

## 'What a mess!': Charles Koch regrets stoking partisan division

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After spending hundreds of millions of dollars promoting conservative ideals, petrochemical tycoon Charles Koch said he regrets how he contributed to what he sees as deeper divisions in the United States.

Speaking to the *Wall Street Journal* about his latest book, Koch made it clear that he has not given up on his vision of a libertarian country. But building on his approach of changing "hearts and minds," the 85-year-old Kansas billionaire suggested an approach that focused less on building up the next Tea Party and more on uniting "a diversity of people behind a common goal. That's our approach today."

Over the course of their political involvement and donations, the Koch brothers, Charles and his late brother David Koch, quickly became the Left's poster children of dark money in politics. In addition to propelling the Tea Party into the House in 2010 and spending roughly \$900 million during the 2016 campaign cycle alone, the Kochs "secretly fund[ed] the climate denial machine," according to Greenpeace, as well as conservative institutions, such as the Cato Institute, the Federalist Society, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and a number of Koch foundations and institutions.

Their influence expanded dramatically in 2010 after the Supreme Court's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* ruling, which allowed virtually unlimited political spending from corporations.

"The wave of money influenced policy areas from health care to environmental regulation, foreign policy and unionization," according to the *Wall Street Journal*. "Critics warned that the Kochs were rigging the public debate to enrich their own bottom line by casting corporate self-interest as a new form of populism."

In spite of the Republican-held Senate, a record 72.6 million votes for President Trump so far (second only to President-elect Joe Biden's 77.9 million votes, according to ABC News, the most votes for a presidential candidate ever), and Republican candidates chipping away at the Democrats' majority in the House, Koch sees some of his political projects, particularly his involvement with the Tea Party, as failures.

"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," Koch wrote in an email.

He took those criticisms one step further in his book.

"Boy, did we screw up!" he wrote. "What a mess!"

Koch said he is now working in a more bipartisan manner with Democrats and liberals, and he even congratulated Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, saying that he "look[s] forward to finding ways to work with them to break down the barriers holding people back, whether in the economy, criminal justice, immigration, the COVID-19 pandemic, or anywhere else."

Koch Industries's political action committee donated \$2.8 million to Republicans during the 2020 campaign cycle and \$221,000 to Democrats, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.