

# VICE NEWS

## The Koch Brothers' Fake Libertarianism: War, Forced Pregnancies, and Homophobia

By Lee Fang

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The largest media outlets in the country routinely describe the conservative billionaires David and Charles Koch, the shadowy megadonors behind much of the modern political infrastructure on the right, as selfless libertarians. Matthew Cooper of *Newsweek* claims they are "more libertarian than Republican, more Austrian economics than Christian Coalition." Daniel Schulman, author of a new book on the Koch family, recently told Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show* that the brothers do not "align with Republicans at all," adding that "David Koch has come out and said he's pro-gay marriage; they're pro-reproductive rights."

It's almost as if these journalists can't accept that the rich men whose names are plastered all over elite cultural institutions in cities like New York are conservative Republicans. But the reality is that the Kochs are underwriting powerful political organizations with decidedly anti-libertarian views—like arbitrarily killing foreigners in detention and using the heavy hand of government to force women to carry undesired pregnancies to term.

The evidence for the Koch clan's supposedly libertarian beliefs—particularly on polarizing issues like gay marriage, war, drugs, and abortion—tends to consist of off-hand remarks made by David and Charles in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as a comment at the 2012 Republican convention.

Following the Koch money paints a different picture.

"It is far past the time that we reject the lie that homosexuality and redefining marriage has no consequences," Alison Howard of Concerned Women for America roared at the anti-gay March for Marriage rally earlier this year. "Marriage does not need to be redefined. It needs to be underlined! Marriage is between a man and woman!"

Howard's group has barnstormed the country, holding rallies to support the contraception-subverting Hobby Lobby Supreme Court decision, fighting for state laws to define a six-week old fetus as a legal "person," and other goofy right-wing causes. The Americans United for Israel conference held in Washington, DC last week—an End Times theology event that has served as a stage for thousands of Christian Evangelicals to cheer the brutal Israeli invasion of Gaza—has been heavily promoted by Concerned Women for America. As I pointed out in a recent column for VICE, Jody Hice—an activist who just locked up the GOP primary in Georgia's 10th

congressional district—was endorsed by CWA. Hice campaigned on ending the separation of church and state, insists Muslims do not have First Amendment Rights, and has openly questioned 2012 Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney's Mormon religion.

None of these projects sound particularly libertarian to me.

Just look at who is keeping CWA afloat. Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce, the "secret bank" controlled by Koch Industries' lobbyists and used to distribute funds to favored groups, gave over \$8.1 million to CWA's issue advocacy branch. During roughly the same time period, CWA brought in about \$8.7 million—meaning the Kochs have been largely footing the bill for CWA's anti-gay and anti-abortion antics.

Other Christian Right advocacy groups obsessed with social causes count on the Kochs' donor network, too. Citizen Link, a Colorado Springs-based offshoot of the virulently homophobic Focus on the Family, received \$4.1 million from a Koch-controlled fund during the same period that the group raised about \$9.8 million. Citizen Link spends a great deal of money mobilizing voters against gay marriage laws and reproductive rights. Americans United for Life Action, the Susan B. Anthony List, and Heritage Action—all groups with similar positions on abortion rights—have received hefty Koch fund checks in recent years.

When it comes to foreign policy, the Koch network funds several think tanks that lobby for more wars. There's the the American Enterprise Institute, for instance, where experts have recently called for special forces to be deployed to both Iraq and Syria.

And the Kochs now have their own advocacy group for military issues: Concerned Veterans for America.

It's a relatively new group that not only received 100 percent of its start-up funds from a Koch-controlled limited liability corporation (LLC), but was also founded by a former Koch Industries lobbyist. The organization is mostly partisan in nature, and has aired TV ads promoting Republicans for Congress while attacking the Obama White House on issues ranging from Benghazi to the Veterans Administration scandal.

Classical libertarians are skeptical about war and view the prison at Guantanamo Bay as an inhumane waste of taxpayer resources. Koch's Concerned Veterans outfit take a different approach. "My advice to the president is at a minimum have an air strike—at a minimum, you have to flex on some level—as these men will think we're tolerant of their behavior," Jessie Jane Duff, an organizer with Concerned Veterans, said during a radio interview about how to deal with ISIS, the Sunni militia in Iraq. Last month, Duff agreed with a Fox News host that the US government should execute all of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. She tweeted: "If we kill evryone in Gitmo (it wouldn't cost much) we'd be sending a very clear message to jihadist. [sic]"

Duff's kill-em-all rhetoric surprised Morris Davis, an assistant professor at Howard University's law school and a former chief prosecutor for terrorism at Guantanamo Bay. "It was really kind of disappointing," Davis told me, pointing out that Duff was endorsing war crimes.

Duff isn't the only Concerned Veteran with a history of hawkish views, either. The CEO of the organization, Pete Hegseth, is the former executive director of Vets for Freedom—a now-defunct group that aired pro-Iraq war messages on behalf of President George W. Bush and his

congressional allies. In June, Concerned Veterans brought on Bill Turenne Jr. as director of communications. Turenne, a former lobbyist to the government of Qatar, was once a personal media aide to former Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, a major architect of Bush's neoconservative agenda. In other words, this is not a pair you would imagine at the helm of some kind of libertarian fantasy.

While Charles Koch certainly funds social libertarian causes like the Cato Institute—a think tank he tried to seize control of by attempting to appoint avowed neoconservatives to the board in the summer of 2012—the amount now wanes in comparison to the many millions he donates annually to social conservative and interventionist advocacy groups. For instance, the latest available tax returns show the Charles Koch Foundation gave \$10,000 to Cato while gifting \$510,000 to the American Enterprise Institute, a place where warmongers like former UN Ambassador John Bolton hang their hat. Moreover, Koch-backed social conservative groups are constantly airing ads to promote their views (here's the Koch-funded Susan B. Anthony List claiming a Democrat running for re-election voted for taxpayer money to cover abortions).

Where are the Koch funds to air ads encouraging people to keep the peace and respect the reproductive independence of women?

Rather than pledging a profound respect for personal liberty, Charles Koch has explained his strategy in more narrow terms. Accepting an award from a gathering of Christian Right donors at the Council for National Policy in 1999, he said his goal was "to rally the troops and unite social and economic conservatives to make a difference."

That's a nice strategy for winning political power, especially if your aim is to eliminate the estate tax and to radically reduce the powers of the Environmental Protection Agency, chief among Charles' self-interested obsessions. But it's not a great strategy for promoting a free society—unless your idea of a free society includes government-mandated transvaginal probes and non-stop wars in the Middle East.