

How the Koch Brothers Mess With the Texas Environment

Remember the old saying "What's good for business is good for Texas?" Well, maybe that old saw just won't cut it anymore. The "Billionaire Brothers Koch" apparently think not only what's good for business in general is good for Texas, they also think what's good specifically for THEIR business is good for YOU, Mr and Ms Texan. Do you buy that?

Koch Industries is the second largest privately held US corporation, with subsidiaries in all but a few states. They rake in \$100 billion each year by selling us a wide array of products. They're all over Texas with subsidiaries including Flint Hills Resources, Koch Pipeline Company, INVISTA, Georgia-Pacific, Koch Supply & Trading, Koch Carbon, Koch Pulp & Paper Trading, Koch Agriculture Company (including the Matador Ranch), Koch Chemical Technology Group, and Koch Nitrogen Company.

Their businesses are refining and supplying oil, gas and chemicals, with a web of pipelines and terminals in every major Texas city, fabrics like nylon, spandex and polyester polymers (e.g., STAINMASTER - carpet and COOLMAX - fabric), construction materials like wallboard, pulp, paper and tissue, and cattle and horse ranching. Furthermore, they also trade in the commodities they sell and derivatives in financial markets.

It's easy to see what public policies would be good for Koch Industries. But maybe we need to examine these policies and ask, "Are these good for me, my family, my neighbors, my business, my community, my state and nation?" Is what's good for Koch Industries really good for the rest of us?

To distort the information base from which public policy is derived, the Koch brothers have created and/or helped fund foundations and "think tanks" like the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Institute for Policy Innovation, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

But that's not all: They've also injected their ideology into public institutions of higher education such as the Mercatus Center at George Mason University in Virginia. Charles Koch donated \$1.5 million to Florida State University's economics program with strings attached allowing him approval of professors hired. Individually and through the Association of Private Enterprise Education, the Kochs fund dozens of university programs with similar strings attached such as a focus on specific research benefiting Koch Industries and installing "pre-trained," Koch-friendly professors.

But that's not all: They have funded and informed a variety of political advocacy groups, their "boots on the ground," to spread the corporate ideology across the land -- e.g., Americans for Prosperity, Citizens for a Sound Economy, Citizens for the Environment, FreedomWorks, the Independent Women's Forum and most recently, tea party groups.

But that's not all: After the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision awarding 1st Amendment personhood rights to corporations, in 2010 Koch Industries directly enlisted their 50,000 employees into political action on behalf of KOCHPAC, including

supplying them with lists of favored candidates for whom it was "suggested" they campaign and vote. Through this and through campaign and "outside" funding, they succeeded in getting elected a whole raft of tea party Republicans who are currently wrecking havoc on our state and nation.

The public policies that benefit Koch Industries stretch too far across the political spectrum to cover in one article. However, prime policy goals are the rollback of environmental and safety standards, the weakening of environmental enforcement and prevention of citizen action against polluters.

Through sympathetic appointees and elected officials they have succeeded in weakening the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), most recently making it harder for citizens to contest the granting of permits. In 2009, the US EPA stated that TCEQ's pollution rules did not fulfill the requirements of the Clean Air Act and were inadequate for protecting our air and water. The Koch Industries solution is to just do away with the EPA instead of upgrading TCEQ and they recently succeeded in getting Congress to cut EPA funds.

The Independent Women's Forum attacks public school curricula regarding what they call the "junk science" of man-made global climate change. The Koch-backed political machine is fighting market-based strategies such as "cap and trade" which accounts for the cost of carbon discharges. (Meanwhile, Koch companies trade carbon emission credits in Europe.) Their raft of lawyers and lobbyists fought the designation of dioxin as a cancer risk and regulation of the financial (commodity trading) markets.

This anti-environment agenda works to the benefit of Koch Industries bottom line. It costs money to meet environmental and safety standards, and Koch Industries has spent a pretty penny paying for their own environmental catastrophes. Some of many examples: In the mid 90s, they paid \$33 million in fines and committed to \$5 million in environmental projects for 300 spills discharging 3 million gallons of oil. In 1999, they were found guilty of negligence in the deaths of two Texas teenagers from a leaky underground butane pipeline and paid an undisclosed settlement.

Doing the right thing might have been easier, but Koch Industries instead backed "tort reform" to limit the ability of injured parties to sue for damages and make "losers pay" if they are outmatched by corporate attorneys. Texas elected higher court judges consistently rule in favor of corporations over individual citizens - the best judiciary money can buy....for the Koch brothers.

Texans, are these public policies that benefit Koch Industries good for you? Does it matter to you that Texas leads the nation in toxic chemicals in water, in carcinogens and carbon dioxide in the air? If Texas was a nation it would rank 7th in the world in total carbon dioxide emissions.

Is it good for your children that the science of global climate change is stripped from their school curriculum? Are you willing to bet THEIR future on the outside chance that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and countless reputable climate scientists are wrong?

If you or your family were injured by their actions, would it be OK with you if your access to the courts to seek compensation would be curtailed? Will you not get cancer from exposure to dioxin just because they say so?

When you hear their spokespersons call for the elimination of the "onerous" EPA or "burdensome" financial regulations ask yourself if those agencies and regulations are as much an onerous burden on you as is the haze in Big Bend National Park or the price of gas inflated by unrestrained market speculation.

What's good for Koch Industries is not good for Texas or for the nation. And they are not alone at the trough of public policies that amount to corporate welfare. But, unless we rethink old sayings, get the facts, stand up, speak out, and demand government policies that serve the interests of the people, not the corporations, one of these days we may find the formerly great state of Texas listed among the "subsidiaries" of corporations like Koch Industries.