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## Byron Williams: Passing Prop. 23 would send California reeling backwards

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DAVID AND CHARLES Koch may be two of the best-kept secrets in politics. The Koch's are lifelong Libertarians, who have reportedly given hundreds of millions to conservative causes.

Their contributions have led to the creation of the Cato Institute, a now well-known conservative think tank. Most recently, they are reported to be two of the major sponsors behind the tea party movement.

Located in Wichita, Kan., Koch Industries owns Brawny paper towels, Dixie cups, Georgia-Pacific lumber, Stainmaster carpet, and Lycra, among other products. Moreover, the Kochs operate oil refineries in Texas, Alaska, and Minnesota.

Forbes ranks Koch Industries as the second-largest private company in the country, making David and Charles among the riches individuals in America.

But their public notoriety has increased since an Aug. 30 article appeared in The New Yorker Magazine, written by Jane Mayer entitled, "Covert Operations."

The article, which is now available online, outlines the level of influence the Kochs have on the 21st century conservative ideology and ostensibly

American politics.

The Kochs were a driving force behind derailing the legislative agenda of former President Bill Clinton and continue to play that role in opposition to President Barack Obama.

The Koch tentacles are felt not only on Capitol Hill, but also in Sacramento. The Koch brothers are part of well-financed conservative

coalition of oil and gas companies and climate-change skeptics that are sponsoring Proposition 23, an initiative on the November ballot that will kill AB32.

Passed by the state Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2006, AB32 has set a goal to reduce California's emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2020 and by 80 percent by 2050.

To reach these goals, regulations are being created that would require cleaner cars, more energy-efficient buildings and appliances, and power plants that use alternative energy sources like wind instead of older fossil fuels.

Moreover, AB32 is not simply a policy of the political left, in addition to the bill being signed by Republican Gov. Schwarzenegger, as the New York Times editorialized this week former Secretary of State under President Ronald Reagan and longtime Californian George Schultz credits AB32 "for an unprecedented outburst of technological creativity and investment."

Beyond the Koch brothers being wrong about the science, supporters of Prop. 23 offer the traditional corporate dissents to climate change legislation. It's too expensive; it will cost jobs. But those arguments assume no jobs will be created by the new



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technology.

Moreover, it is hard to ignore the insidious manner in which the Kochs are involving themselves in California politics is driven by greed. Prop. 23 feeds Californians false notion that somewhere just over the horizon lies a pain free change that is adjacent to the Loch Ness Monster and Big Foot.

There is something undemocratic and immoral about individuals, who live in Wichita, funding an initiative in California based solely on their bottom line, with seemingly no consideration for the state's quality of life.

But I blame this less on the Kochs' greed than I do the door of direct democracy that has been left wide open by Californians.

Direct democracy, in its present form, is a tool that overwhelmingly benefits those with resources to place their issues on the ballot -- very few grass roots efforts make it to this point. It is a closed game that allows only those with adequate resources to play.

Instead of California leading the nation into the future with the passage of AB32, Prop. 23 would send it stumbling back to the troglodyte past mainly because of the economic self-interest of a few.

The manner in which the Kochs et al are going about influencing California policy should be abhorrent to anyone who lives here. If Prop. 23 passes, overturning AB32, not only would it be a huge mistake, it would be orchestrated largely by those who neither live nor vote in California.

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