

MSNBC's *The ReidOut*

06/15/21

7:14:41 p.m. [TEASE]

10 seconds

JOY REID: Plus, why we can't have nice things. The corrosive influence of big oil on our politics and our society and the role that the oil barons are playing right now in blocking critical legislation.

(...)

7:38:06 p.m. [TEASE]

13 seconds

REID: Remember the day when few — when a few incredibly powerful corporations held a stranglehold over America's legislative process? Well, good thing those days are behind us, right? Right? No, not so much. Stay with us.

(...)

7:42:36 p.m.

5 minutes and 14 seconds

REID: Remember the BP Deepwater Horizon spill back in 2010? It kind of looked like the beginning of the end of the power of big oil over American politics. President Obama went off on them, lawsuits poured in, and they seemed like a goner. Or maybe that's not the way it happened at all. As James Ridgeway wrote in *Mother Jones* in June of 2010, "oil companies have begun to weigh strategies to fight off tougher regulations in the wake of BP's spill to end all spills. Frankly, I don't buy it. Ever since John D. Rockefeller founded Standard Oil in 1870, the federal government has pretty much given the oil men exactly what they wanted, when and where they wanted it. Periodic government attempts to contain or regulate the industry have been little more than temporary annoyances, rather than major obstacles to big oil's power or profits." It shouldn't be much of a secret now that big oil largely runs things in the United States, keeping us trapped in the 20th century while they soak up federal subsidies from your tax dollars. So, fighting over whether to ram new oil pipelines through indigenous lands or poison the Arctic with potential oil spills, and if we can please, please flip our federal vehicle fleet to electric as President Biden wants to do in his infrastructure plan and fight climate change? Oh, and also, can Texans please not freeze to death when a freak winter storm hits because the off the grid private oil authority fails?

Part of their power is because of their expertise in advocacy. It's not a coincidence that the Green New Deal has been turned into a form of cussing. They're really good at messaging good things that could save the planet and make our lives more convenient and cleaner and better into bad, socialist things. They've moved our foreign policy to the right, and pushed us into bad Saudi policy and wars in the Middle East out of a hunger to keep the free supply flowing and to control

it. Oil is the only thing that Russia sells, basically, and it's at the heart of their frantic, desperate and diminishing power that Vladimir Putin obsessively uses against us and against his own people. And the big American oil barons of today, including multinationals who grew out of oil companies but are now multi-industry conglomerates like the Koch brothers company — Kock Industries, aren't just opposed to green energy. They also fight like hell against things like Wisconsin. They tried to crush them in Wisconsin under the Koch Brothers favorite toy, Governor Scott Walker. Remember the dramatic protests and walkouts by Democratic state senators in 2011 as Republicans pushed to pass a sweeping anti-union bill that was quickly replicated in other states, cookie cutter style?

The same way the current crop of anti-critical race theory and trans kids on the soccer pitch bills are. They've sought to warp education, funding college camera programs that inject libertarianism into the curriculum, to crank out more Rand Pauls and fewer AOCs, and surprise, surprise, they're not too fond of voting, because polls show that if everyone was allowed to easily and conveniently vote, majorities of Americans would vote for things like a Green New deal and more representation for union workers and a \$15 an hour minimum wage and getting dark money out of the politics. Now, you probably haven't heard of the advocacy group, Stand Together, and you may or may not know its partner organization, Americans for Prosperity, but it's one of the central organizers from super wealthy Americans like the Koch brothers and dying industries to maintain control over our politics by controlling one of the two major political parties, in particular. Jane Mayer of *The New Yorker* obtained audio from a conference call presentation to conservative groups in January on how to kill the voting rights bill, the For the People Act.

KYLE MCKENZIE [on 01/08/21]: When presented with a very neutral description of H.R. 1, people were generally supportive, and the most worrisome part, which Grover mentioned at the very beginning of his presentation, is that conservatives were actually as supportive as the general public was when they read the neutral description of H.R. 1. [SCREEN WIPE] Winning over public support for this is actually incredibly difficult. [SCREEN WIPE] H.R. 1 stops billionaires from buying elections. Unfortunately, we found that that is a winning message for both, you know, the general public and also conservatives.

REID: H.R. 1, the For the People Act, same deal. Now, these folks are not just targeting Republicans. They're — they actually already have them in the bag. As CNBC notes, they're also pressuring conservative Democrats like — you guessed it — Joe Manchin, to oppose his party's legislative priorities. They've got an entire website asking people to email Manchin, touting what he's promised to oppose, ending the filibuster, the Green New Deal, additional Supreme Court justices, and voting rights, the Senate's version of H.R. 1. And what it thinks he should oppose, raising the minimum wage, a bill to protect union organizing, and President Biden's infrastructure package. Now, if Americans for Prosperity sounds vaguely familiar, ding, ding, ding, you've heard about them before. During this era — and — you may have heard about them before during this era, and that story is next.

(...)

7:51:58 p.m.

8 minutes and 38 seconds

REID: Today we got a stark warning of the very real effects of big oil's impact on the world. An Arctic scientist said global warming may have already passed an irreversible tipping point. And if as the world burns isn't enough, big oil is also not paying taxes, not getting regulated, and ruining our politics. The very people who have been killing the planet, pour tons of money into targeting progressive politics, specifically the organizations funded by the billionaire Koch brothers, Charles and the late David Koch. When he died in 2019, New York magazine noted that Koch helped funnel billions into climate-denying organizations for decades since his family made its money on oil and gas, naturally. And with his money he founded Americans for Prosperity, the group that mobilized the tea party. Americans for Prosperity is still going along, with its other partners in the Koch network, waging a behind-the-scenes network to stop progressive priorities like the For the People Act and launching a tea party version 2.0 campaign to target President Biden's infrastructure plan, whining about spending and taxes, targeting lawmakers from both parties in 27 states. And joining me now is Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island. And Senator Whitehouse, I am so glad you're available today because I — I am that nerd. I watch C-SPAN and I have seen your presentations with charts about big money and its influence on our politics. I am obsessed with this. Talk to me about how this works because the Koch brothers, you know, they funded the tea party. They are now backing this push to kill S-1, HR-1, the For the People Act, and they're now moving out of targeting just Republicans. They're also targeting Democrats like Joe Manchin.

SENATOR SHELDON WHITEHOUSE (D-RI): Well, the Koch brothers and a couple of other creepy right-wing Republican billionaires have basically built out what in the intelligence community you'd call a massive covert operation. It's primarily for oil and gas. That's where it began as to propagate climate denial and block climate legislation in its most kind of powerful sense. It had worked for big tobacco before but it really came alive to do climate denial. And like a good covert operation, they use anonymous money, they use cutouts, they use front groups, they use disinformation, they have people who pretend to be real scientists who can act like scientists on TV but say complete non-science if not, you know, nonsense. So it's a really, really significant operation. I'm really glad you're paying attention to it because frankly we have not been attentive enough to it as Democrats.

REID: Well, one of the things that gets buried in the conversation about S-1 is the extent to which it is an anti-dark money bill.

WHITEHOUSE: Yeah.

REID: Joe Manchin used to be a backer of S-1. He's a co-sponsor of the bill. Then all of a sudden Americans for Prosperity posts this website, tells him be against the bill and now he's suddenly against the bill. You had him and Kyrsten Sinema, another sort of, you know, surprise conservative Democrat — I don't think that's how she ran — didn't even show up today to talk with Texas lawmakers who are fighting for voting rights. So you have these organizations that are anti-voting rights. They are — they want climate change science to be buried and now they're anti-voting but it's the money piece of it that we don't talk enough about. Do you agree with that?

WHITEHOUSE: Yeah. I mean, if you connect the dots a little bit, Heritage Action, which has long been a part of the Koch dark money network, was the group that was caught recently with the clip from their fundraiser saying how they were anonymously funding voter suppression activities in all these Republican states, that sometimes the Republican legislators don't even know it's us and that they work through what they ominously called sentinels in these places to hide their role. You had Leonard Leo, who was the mastermind of the court capture operation that pushed Gorsuch and then Kavanaugh and then Barrett onto the Supreme Court. When *The Washington Post* did their big expose about his \$250 million scheme, he jumped out and he jumped to something called the Honest Elections Project, which does — guess what — dark money-funded voter suppression and which, by the way, if you do the corporate links, it's related to the Judicial Education Project, which is related to the Judicial Crisis Network, which paid for the ads for Gorsuch, for Kavanaugh, and for Barrett. So it's the same central command scheme operating against climate legislation, operating for dark money, and operating to pull off this voter suppression stunt. And frankly, Democrats have had crap for countermeasures against it for a very long time and it's really hard to fight a group like that if you don't take them seriously and take it on.

REID: Well, that was going to be my question, unfortunately, is what can we do about it because — right, they also have these organizations like ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council that are also heavily involved in pushing cookie cutter legislation. There is that Heritage Action organization that they have a plan with ALEC to produce model legislation to write voter suppression bills. Because, again, if you just poll things like saving the planet from doom, and we are at this tipping point in terms of saving the planet from climate doom, we don't do anything, we're going to get past the point where we can stop it. Most people want to do something about it. They say no, you cannot and then they say no, you cannot vote because they know the majority would vote to save the planet. So, my question is us little folks out here who are not multi billionaires and just want our planet to continue and want us to be a democracy, what the hell can we do about it when people like Manchin, who has an impoverished state that needs infrastructure, who's got miners dying at age 50 something because they're in the mines rather being changed into Green New — you know, sort of green jobs, what do we do? If he doesn't want to help, what do we do?

WHITEHOUSE: You've got to demand transparency and fight back and call on leaders of the Democratic Party to ask what their countermeasures are against this big operation. It's like the other side has an air force and we have none and we're going to war. And we got to have our own air force to fight back against theirs. And ours will be an air force of, like, truth and light and exposure and transparency in showing who these rascals are. But we haven't deliberately gone about it. And to your point about these groups, there are actually scientists who study this stuff who Democrats have not put to effective use. But they study this stuff and they'll show that there are 50, 60, 80, 100 different front groups all operated in this same network and that's mostly on the climate denial side. And the network can dial up whichever phony baloney group it wants like a pianist playing keys on the piano and we don't bother to point out to the American people that this is a big piano that is being played by a bunch of creepy right-wing billionaires and half of the stuff that comes out of it is completely phony and it's all controlled.

REID: Have you had this conversation Krysten Sinema and Joe Manchin, because Texas legislators came up and tried to have that conversation and they didn't show up to the Democratic meeting. They just weren't there.

WHITEHOUSE: Not precisely. But I tell you what, when we go at the dark money thing, I'm confident that we will have them and the reason that I'm confident that we will have them is what you just quoted from Jane Mayer's expose which we know from polling and that is that a conservative tea partier hates special interests, anonymous, dark money, corrupting American politics just as much as a Bernie Bro does.

REID: Yeah.

WHITEHOUSE: And the numbers are unbelievable. The numbers

REID: Yeah.

WHITEHOUSE: — are off the charts. We poll in the high 80s and the 90s fighting that.

REID: Yeah. Well —

WHITEHOUSE: Independent voters on a —

REID: — yeah.

WHITEHOUSE: — related question poll at 100-0.

REID: Yeah. Absolutely.

WHITEHOUSE: So, we can make this work if the public is with us.

REID: Well, the public, I believe, is but I am now in the next show. I have to go and let Chris Hayes do his show. Senator Whitehouse, thank you so much.