



Billionaire Koch agrees with Sanders, but isn't feeling the Bern

Ann Marie Awad

February 19, 2016

One of the billionaire Koch brothers wrote this week that he agrees with Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders on several key issues, even though he isn't "feeling the Bern."

"The senator is upset with a political and economic system that is often rigged to help the privileged few at the expense of everyone else, particularly the least advantaged," Charles Koch wrote in a Washington Post op-ed published Thursday. "I agree with him."

Koch, along with his brother David, owns and runs Koch Industries -- a manufacturing company with hands in various industries such as oil, natural gas, plastics, ranching and more. It is the second-largest privately held company in the United States next to Cargill.

The two brothers have also been involved in a wide array of political causes, including helping found the Cato Institute, the premier libertarian think tank in the United States.

"Consider the regulations, handouts, mandates, subsidies and other forms of largesse our elected officials dole out to the wealthy and well-connected," Koch wrote. "The tax code alone contains \$1.5 trillion in exemptions and special-interest carve-outs. Anti-competitive regulations cost businesses an additional \$1.9 trillion every year."

"That's why Koch Industries opposes all forms of corporate welfare — even those that benefit us. (The government's ethanol mandate is a good example. We oppose that mandate, even though we are the fifth-largest ethanol producer in the United States.)"

Koch also supported Sanders when it came to criminal justice reform, saying that sentencing reform was needed to change laws that target low-level offenders with harsh penalties -- penalties that could make life much harder after they've served their sentences.

"Arbitrary restrictions limit the ability of ex-offenders to get housing, student or business loans, credit cards, a meaningful job or even to vote. Public policy must change if people are to have the chance to succeed after making amends for their transgressions," he wrote. "At Koch

Industries we're practicing our principles by "banning the box." We have voluntarily removed the question about prior criminal convictions from our job application."

However, Koch does not want anyone to mistake his op-ed for an endorsement of Sanders.

"At this point you may be asking yourself, 'Is Charles Koch feeling the Bern?' Hardly," he continued. "I applaud the senator for giving a voice to many Americans struggling to get ahead in a system too often stacked in favor of the haves, but I disagree with his desire to expand the federal government's control over people's lives. This is what built so many barriers to opportunity in the first place."

Koch promised an endorsement would come when he observed a candidate who, in his view, has a "commitment to a set of ideas and values that will lead to peace, civility and well-being rather than conflict, contempt and division."