

# Daily Journal

## **Koch thought machine will influence Mississippi elections**

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When it comes to government, Charles and David Koch want to influence, some say control, the political thoughts of all Americans. Yes, including Mississippians.

The Koch brothers and their super wealthy compatriots are spending billions of dollars to inform, many say indoctrinate, Americans on how to think about government, how to vote, and how to take down contrary elected officials.

The sprawling, sophisticated Koch network ranges from its grassroots army, Americans for Prosperity founded by David Koch in 2004, to its funding arm, Freedom Partners founded in 2011 that funnels money Koch network ventures, to its affiliated conservative think tanks like the Cato Institute, Fraser Institute, and Heritage Foundation, to its higher education ventures funded by various Koch family charities, to its like-minded coalition of billionaires who pump hundreds of millions of dollars into political campaigns across the country.

And that's not all. Indeed, the pervasiveness of the Koch thought machine across America is mind boggling, some say frightening, even reaching deep into Mississippi politics.

A foundation Charles Koch created (now defunct) spent millions over decades to fund groups advocating the Koch agenda, including conservative state-based think tanks affiliated with the national State Policy Network, e.g., the Mississippi Center for Public Policy. The Koch network has continued funding the State Policy Network and its affiliated American Legislative Exchange Council of which Mississippi Speaker of the House Philip Gunn is a board member. School choice advocate Empower Mississippi is the latest link in this network.

The Charles Koch Foundation has spent millions to push Koch thinking onto college campuses, including Mississippi State University. In 2015 the university announced formation of its Institute for Market Studies to be funded with nearly \$2.5 million of Koch money over six years. Since then, MSU associate professor Claudia Williamson, co-director of the Institute, has been an active voice for economic policies aligned with Koch thinking.

The Mississippi chapter of Americans for Prosperity has risen in power to dominate thinking on many legislative issues. The chapter has strongly touted Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves for promoting its agenda. It is expected to play a dominant role in next year's legislative elections.

As they infiltrate American politics, the Koch brothers, owners of the second largest private company in America, have used populist themes to pursue extremist policies beneficial to their vast business interests. Many of these anti-government policies, such as sweeping deregulation and big tax cuts, harken back to David Koch's 1980 run for vice president on the Libertarian Party ticket. Among other issues, the party platform called for abolition of the FBI, Securities and Exchange Commission, and Department of Energy and the end of Social Security and all personal and corporate income taxes.

"Average Americans are realizing that they are being cheated a fair shot at building a better life," wrote David Koch in a fundraising letter last month for Americans for Prosperity. He, again, pitched "economic freedom and opportunity" as the alternative.

This siren call of personal freedom lures many while shrewdly obscuring the real goal – freedom for corporate titans to do as they please.

Yes, the deliberate, relentless Koch brothers have deeply rooted their thought machine into American politics. Its machinations will greatly influence Mississippi state politics and elections next year