



## **Battle of the oligarchs in every election**

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An oligarchy, by Merriam-Webster's definition, is "today and from ancient times the rule of government by the few. A minority of men from rich families control the state; most citizens couldn't take part in government ..."

Sound familiar? The super billionaires in our society have moved to form an unofficial yet extremely powerful oligarchy. We citizens have but one form of input in society — the vote.

In the United States we have super billionaires on both the progressive and conservative side. The conservative oligarchs outnumber the progressive oligarchs by approximately 10-1. The best-known conservative multi-billionaires are the Koch brothers, Charles and David, the controllers of large oil and mining conglomerates, and consumer products, including Georgia-Pacific. Georgia-Pacific household paper products including Angel Soft, Quilted Northern and Soft 'n Gentle, toilet paper, Brawny paper towels, Dixie plates, bowls, napkins etc.

Far larger are their building and construction products businesses, No. 1 in North America for building panels, cellulose used in products such as diapers. For a full list go to their Georgia-Pacific website.

Their father, Fred C. Koch, founded the John Birch Society. His Koch Industries has grown to be the second-largest privately held company in the United States, of which the brothers own 84 percent. Since the 1960s their millions of dollars have supported the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute, plus other libertarian and conservative think tanks.

More recently, a 2013 study by the Center for Responsive Politics reported that donor networks organized by the Kochs raised more than \$400 million for the 2011–12 election cycle.

On the progressive side, George Soros is the most prominent billionaire contributor, followed by former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, California investor Tom Steyer, and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who reportedly has spent \$25 million pushing progressive candidates and causes.

The loser in this battle of the billionaire oligarchs is we the people, not we the corporations or we the conglomerates. Since the 2010 Supreme Court Citizens United 5-4 decision said it's OK for corporations and labor unions to spend as much as they want to convince people to vote for or

against a candidate, we have seen the flood of incredible sums of money spent to influence elections.

The two major political parties are not monoliths. Each has a range of belief along the progressive/conservative continuum, and as such must pay attention to their members. The billionaire oligarchs have only their own super PAC belief system to promote.

For our democracy to survive, I believe Citizens United must eventually be reversed by a constitutional amendment, and in the meantime each of us must vote each and every time we have the opportunity.