

‘What a mess’: Charles Koch says he regrets fueling partisanship

Mr. Koch has helped put billions behind Republican causes in the US

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Charles Koch, the libertarian tycoon who helped funnel billions of dollars to conservative causes and politicians around the country, says the era of hyper-partisanship he helped create was a “mess.”

“Boy, did we screw up!” he writes in a forthcoming book, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. “What a mess!”

He also wrote that backing the Tea Party, a grassroots conservative movement advocating for low taxes and small government that challenged both Democrats and mainstream Republicans during the Obama years, did not pan out either.

“It seems to me the tea party was largely unsuccessful long-term, given that we’re coming off a Republican administration with the largest government spending in history,” he told the paper.

They are stunning admissions—or perhaps just canny post-Trump messaging—from an individual who is arguably the most influential person in US politics outside of the politicians themselves.

The Koch network of donors and organizations has funded numerous Republican political campaigns; helped nurture the Tea Party; backed advocacy groups and think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, and Americans for Prosperity; bankrolled climate change denialism across the country; and helped fund roughly 1000 faculty members at 200 universities.

They acted, in the words of one writer, as “a private political bank capable of bestowing unlimited amounts of money on favored candidates, and doing it with virtually no disclosure of its source,” thanks to the *Citizens United* decision and other rulings rolling back political spending limits from individuals and corporations.

In recent years, the Koch network has increasingly diverged from the Republican party of Donald Trump. It didn’t support his campaigns in 2016 or 2020, and Mr Koch once compared the president’s Muslim ban to Nazi Germany.

And the president has no love lost for them either, thanks to public spats on issues like trade

In 2018, the Koch network announced it would begin supporting certain Democrats who aligned with their priorities, and the billionaire executive, 85, says he hopes to spend his final act in politics working on bipartisan solutions to issues like immigration and criminal-justice reform.

Despite the change in rhetoric, Koch Industries, the conglomerate responsible for Mr Koch's fortune, donated \$2.8 million in 2020 to Republicans via its political action committee and employee donations, compared to \$221,000 to Democrats.