

Good Gov't Group Gets Louder

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February 9, 2011; Source: [Washington Post](#) | Common Cause has been one of the nation's most admired good government organizations throughout its 40-year history, but it was typically not one to take to the streets in noisy protests. That seems to be changing under the relatively new executive director of Common Cause, former Pennsylvania Congressman Bob Edgar, with a campaign against energy billionaires Charles and David Koch of Koch Industries.

Koch Industries have long supported very conservative or libertarian think tanks (such as the Cato Institute) and charities, including significant support for some Tea Party affiliated groups, such as Americans for Prosperity which David Koch chairs.

Common Cause showed up to make noisy protests at a private gathering the Koch brothers held in Rancho Mirage, Calif. So why shift from erudite campaign research and analysis to vocal, somewhat confrontational political organizing? The right wing charges that it's simply a fundraising ploy for the organization, taking aim at the Kochs to generate sympathy and largesse from liberal donors (Common Cause revenues declined to \$4.8 million in fiscal year 2009 compared to \$6.6 million in 2008). Others suggest that this is simply a return to its roots for an organization that began as an anti-war group in 1970. Or perhaps, it is a reflection of the organization's new board chair, former Clinton secretary Robert Reich.

The Koch brothers aren't small potatoes political donors, spending \$40 million for television issue ads and grassroots organizing in the 2008 campaign. The secret money pouring into campaign advertisements due to Citizens United may not be direct campaign contributions, but it is mighty powerful in swaying public opinion for or against specific candidates.

Common Cause has been patiently waiting for changes in campaign finance, but some parts of campaign finance still escape definitive control. If the organization adopts some in-your-face organizing strategies to get attention about campaign finance reform after 40 years of stop-and-start progress, it seems eminently understandable.—Rick Cohen