

Koch Brothers Hire PR Firm To Combat Public Outrage

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Over the past weekend, billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, among the biggest funders of right-wing causes and owners of the nation's second-largest privately held company, held their annual gathering of vastly wealthy ultra-conservative donors. The invite-only get together was held at an expensive Rancho Mirage, CA resort, and featured a private security force hired by the brothers. (Good coverage in this LA Times [story](#).)

A gathering of average Americans and capitalists it was not. This was the eighth year the brothers have hosted the affair, previous keynote speakers including rational-thinker Glen Beck.

Except this meeting was different. Having been outed as bank-rolling anti-democratic astroturf advocacy organizations, this Koch extravaganza was greeted by nearly 1,000 regular folk protesters.

In the wake of the embarrassment, the brothers decided to do what they know best: fork out big bucks to buy inauthentic mainstream credibility. As Politico [reported](#) today:

They've hired a team of p.r. pros with experience working for top Republicans including Sarah Palin and Arnold Schwarzenegger to quietly engage reporters to try to shape their Koch coverage, and commissioned sophisticated polling to monitor any collateral damage to the image of their company, Koch Industries.

There is certainly need for damage control. A recent [New Yorker piece](#) by Jane Mayer outed in detail the Koch's funding of astroturf groups such as American for Prosperity, even though David Koch originally denied having ever associated with anyone from the group. This must have been especially galling for the New York socialite, as it was compounded by an ensuing New York Times [Op-Ed](#) by Frank Rich, who helped take the veil off a man who is usually seen in the social pages and lauded for his \$100 million dollar gifts to New York cultural institutions.

The Koch Brothers own Wichita, KS-based Koch Industries, which has holdings in the oil, gas, chemical and consumer products sectors. One of the companies they own is Georgia Pacific, makers of popular paper towels and toilet paper.

Americans for Prosperity is just one of the myriad astroturf groups the Koch's have funded to push their extreme-right, self-serving agenda. A recent [Greenpeace report](#) chronicles the web of that funding.

Jane Mayer, in her New Yorker story, quotes long-time observer of the Washington scene, Charles Lewis, who founded the non-partisan watchdog group the Center for Public Integrity as saying:

The Koch's are on a whole different level. There's no one else who has spent this much money. The sheer dimension of it is what sets them apart. They have a pattern of lawbreaking, political manipulation, and obfuscation. I've been in Washington since Watergate, and I've never seen anything like it.

The brothers claim that in bank-rolling right wing think tanks such as The Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and others they are only supporting the fostering of ideas, including less government intervention in the private sector.

Yet as I noted in a [previous blog](#): a New York Observer [story](#), '7 Ways the Koch Bros. Benefit from Corporate Welfare,' illustrates how the brothers are actually not so anti-government. In fact, they really like government intervention as long as it is bent to serve their business interests. And their business interests are doing just fine: according to the most recent [Forbes 400](#) list, David Koch just passed Michael Bloomberg to become New York's richest man and the sixth richest American over all, worth \$21.5 billion.

Today's Politico story further elaborates on the Koch brothers thinking and the impact of the media attention:

Personally, the brothers and their executives were rattled by the scrutiny, according to a conservative source who has closely tracked the Kochs' philanthropy and their meetings, but who contends the Kochs largely brought the heightened scrutiny on themselves.

“They somehow thought that they could run tens of millions of dollars in ads, but fly under the radar screen and that nobody was going to find out,” said the source. “So they're scrambling now because they weren't nearly as prepared for the fallout as they should have been.”

Scrambling also apparently includes hiring thugs to threaten journalists attempting to cover this weekend's high-roller confab. Once again from the Politico story:

Security manned every doorway and stairwell near the ballrooms where Koch events were held, and threatened to jail this POLITICO reporter while he waited in line at the resort's café, after he stopped by a Koch conference registration table.

Grassroots democracy in action.

Note: In early edition of this blog i incorrectly identified Koch Industries as owning Kimberly Clark. They actually own competitor Georgia Pacific