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Liberals cannot seem to comprehend any policy issue without first identifying themselves as the good guys and somebody else as the bad guys who are to be demonized. In health care, the villains are the insurance companies; in finance, Goldman Sachs; and in energy and politics, it is the Koch brothers, Charles and David. The Kochs own and operate Koch Industries, a privately held manufacturing and energy conglomerate with more than 70,000 employees and revenues of more than \$100 billion annually. The Kochs are also politically active libertarians and devoted advocates of free-market capitalism. In addition to providing seed money for the libertarian Cato Institute, they also helped found FreedomWorks, which has been credited with helping to organize Tea Party events. The Kochs also donate money to multiple candidates who oppose higher energy taxes and have spent millions of their own dollars lobbying against those policies in Congress.

But in recent days the Left has greatly exaggerated the Kochs' tactics and influence. The brain trust for the Obama White House, the Center for American Progress, appears to have made it their central mission to demonize the Kochs. Liberal mainstream media outlets like MSNBC have seconded that messaging, thus helping to put the brothers at the heart of a growing leftist urban legend. Reading CAP's blog, ThinkProgress, for example, one would think the Kochs single-handedly defeated Obama's cap-and-trade legislation.

Just this week, the Nation claimed to have exposed an effort by Koch Industries to practice "thought control" on their employees. What the Nation actually had was a benign packet of materials distributed by Koch Companies managers telling employees about state and federal candidates the company's political action committee was supporting (also included in the packet was a reprint of an article from this newspaper). The packet's cover letter explicitly stated: "Of course, deciding who to vote for is a decision that is yours and yours alone, based on factors important to you." The Nation left that part out. ThinkProgress falsely claimed the packet "instructed" employees how to vote.

The Koch legend is so powerful that conventional wisdom on the Left holds that the main reason environmentalists failed to pass cap and trade in the last Congress was they were outspent by the Kochs, with their sinister network of foundations and activist groups on the Right. But now comes an exhaustive new 84-page study by American University public policy communications scholar Matthew Nisbet that documents the false nature of such claims. According to Nisbet, nine liberal foundations spent at least \$368 million promoting cap-and-trade-like policies between 2008 and 2010. In contrast, Koch-affiliated foundations spent only \$31.3 million.

Unfortunately, instead of correcting the Left's false narratives, President Obama actively feeds them. The cross-country campaign kickoff that Obama is finishing up today was supposed to focus on his deficit reduction ideas. Instead, Obama quickly found out that voters want to talk about high gas prices. Unwilling to embrace the common-sense solution of increasing domestic energy supplies, Obama told a town hall in Reno, Nev., that Attorney General Eric Holder would investigate "the role of traders and speculators" in manipulating gas prices. Holder's "investigation" is pure political theater because, like the Koch brother legend, the idea that speculators cause high gas prices is a complete fiction. Speculators are betting prices will increase, but they don't have to force them upwards. Obama is taking care of that job for them.

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