

SUMMIT DAILY

Knopf: Fakenomics and the Kochtopus

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The Trump administration has “cut homelessness by 50%,” claimed Kevin Hassett, the chairman of the president’s Council of Economic Advisers in an NPR interview last week. I was shocked, and asked another economist about it. Interestingly enough he also served on the CEA for a prior U.S. president. He’s never heard of anybody keeping such statistics.

I happen to be working on developing programs with Good Bridge and the Summit Colorado Interfaith Council to help uplift homeless workers right here in Summit County. The first thing everybody wants to know is, how many people are affected? Uh, they’re homeless. It’s difficult to count; and there isn’t any standard official way of counting them. So how can Hassett say Trump cut the number in half? He probably can’t. Fakeconomics.

After watching the parade of Trump’s unqualified picks to serve on the Federal Reserve Board, I started wondering about Hassett. For the record, before serving on CEA, he was an economist at the American Economics Institute. That immediately made me suspicious. That’s one of about 45 think tanks the Koch Brothers fund to advance their particular political point of view.

“The Kochs are longtime libertarians who believe in drastically lower personal and corporate taxes, minimal social services for the needy, and much less oversight of industry — especially environmental regulation,” wrote Jane Mayer in her 2010 New Yorker magazine expose.

The Kochs fund mouthpieces to do their dirty work and protect their dirty business. Koch Industries was ranked as the 13th most toxic/biggest polluters in the world by University of Massachusetts at Amherst’s Political Economy Research Institute in a 2018 study.

In fairness that’s an improvement. When Mayer wrote her story nine years ago, Koch Industries was one of the top 10 polluters. Greenpeace issued a report identifying the company as a “kingpin of climate science denial.” Everybody works in their own best interest, so no surprise here, right? The Kochs are stealth. The Kochs are the second wealthiest family in the U.S., with the second largest privately-held company in the country.

Did you know the Kochs own Georgia-Pacific? It’s just a piece of their global pie. GP makes Brawny paper towels, Dixie cups, Northern bath tissue, Vanity Fair napkins, as well as Angel Soft, Mardis Gras and Sparkle. If global climate change is one of your concerns, you probably want to start making some brand substitutions and stop lining the pockets of one of the biggest funders of climate denial.

The Kochs are particularly stealth in the way they cloak their political activities. They fund trusts which give the money to the charities they designate, which in turn generate the research defending their political interests. Donor’s Trust is one of their charitable trusts. The website states “Donors Trust is a donor-advised fund ... We share your commitment to

protecting our Nation's constitutional liberties and strengthening civil society through private institutions rather than with government programs.”

Through Donor's Trust you can give to any 501(c)(3) “so long as it doesn't work to expand government and takes a minimal amount of government money.” In other words, you can't support Greenpeace or any other group that might want to apply new government standards to polluters like Koch Industries. Cute how that works.

So you're reading an article that quotes the American Economic Institute, or the American Legislative Exchange Council, Americans for Prosperity, CATO Institute, Freedom Partners, State Policy Network, Center to Protect Patient Rights, 60 Plus Association, Generation Opportunity, American Commitment, Concerned Women for America, Concerned Veterans for America, Libre Initiative, Public Notice, American Commitment, American Energy Alliance, American Future Fund, Center for Shared Services, Evangchr4 Trust, Public Engagement Group, Themis Trust ... the list goes on and on ... all Koch-funded with the intention to shrink government, reduce government protections for consumers, decrease regulation of polluters and deny global climate science.

(That would include shrinking or eliminating Social Security, Medicare, public schools and parks.)

As you try to do your due diligence, to figure out who is behind the words, you run smack dab into Donor's Trust, or Donor's Capital Fund, or any one of a number of other such trusts, that hide who is paying whom to promote what. The Supreme Court decision, Citizens United, determined corporations are entitled to the same freedom of speech rights afforded to citizens. The judicial action was funded in part by the Kochs, and gave them carte blanche to hijack our democracy and pursue their own interests.

The Supreme Court forgot corporations have bigger pocketbooks, and thus can shout over the people in any political contest.

“The Kochs are on a whole different level. There's no one else who has spent this much money. The sheer dimension of it is what sets them apart. They have a pattern of law-breaking, political manipulation, and obfuscation. I've been in Washington since Watergate, and I've never seen anything like it,” said Charles Lewis, the founder of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan watchdog group.

It gets more confusing when you realize Donor's Trust contributes to the Lucy Burns Institute that supports Ballotpedia, a seemingly non-partisan, objective source of complete information about candidates and ballot measures in every state across the country. I've often cited it in this column.

But the organization has right-wing “bedfellows” and is less than transparent about those relationships, its donors and organization.

What's a voter to do? Do your best, and I promise to help. Next on our radar? Trump's appointees to the Fed. The last one, Stephen Moore, was a Koch-funded ALEC economist. More Fakeonomics?

Careful what you read. Remember it could be Koch-generated toxic waste. Not this column of course!

