

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024038516323 Robert Greenwald, filmmaker and founder of Brave New Films, recently announced a sequel to his 2012 film "Koch Brothers Exposed." He said the new film will focus specifically on the duo's efforts to buy the 2014 election, as well as how detrimental their support for Citizens United has been to the state of democracy in the United States. While Charles and David Koch remain largely unknown figures to the majority of the American public, with 52 percent recently reporting they have never heard of them, the reality is that the brothers are arguably the most powerful and influential people in Washington — and they've never even been elected to office. Americans may not recognize the men, but they're probably familiar with the brothers' business, Koch Industries, and its oil refineries in Alaska, Texas and Minnesota, as well as its products such as Brawny paper towels, Dixie cups, Georgia-Pacific lumber, Stainmaster carpet and Lycra, among others. Recognizable businesses and brands aside, the public is largely unaware that the Koch brothers are doing everything they can to suppress voter rights, re-segregate public schools, weaken Environmental Protection Agency regulations and privatize Social Security. As of March 2014, the duo, who are among the richest men in America, have spent at least \$30 million this election season to prevent Senate Democrats from being re-elected. Part of the reason the Koch brothers can spend vast amounts of money but still remain largely unknown public figures is because the Libertarians work to lower personal and corporate taxes, remove social services and limit oversight for industries, especially environmental regulations, through think tanks and generic-sounding advocacy groups such as Americans for Prosperity. "The Kochs are on a whole different level. There's no one else who has spent this much money," said Charles Lewis, the founder of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan watchdog group. "The sheer dimension of it is what sets them apart. They have a pattern of lawbreaking, political manipulation, and obfuscation. I've been in Washington since Watergate, and I've never seen anything like it. They are the Standard Oil of our times." Puppetmasters The Koch brothers initiated their influence on U.S. politics by forming and funding think tanks such as the first-ever Libertarian think tank the Cato Institute and electing those who shared their political ideology to local-level positions such as school boards. In recent years, though, the oil barons have used their wealth to influence public policy on a national level. For example, in the 2000 presidential election campaign, Koch Industries reportedly spent around \$900,000 to support George W. Bush and other Republicans. In 2004, the Koch brothers-founded group Citizens for a Sound Economy's Oregon chapter was accused of working to get Ralph Nader on the presidential ballot, in a bid to weaken Democratic support for John Kerry and ensure a re-election for the Bush-Cheney White House. After Bush was ultimately re-elected, Koch Industries and other fossil fuel companies enjoyed tremendous kickbacks such as the 2005 energy bill, which Hillary Clinton referred to as "the Dick Cheney lobbyist energy bill," since it provided enormous subsidies and tax breaks to U.S. energy companies. The Koch brothers also helped Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, who has been called a test-case and puppet of the Koch brothers, take down unions and their fight for a reasonable wage and collective bargaining, as well as win a special election that was held after the constitutionality of the governor's actions were questioned. And the brothers currently own the Republican-led U.S. House of Representatives. As they push to take over the Senate and the White House, some Democrats like Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) are coming forward and asking their colleagues to not let the Koch brothers buy their votes in order to preserve and protect democracy. "The truth is, the Koch brothers are willing to do anything — even exploit Americans suffering from cancer — to advance their campaign of distortion," Reid said on the Senate floor in early March. "These two multi-billionaires may spend hundreds of millions of dollars rigging the political process for their own benefit. And they may believe that whoever has the most money gets the most free speech. But I will do whatever it takes to expose their campaign to rig the American political system to benefit the wealthy at the expense of the middle class. "Republicans are willing to defend the Koch brothers on the floor of the United States Senate. But are they willing to defend the Koch brothers' radical policy agenda as well? If Republicans don't support the Koch brothers' survival of the richest philosophy, all they have to do is say so," Reid said. As the Koch brothers have more than enough money to fund an election campaign, some have wondered why they don't run for office instead of buying and influencing lawmakers on Capitol Hill and in all 50 states. In fact, Charles did convince David to run for office in 1979 as the vice-presidential candidate for the Libertarian Party against Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. David Koch may have lost the election,

but according to Brian Doherty, an editor of the Libertarian magazine Reason and the author of "Radicals for Capitalism," the experience changed the way the duo looked at politicians. The Koch brothers saw them not as lawmakers, but merely as "actors playing out a script," and reportedly said they wanted to "supply the themes and words for the scripts." How they planned to influence public policy was going to be where policy ideas originate: academia and think tanks. Abuse of wealth Though there are several other wealthy individuals in the U.S. who found and fund private organizations, higher education institutions and super PACs, the difference between the Koch brothers and Democratic supporter George Soros, or even Republican supporter Sheldon Adelson, is that the brothers are abusing their wealth to push their self-described radical ideologies that value profit over all else. Donations made by Soros and Adelson are also much less significant than those made by the Koch brothers, raising concerns about the true intent of the Koch brothers' donations. Even David Koch has admitted that the family "exerts tight ideological control" over its interests. "If we're going to give a lot of money, we'll make darn sure they spend it in a way that goes along with our intent," he told Doherty. "And if they make a wrong turn and start doing things we don't agree with, we withdraw funding." But since the spokespersons for about 45 public and private universities who receive funding from the Koch brothers have continued to deny that the Koch brothers manipulate the curriculum, the Koch brothers' influence on academia continues to occur without alarming the American public. Even groups such as Americans for Prosperity are "micromanaged by the Kochs." That tight control seems to have paid off for the brothers, since during the Obama administration, the president's public support has dropped to historic lows and his Democratic colleagues have been unseated by Republicans, some of whom are increasingly aligning with Libertarian views. As the 2014 election season heats up and radical, anti-democratic ideology such as voter ID laws makes its way back into the political realm, the only thing the American public can be sure of is that the Koch brothers are not only funding smear campaigns against politicians whose political ideologies do not help their bottom line, but they are also funding the campaigns of Republican politicians who are pro-big-oil, pro-Wall Street and pro-segregation. Since the Koch brothers have been successful in manipulating the American political system for a number of decades, even though they hide in the shadows, it's more important than ever to look at who is funding the think tanks and higher education institutions the media enlists this election season to explain the policies that are at the center of the political debate and will ultimately affect us all. If we fail to pay attention now, it's evident from the Koch brothers' record that only a few of us will continue to be allowed to actively participate in our democracy.