

# The Berkshire Eagle

## Robert F. Jakubowicz: Beware rich political sharks

Robert F. Jakubowicz

August 26, 2016

While at Cape Cod this month for my annual vacation, I found notices to be wary of great white sharks in the waters. These denizens of the dark side of the ocean are there now preying on the growing population of seals, a favorite food for sharks.

But while at the Cape, I also found something else to be wary of, namely, the political warning in Jane Mayer's book "Dark Money — The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right." This book is about the extraordinary amount of money — "dark money" in the words of the author — and how it is being used to drastically change our political system.

It is money that a very few, exceptionally wealthy Americans are donating, without having to disclose their identities, to private foundations and non-profit groups, ostensibly organized for philanthropic purposes, but in reality they are working hard to radically alter the nation's political system.

### **KOCHS PERFECT EFFORT**

The idea to remake America by drastically limiting the government's powers, has been the longtime intention of a small group of extremely wealthy families. The main point of the book is that two brothers from one of these families, Charles and David Koch, have raised this effort to a new level. And although, the brothers say they are doing this as a matter of principle, Mayer points out that their ultimate objective of a hands-off business government neatly dove-tails with their financial interests.

The patriarch of the family, Fred, made a great deal of money building oil refineries for Russia and Germany in the early 1930s. Fred later became an active member of the John Birch society. Mayer asserts he was a strict disciplinarian and right-wing conservative, and family background played a role in the thinking of Charles and David that the role of government should be limited to national security and little else.

She also noted that there was a fringe group that ran the Freedom School in Colorado that was also "seminal" in Charles' "political evolution." Its teachers taught a revisionist American history that extolled the robber barons as heroes, described the Gilded Age as the country's golden era, called taxes a form of theft, and described the New Deal and the War on Poverty as disastrous paths to socialism. Charles reportedly was so enthusiastic about this school that he talked his brothers into attending sessions.

On the death of Fred, his four sons inherited his business and fortune. After several legal actions among themselves over their inheritance, Charles and David emerged as the owners of the family business.

In running the business, they ran up a number of violations under federal laws and regulations and aggressively fought the government in court. They became involved in politics to try to change the political system. David even ran in 1980 for vice-president on the Libertarian ticket. He and that party lost badly.

The two brothers then pulled back from conventional politics and decided to try changing the minds of Americans to their view of the need for extremely limited government. They worked on this enterprise for the next three decades, and were instrumental in creating a private network of wealthy individuals to fund what Mayer in her book called stealth organizations to implement their objective.

They funded academic centers within colleges and universities to influence students. In one of the anecdotes in the book, a Florida State University student complained about a Koch foundation grant giving it a say over faculty hires. He said that he was taught things such as "sweatshop labor wasn't so bad," and that "China's 'hands-off regulations' was better than America's policy." He also complained about a textbook written by a recipient of Koch funding who taught that safety regulations hurt coal miners. The Koch answer to such criticism, according to Mayer, was that they were merely providing "fresh" college thinking.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE DENIAL KINGPINS**

The Koch brothers and their wealthy supporters created and support think tanks like the Cato Institute and groups like Americans for Prosperity to advance and promote their views on government policies and attack those adverse to their views. Fossil fuel being an important part

of Koch Industry, these organizations, according to Mayer "funded and directed by the Kochs tore into global warming science." A Greenpeace spokesman dubbed Koch Industries as the "kingpin of climate of science denial."

The Americans for Prosperity Foundation, chaired by David Koch, aired a highly dubious ad against Obamacare, featuring a Canadian woman claiming she almost died because of her country's health service. This underground, network claimed Obamacare was a government takeover which Mayer noted was chosen as "the lie of the year" by the fact checker PoliticFact.

Having returned to Pittsfield, I am not now menaced by sharks. But I am still concerned about the billionaire network, led by the Kochs, selling their pseudohistory and pseudoscience to change America.