

## Community conversations: The dangers of 'Democracy in Chains' are all too real

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On Saturday, Nov. 11, David Cook, a retired UW Stout professor, introduced a group gathered at the Menomonie Public Library for the monthly Community Conversations discussion to the book, "Democracy in Chains" by Nancy MacLean. The book examines the roots of the division of our citizenry in terms of "takers" and "makers", the influx of dark money into politics, and denigration of the importance of government in providing services — infrastructure, education and health care — to the masses.

The Supreme Court of the United States May 1954 decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* was opposed by powerful politicians in Virginia. Politicians, including Virginia's Senator Byrd, who felt that government should provide for the national defense and law enforcement and little else.

They felt that the court's decision affected the white elite's rigid social order. They called for privatization of education and a crusade against federal dictates. In Virginia, legal rules kept the state's voter participation among the lowest in the nation. In 1947, Virginia had passed a right-to-work law to weaken labor unions. Newspapers were burying news for political control. Issues in Virginia were employer's power, states' rights, and racial segregation.

In 1956, James Buchanan, educated at the University of Chicago, was enlisted to start Virginia's counter-revolution movement as the chairman of the economics department at the University of Virginia. Buchanan wanted others to see that the market could coordinate millions of individual projects far better than government could.

He was against programs to help the poor and to ensure fair labor standards. He did not believe in the government intervening with the problem of poverty.

As the afternoon's presenter, Cook commented on Buchanan's "evil genius" in believing that one could break down the trust of the governing with the governed, to have them lose confidence in government solutions. Buchanan questioned the ethics of Jesus: "We may simply be too compassionate for our own well being or for that of an orderly and productive free society." He questioned the ethics of the "Good Samaritan."

Enter into the scenario David Koch, the other important character in MacLean's book. David is the second son of Fred Chase Koch, who made his millions running an oil refining business.

Following their father's death, David and eldest son Charles each own 42 percent of the Koch Industries conglomerate which has grown into the second largest privately-held company in America.

David feels that entrepreneurs are underappreciated and are overcontrolled. He has a quest for economic liberty as the passionate mission of his life. Charles likes control and holds the notion of superior and inferior people. He feels the he is intellectually and ethically superior to others. In the 1970s, Buchanan and David Koch joined forces. Together they had a shared commitment to school privatization at every level, to axing taxes, to revoking regulation, and to ending social insurance. With his financial resources, Koch believes in maintaining and extending the libertarian cadre at think tanks such as the CATO Institute to push the libertarian case into the media and public life.

The book concludes with the concern that the ultimate target of the well-heeled political right is our U.S. Constitution. In September 1973, Buchanan helped organize the new constitution of Chile after the overthrow of the elected government by Pinochet. The document corresponded to Buchanan's ideal society and was built to repel future popular pressure for change as it was not amendable.

It guaranteed the economic liberty of the wealthy and constrained majority power. Major social questions were removed from democratic influence. Buchanan valued economic liberty so much more than political freedom, he did not care about the abuse inherent in giving unchecked power to an alliance between capital and armed forces. Fast forward to the Nov. 7, 2017 vote in the Wisconsin Senate for a Constitutional Convention for our country. Could changes in our constitution eliminate the protections in our current U.S. Constitution?