



Thank a Koch brother

By **Bill Press** - 02/02/12

“If not now, when?” It’s one of the most famous maxims of history, attributed to the great Rabbi Hillel, who’s also credited with a down-to-earth version of the Golden Rule: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the Torah. All the rest is commentary.”

Who in our time revived that call to action with the challenge: “If not us, who? If not now, when?” Michael Moore? Barack Obama? Leaders of Occupy Wall Street?

Not even close. Hillel’s urgent plea “If not now, when?” was appropriated by oil billionaires Charles and David Koch in a letter of invitation summoning CEOs to a fundraising summit in Palm Springs, in January 2011. It was imperative that they join forces, explained Charles Koch, “to combat what is now the greatest threat to American freedom and prosperity in our lifetimes” — the administration of Barack Obama.

This was not the first such meeting called by the Koch brothers. They’d been holding semiannual gatherings of corporate barons since 2003, sprinkled with right-wing journalists, politicians and Supreme Court justices. Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas sat in. So did Jim DeMint, Eric Cantor, Paul Ryan, Chris Christie and Rick Perry. Conservative pundits Charles Krauthammer, Michael Barone and Glenn Beck shed any pretense of objectivity in order to attend.

Nor was this, as Charles Koch described it, just an innocent gathering of “some of America’s greatest philanthropists and job creators.” No, this was a meeting to line up corporate opposition to President Obama’s reelection — and a very successful one. Corporations attending the Rancho Mirage summit pledged \$49 million for the 2012 anti-Obama campaign. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg of what the Koch brothers have raised and pumped into politics over the last 20 years.

The Kochs are hugely successful oilmen. But, as I describe in my new book, *The Obama Hate Machine*, published this week, it’s their political activity that has gained them notoriety. They’re among the nation’s biggest political donors, and their influence is

everywhere. They're major funders of two conservative think tanks, the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. They've created research centers on many college campuses, like the Mercatus Center of George Mason University. They're the sugar daddies behind two powerful political organizations, FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity. And, by my count, they're the principal sources of funding for at least 57 conservative political action groups.

And for the last three years, most of that money, directly or indirectly, has been fueling a hate-filled campaign against President Obama, marked by personal attacks worse than any American president has faced since Abraham Lincoln. Obama's been called a communist, fascist, socialist, Marxist, Nazi and America-hating terrorist.

So we know what lies ahead for 2012. More money, and more corporate money, in politics than ever before. And more ugly, personal attacks against Obama. All for which you can thank a Koch brother. Or both of them.