



New Canaan: A look inside ‘Kochland’

Robert Smith

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“Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power in America” was written by Christopher Leonard and originally published on Aug 13, 2019. Following are some highlights.

Koch Industries realized early on that it would be a financial disaster for the firm if the American government regulated carbon emissions or made companies pay a price for releasing carbon into the atmosphere. If a limit on greenhouse gas emissions were imposed, it would dampen demand for oil and diminish the value of the Koch assets and their future sales. The total dollar losses would likely be measured in trillions over a period of 30 years.

This large tome details the extraordinary behind-the-scenes influence that Charles and David Koch have exerted to cripple U.S. government action on climate change. If there is any lingering doubt that the Koch brothers are not the primary sponsors of climate-change denial in the United States, this book emphatically puts this to rest.

“Kochland” opens with an FBI investigator staking out an oil tank on an Indian reservation in Oklahoma. A number of investigations concluded that Koch technicians routinely shortchanged the tribe when recording how much oil they were taking. In a civil trial, a jury found Koch Industries guilty of falsifying about 25,000 documents to cover up its theft of oil on Indian land in the early 1980s.”

Leonard managed to dig up valuable new material, including evidence of the Kochs’ role in perhaps the earliest known organized conference of climate-change deniers. The meeting in 1991 was sponsored by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, which the Kochs founded and heavily funded for years. After President George H.W. Bush announced that he would support a treaty limiting carbon emissions, a move that posed a potentially devastating threat to the profits of Koch Industries, Charles Koch and other fossil-fuel magnates sprang into action that year. Like the Democrats, the Republicans largely accepted the scientific consensus on climate change, reflected in the findings of expert groups.

The Kochs’ key role in stopping congressional action on climate change is well-known, but Leonard discovered that the Kochs played an earlier and even more central role in climate-change denial than was previously understood. “Kochland” makes it clear that “you’d have a carbon tax, or something better, today, if not for the Kochs.” They stopped anything from happening back when there was still time.”

The book also documents how, in 2010, the company's lobbyists spent gobs of cash and swarmed Congress as part of a multi-pronged effort to kill the first, and so far, the last, serious effort to place a price on carbon pollution via a "cap and trade" bill. Magnifying the Kochs' power was their network of allied donors, anonymously funded shell groups, think tanks, academic centers, and nonprofit advocacy groups. The Koch insiders referred to this as their "echo chamber."

David Koch worked tirelessly, over decades, to jettison from office any moderate Republicans who proposed to regulate greenhouse gases. In 2009, for example, South Carolina Republican Rep. Bob Inglis proposed a carbon tax bill. Koch Industries stopped funding his campaign, donated heavily to a primary opponent named Trey Gowdy and helped organize teams of Tea Party activists who traveled to town hall meetings to protest against Mr. Inglis. Some of the town hall meetings devolved into angry affairs, where Mr. Inglis couldn't make himself heard above the shouting. Mr. Inglis lost re-election, and his defeat sent a message to other Republicans: Koch's orthodoxy on climate rules could not be violated.

In conclusion, the Koch brothers have spent about 20 years denying climate science as their way to prevent the U.S. Government doing anything about limiting fossil fuel emissions. Limiting fossil fuel emissions would have resulted in massive losses to the value of the Koch assets and their future sales.

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