



(April 15, 2016)

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

Alma L. Lee
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing:** It Turns Out the Koch Brothers Took an Interest in the VA Hospital System

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Report by Esquire.com

A great number of people out there will tell you that there is nothing that unusual about how the Koch Brothers are slinging around their money in an attempt to refashion government at almost every level to conform to their dystopian concept of civilization. There are even people who will point to their various charitable endeavors as though these were somehow acceptable penance for their unceasing campaign to deform the country into something they can keep in their poolhouse. Then again, there's also someone like Alicia Mundy, [who comes along and explains that](#), yes, the Kochs are every bit the conniving plutocrats that you think they are, and that, yes, they want everything and are half on the way to getting it.

This week's cautionary tale is the Veterans Administration. The Kochs and their operation are after the VA because privatizing everything helps make them more money and they are completely ethics-free with regard to how they go about it.

Yet beneath the surface of events, a far different, deeper, and more consequential story is unfolding. The [Concerned Veterans for America], it turns out, is the creation of David and Charles Koch's network. The Koch family has famously poured hundreds of millions of dollars into think tanks, candidates, and advocacy groups to advance their libertarian views about the virtues of free markets and the evils of governments and unions. Seldom,

however, has one of their investments paid off so spectacularly well as it has on the issue of veterans' health care. Working through the CVA, and in partnership with key Republicans and corporate medical interests, the Koch brothers' web of affiliates has succeeded in manufacturing or vastly exaggerating "scandals" at the VA as part of a larger campaign to delegitimize publicly provided health care.

Unpossible!

However, and this has become something of a historical theme, then George W. Bush became president.

Yet behind the scenes, the administration took many measures to undo the quality transformation that had occurred under Kizer's leadership, including the freedom given to front-line employees. Partly this was the result of the tendency of top managers in all large organizations to want to exercise control. But it also reflected the Bush administration's commitment to outsourcing more and more VA functions. Bush's political appointees at the VA, for example, quickly squashed software innovation in the field by reconsolidating bureaucratic control over all things digital in Washington and then contracting with vendors of private, proprietary software. At one point, the VA even lost control of its own lab software system to Cerner, a private corporation that dramatically ramped up spending on lobbying during the middle of the last decade.

Read the whole thing. Especially this part.

Behind the scenes, the lobbying was even more intense. According to Democratic and Republican Senate staffers, directors of major medical institutions were calling their senators and representatives to talk about what private medicine could do, and what it would mean in terms of jobs and economic growth in their states and congressional districts. A longtime staffer to a member of the GOP leadership who was involved in VA legislation told me, "My boss had a lot of invitations to golf in his district, and at some of the finest golf clubs in America, from big hospital system CEOs" who wanted to talk about how their facilities were ready to absorb veterans in their area for certain kinds of treatment—usually expensive, usually in their new wings.