

Recently Jane Mayer's book, "Dark Money," has gotten a lot of attention. It focuses on the extent to which the Koch brothers specifically use the caverns for subterranean dark money to mess around in our politics. Following up on the use of conservative think tanks, we have an early—I guess you would say "strategizer" of this effort quoted as saying:

It would be necessary to use ambiguous and misleading names, obscure the true agenda, and conceal the means of control.

That is the background. This whole development of the think tank is described here this way:

In the 1970s, with funding from a handful of hugely wealthy donors . . . as well as some major corporate support, a whole new form of "think tank" emerged that was more engaged in selling predetermined ideology to politicians and the public than undertaking scholarly research.

To use her phrase, it was "the think tank as disguised political weapon."

That is part of what we are up against.

"Democracy in Chains," a book by Nancy MacLean, looks back at some of the early history through which the Koch brothers and others funded this operation. It points out that "the Koch team's most important stealth move, and the one that proved most critical to success, was to wrest control over the machinery of the Republican Party, beginning in the late 1990s and with sharply escalating determination after 2008."

What made them want to do this? I will read. The Koch cadre identified the public's embrace of environmentalism as a problem early on. They then pulled together—

a circle of less-known Koch-funded libertarian think tanks driving what two science scholars describe as systematic environmental "misinformation campaigns." They spread junk pseudoscience to make the public believe that there is still doubt about the peril of climate change, a tactic they learned from the tobacco companies that for years sowed doubt about science to keep the public from connecting smoking and illness.

The Koch team by then could count on its Club for Growth to fund primary challenges to ensure that the party line on environmentalism would be maintained by Republican members of Congress. . . . "We're looking at a party," the economist and columnist Paul Krugman rightly points out, "that has turned its back on science at a time when doing so puts the very future of civilization at risk."

Backing up that chokehold on federal action is what one reporter called a "secretive alliance" between red-state attorneys general and fossil fuel corporations.

Again, we link back to my earlier remarks. One of the red States' attorneys general who link up with the fossil fuel corporations is none other than our EPA Administrator, Scott Pruitt.

She concludes it this way:

To put all this another way: if the Koch-network-funded academics and institutions were not in the conversation, the public would have little doubt that the evidence of science is overwhelming and government action to prevent further global warming is urgent.

I will close with a return to Jane Mayer, whose research on this whole dark money problem that bedevils our democracy has been nothing less than heroic, in my view. She wrote recently:

If there was any lingering doubt that a tiny clique of fossil-fuel barons has captured America's energy and environmental policies, it was dispelled . . . when the Trump Administration withdrew from the Paris climate accord. . . . [A] majority of Americans in literally every state wanted to remain within the agreement, and . . . the heads of many of the country's most successful and iconic Fortune 100 companies, from Disney to General Electric, did, too. . . . Yet . . . a tiny—and until recently, almost faceless—minority somehow prevailed.

How this happened is no longer a secret. The answer . . . is "a story of big political money." It is, perhaps, the most astounding example of influence-buying in modern American political history.

It is focused now on climate change because climate change is—and I quote her again here—"a direct challenge to the most powerful industry that has ever existed on the face of the Earth. There's no depth to which they are unwilling to sink to challenge anything threatening their interests."

That is a pretty good description by a lot of very well-regarded, and some in cases, Pulitzer Prize winning and award-winning writers and researchers about where we are. The result of all that is the gridlock that these interests have bought and paid for in Congress on this critical issue and an administration that is driven by fossil fuel interests to roll back all regulations that impinge on fossil fuel profits. Using that screen these authors have talked about—and that I have talked about—of think tanks and foundations and public relations firms and trade associations and, of course, those rivers of dark money flowing through subterranean political caverns, this industry—the fossil fuel industry—has taken control of and disabled our American political system. That is a very inconvenient truth for those in our political system, but its inconvenience takes away nothing from its truth.

Thanks to these authors and researchers and many others like them—many others like them—the truth of what has happened is plain. It is not just plain in these books. It will be plain before the reckoning gaze of history. There will be a reckoning. History always looks back, ultimately. If you look at these books and you look at others and you look at the record of what has taken place and the reporting, there is no doubt that this is the biggest influence-buying operation of all time. Do we in Congress really want to be found on the side of this crooked apparatus when that reckoning comes? God, I hope not. It is time to wake up.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that at 12:20 p.m. on Wednesday, April 11, the Senate vote on confirmation of the Ring nomination and that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING DANIEL AKAKA

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to a dedicated public servant, a beloved statesman, and a gentleman of the Senate: Senator Daniel Akaka. On Friday, Senator Akaka passed away peacefully with his family gathered by his bedside. He leaves behind not only a strong record of legislative achievement, but a legacy of love and Aloha that animated his work here in the Senate.

Senator Akaka committed his life to public service. Whether as a soldier, educator, or Senator, he dedicated himself fully to the betterment of our Nation. After graduating high school in 1942, Senator Akaka enlisted in the Army Corps of Engineers, playing a key role in critical construction projects across the Pacific Theater during World War II. Senator Akaka's military service was a springboard to even greater opportunities, allowing him to finance a college education through the GI bill.

As a beneficiary of this historic legislation, Senator Akaka was perhaps the greatest advocate of our troops during his time here in the Senate, writing and spearheading passage of the 21st Century GI bill. He wanted our servicemembers to have the same opportunity he had to transition into civilian life, receive an education, and change this country for the better.

With help from the GI bill, Senator Akaka earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in education from the University of Hawaii. For nearly two decades, he worked in Hawaii's public schools, first as a teacher and eventually as a principal. Working in the trenches of America's public education system, Senator Akaka gained the