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By [Annette Fuentes](#)



## [The Slick New Way to Buy Elections](#)

By [Jonathan Weber](#) | September 21, 2010 10:05 a.m. | In [Politics](#)

As a non-profit news organization, The Bay Citizen is not allowed to endorse candidates or otherwise engage in electioneering or partisan political campaigning. The rules on this - mainly the IRS regulations governing 501 (c) (3) organizations - are actually pretty vague, but we've taken the issue seriously and we think we have a pretty good idea of what we can and can't do (and the non-profit restrictions are pretty consistent with what we would do anyway given our public service mission).

Given that perspective, I find it bizarre and frankly kind of disgusting to see that non-profit status is now being used, deliberately and deceptively, as a cover for aggressive political advocacy, mostly from the right. The New York Times yesterday ran [a frightening story](#) about how Republican operatives across the country are using non-profits to conceal the identity of the big-money donors and the hidden agendas of allegedly grass-roots organizations. Granted, these are 501 (c) (4) organizations and thus have a little more leeway, but assuming the Times reporting is even close to accurate it is clear that many of these groups are in brazen violation of at least the spirit of the law, and probably the letter too.

The Time story comes on the heels of the [New Yorker's expose of the Koch brothers](#), who have used their massive private fortune (mostly earned in the oil business) to secretly fund a right-wing, anti-Obama agenda that conveniently benefits their business interests while also advancing a fairly extreme libertarian political philosophy. Groups like the Cato Institute might seem to be respectable think-tanks, but in fact they are funded to advance a very specific political ideology and electoral agenda.

The Koch brothers are now throwing their money around here in California, joining a couple of self-interested Texas oil companies as virtually the only substantial backers of the effort to repeal AB 32, the state's landmark global warming law. Koch Industries is one of the worst polluters around, and the Koch brothers don't believe in global warming, so no surprise really that they'd be involved. But let's all see it for what it is.

The Supreme Court recently ruled that many restrictions on campaign financing are a violation of free speech, and election-buying by wealthy individuals seems to be more popular than ever. But it doesn't seem like much to ask that such activities be out in the open and not shrouded in bogus non-profit entities and deliberately misleading rhetoric about who is really pulling the strings, and why.