

[Thousands Converge on Koch Brothers Billionaire's Caucus; 25 Arrested](#)

By: [David Dayen](#) Sunday
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Twenty-five protesters were arrested in Rancho Mirage, California today, at a protest in front of the Rancho Las Palmas resort, site of the "Billionaire's Caucus," an annual meeting put on by the Koch Brothers and other corporate entities and conservative movement operators.

Riverside Sheriff's deputy Melissa Nieburger said that the sheriff's department did have contacts with protest organizers, which included the California Courage Campaign, CREDO, MoveOn.org, 350.org, the California Nurses Association, United Domestic Workers of America and the main sponsor, the good-government group Common Cause, prior to the event, and that they were aware that some protesters would seek to be arrested for trespassing. She would not guarantee that all 25 who were arrested were part of that coordinated operation. The police, who wore riot gear, batons and helmets, did put the arrested into plastic handcuffs. Nieburger described them as "passive restraints." They were being processed at press time, and Nieburger would not say whether they would be released or would spend the night at the jail in Indio.

Nieburger estimated between 800 and 1,000 activists at the "Uncloak the Kochs" event. Event organizers chartered buses from several locations around Southern California and claimed 1,500 people signed up for those buses, on top of any local activists who attended. It appeared from the ground that well over 1,000 protesters were there.

While the sheriff's deputy claimed no knowledge of who called out the Riverside County sheriffs and the Palm Springs police department to the proceedings, Common Cause was contacted by the sheriff to see what they were planning and coordinate appropriate resources. The city of Rancho Mirage contracts with the Riverside County sheriff's department for their law enforcement needs.

Van Jones, the former green jobs deputy in the Obama Administration and senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, described the anti-Koch rally as "the beginning of our fight back." The leadership of Common Cause, generally a far more congenial organization, was a bit unusual, part of a new aggressiveness and penchant for direct action from the group. "I think you're going to see a new Common Cause."

The Koch Brothers, billionaires who have generously funded conservative and libertarian causes for over a generation – including the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and tea party groups like Americans for Prosperity – put together an annual meeting, typically held in the California desert, with fellow corporate CEOs and conservative operatives, to plan the year ahead. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor and 2012 Republican Presidential candidate Herman Cain were reputed to attend the gathering at the sprawling Rancho Las Palmas resort. The Kochs bought out the entire resort for Saturday and

Sunday. Some activists who stayed at the resort Friday night and booked dinners at their restaurants on Saturday had their reservations canceled by the resort, and were given \$150 each for their trouble.

Common Cause organized the protest weeks ago, and set up a stage in the parking lot across the street from the Rancho Las Palmas resort. But from the beginning, activists were far more interested in the resort site, and they massed themselves across the street and then eventually in the driveway of the resort. The police, in their riot gear, came out very early to guard the resort, only letting in authorized personnel. Hotel guests, presumably attendees to the Koch Brothers meeting, looked on, holding smart phone cameras and taking pictures of the display. In addition, conservative provocateur Andrew Breitbart, resplendent in shorts and roller skates, mullered around the crowd with a couple lackeys and a small video camera, talking to (and arguing with) attendees. I asked Breitbart exactly who necessitated the riot police, the lady with the papier-maché puppet or the Code Pink lady's umbrella, and he claimed to have seen unspecified "internal emails" proving the potential for violence and the need for security. Surely that will come out in the next few days. I didn't want to keep him from his workout, so I wrapped up the interview.

After a litany of speakers – including Jim Hightower, Rick Jacobs of the Courage Campaign, and Common Cause President and former Pennsylvania Congressman Bob Edgar, the entire group of protesters moved to the setup across the street from the resort. Police helicopters buzzed overhead. After a while, the police agreed to shut down Bob Hope Drive, and the protesters streamed across the street and directly in front of the resort, just a few inches away from the phalanx of riot cops. The usual protest chanting and raising of banners ensued. More cops were brought in, traipsing over the flower beds. And 25 protesters were taken away in a paddy wagon. The protests were generally peaceful, and the police professional.

The protesters generally decried the Koch Brothers' influence over American democracy, in particular their use of the *Citizens United* ruling to spend corporate money in elections. Koch Industries' funding of climate denialism and other conservative causes was on the minds of the protesters as well.

After about 45 minutes, the cops opened the road again (the police originally said they would only shut the street for 7 minutes) and asked the crowd to disperse. Eventually, the crowd did so, chanting "This is just the beginning."

Sheriff's deputy Neiburger would not say whether this was the first time protesters had disrupted the Koch Brothers meetings, but up until last year and a series of articles by Lee Fang of [Think Progress](#), they had not been well-publicized.

Bob Edgar, the President of Common Cause, said in a brief interview that he was happy with the turnout and the outcome. I asked him if this was evidence of a more aggressive organization. "Keep watching," he said.

FDL's Gregg Levine and I have more pictures and video that we'll put up in the coming days.