

The Koch Brothers and Darrell Issa

by: [Lucas O'Connor](#)

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This weekend, Rancho Mirage will play host to what's often called the "Billionaire's Caucus," a regular top secret meeting hosted by the Koch Brothers, at which the wealthiest of the wealthy -- together with right wing media personalities, lawmakers, and even judges -- gather to plot their national political agenda. The meeting has taken on even greater importance in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2009 Citizens United decision, which effectively opened the door to unlimited corporate influence on U.S. elections.

Trying to list all the beneficiaries of the Kochs and their rich friends would be a daunting task. Suffice it to say, they are the wallet for just about every right wing cause you can think of -- from tea party candidates and ballot measures like California's pro-pollution Prop 23, to right wing think tanks like the Cato Institute and astro-turf front groups like Freedomworks and Americans for Prosperity.

One of the [country's worst polluters](#) -- with business interests in everything from [healthcare to the derivatives](#) trading that helped push our economy off a cliff, the Koch brothers have spread [hundreds of millions of dollars](#) to protect their narrow ideological and financial interests over the years -- ensuring that the agenda of billionaires is inserted at every level of our government and political discourse, and often at the expense of the middle class. No one has worked harder to kill Wall Street Reform, Healthcare Reform, or Energy Reform than the Kochs.

This is the meeting where the Kochs and their allies [come together to refine their strategy](#); The billionaires prepare the agenda, which is packaged by the right-wing media echo chamber to sow fear and anxiety amongst unwitting foot soldiers who provide "grassroots cover" for right wing lawmakers as they push policies that undermine the middle class in DC.

It's a sophisticated shell game that the Kochs and their allies are playing -- steeped in secrecy, profit motive and ideological extremism -- as described in a profile [written by Jane Mayer of New Yorker Magazine](#). [Past attendees](#) at Koch sponsored events include Glenn Beck, and Supreme Court Justices Thomas and Scalia. This weekend's junket will also be attended by newly minted [House Majority Leader Eric Cantor](#). Ultimately, the tentacles of the 'Kochtopus' stretch out in all directions from this meeting.

And it's hardly a stretch to think that Darrell Issa will be an important part of their future plans.

In just the past five years, the Koch network [has spent nearly \\$44 million lobbying Congress on oil & gas issues](#). High-polluting industry is their primary business, and it's obviously proven to be exceptionally profitable. Unsurprisingly, they're in no hurry to give up that

profitability or the influence it's afforded them. This week we've also [learned that](#) concern over stronger EPA regulations on pollution have dominated feedback from industry representatives to Darrell Issa's letter requesting suggestions of regulations to repeal.

And [according to the Center on Responsive Politics](#), the Koch network has sunk at least \$200,000 into the Oversight Committee. More than 87% has gone to committee Republicans, including [more than \\$100,000](#) in support of Republicans currently on the committee. The list includes Chairman Issa and five subcommittee chairs (starred):

Rep. Darrell E. Issa (CA-49) - \$12,500
Rep. John L. Mica (FL-07) - \$7,500
Rep. Patrick T. McHenry* (NC-10) - \$2,500
Rep. Jason Chaffetz* (UT-03) - \$2,500
Rep. Connie Mack (FL-14) - \$15,000
Rep. Tim Walberg (MI-7) - \$20,000
Rep. James Lankford* (OK-5) - \$10,000
Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle (NY-25) - \$250
Rep. Pat Meehan (PA-7) - \$7,500
Rep. Trey Gowdy* (SC-4) - \$7,500
Rep. Frank Guinta (NH-1) - \$5,000
Rep. Dennis Ross* (FL-12) - \$10,000
Rep. Mike Kelly (PA-3) - \$2,500

Issa's personally amassed a fortune of hundreds of millions of dollars, so he fits right in with the Kochs and the other big-money heavy hitters in the same orbit. His connections to these industries are nothing new, just like he's no stranger to the vast influence of the Koch brothers. Nor is his [antipathy towards the EPA and climate science](#) a recent development.

The web of financial support from the Right's heaviest hitters weaves all through Issa's personal career and the key members of his committee. All those heavy hitters are gathering this weekend to plan their strategy, and we can reasonably expect that Issa will be an important piece. Where an independent watchdog might be focused on investigating the deep influence of this unlimited money on our government and the policies that have created an ever shrinking middle class, Issa has taken the opposite tack. He's already thrown open the doors of the committee to allow many of the folks heading to Rancho Mirage the chance to rewrite their own rules. This weekend, they'll be working out what to do with the access.

Unlike past years however, this weekend a counter-protest is planned for the Kochs' event, as is a national campaign to expose their broad reach, nefarious tactics, and destructive impact on the middle class. [You can read more about that here.](#)

(I work on the IssaWatch project at the Courage Campaign)