



David Koch, 1940 to 2019: A shameful legacy of outsized anti-science influence

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August 26, 2019

David Koch, 79, died last week. There will be a special place in the annals of the hell of a hotter Earth for him and his brother Charles.

No one can deny the outsized influence on American political life of David and Charles Koch, brilliant sons of a brilliant libertarian father who built a business empire making them among the richest men in the world — \$52 billion each, more or less. And no one should deny their right to have spent that money as the law allows to influence American politics and policies in a direction they believed good for the nation.

But everyone must contest their right to have attacked science, and scientists, who brought news they didn't like. So when the Kochs and the many entities they funded undermined the distressing facts of climate science, and facilitated attacks on the scientists who brought them that unwelcome news, and scoffed at public policies to address climate chaos already horribly in evidence, such acts became permanent blots not only on their legacy but on the entire planet.

In fact, the Koch brothers' consistent attack on climate science and its implications cast doubt on any purity of their motives, because the richest core of their business involved fossil fuels. Were they really patriotic free-market conservatives, as their business friend Stanley Hubbard asserted, "not pushing to help their business"? Unbiased observers of climate science must disagree. Instead they appear no better than the desperate tobacco industry, which spent untold millions of dollars over 30 years denying the links between cancer and cigarettes. In the Kochs' opposition to climate science, the appearance is of self-dealing, not selflessness.

The laboratories at Koch industries, according to their current advertising, are hard at work on alternative, noncarbon fuels. One certainly hopes that is the case. But that commitment rings hollow without commensurate public support for the findings and policy implications of climate science — all-hands-on-deck policies to end fossil fuel and other carbon pollution. Yet the vast Koch fortune continued financial support for a suite of faux think tanks espousing a radical anti-science, planet-killing agenda — the Heartland Institute, the George C. Marshall Institute, the Cato Institute and others — more than \$100 million spent over the last two decades, according to an analysis by Greenpeace.

David Koch has passed from this life, and Charles Koch will pass soon enough, their remarkable financial and political legacy assured. And the nation will continue to debate whether unfettered or regulated capitalism is the better path to prosperity (short answer: regulated). But these graduates of MIT had to understand the simple math problem that adding carbon to the

atmosphere is a one-way negative proposition, throwing a suffocating second carbon blanket over the Earth in their lifetimes.

Subsequent generations will never forgive them for the atmosphere of lies about climate science they funded, helping forestall significant action, leading to a planetary home radically hotter and less stable than one in which they and their father grew into prosperity.

The drowning of America's coastlines has already begun, as have the fires, floods, droughts and heat waves. Soon enough, their beloved Kansas heartland will reach temperatures that are intolerable for many crops and threatening to human life. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Kansas "is likely to have four times as many days above 100 degrees" than in the past. The Kochs forgot, or denied, the "conserve" in "conservatism," and that is not just a political tactic, but a global tragedy for which there can be no forgiveness.