



# Cato, the Kochs and Common Cause

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Why in the world is Common Cause speaking up for the Cato Institute?

Since we issued a press release last week decrying the bid by industrialists and right-wing financiers Charles and David Koch to take control of Cato, we've been hearing that question quite a lot.

And no wonder. After all, though both are long-established nonprofit groups with a strong interest in public policy, it's pretty tough to find things that Common Cause and Cato agree on. Cato calls itself an advocate for libertarian ideas, but it's probably fair to say that many Common Cause supporters see it as a Republican front group. Common Causers think of ourselves as progressives, but I suspect many Cato backers see us as an arm of the Democratic establishment.

Neither label stands up to scrutiny. Our supporters know Common Cause regularly takes on Democrats as well as Republicans. We've been challenging President Obama for years over his failure to fight for real campaign finance reform, for example, and we've invited the wrath of Senate Democratic leaders with our campaign to abolish the filibuster.

Similarly, there is a substantial list of issues on which Cato parts with Republican orthodoxy. To name just two: Cato has declared the war on drugs a failure and supports decriminalization of drug use; it has long viewed the war in Afghanistan a waste of money and American lives.

"I find much of Cato's hard-line libertarianism... naive, callous and occasionally absurd"[Washington Post columnist Ezra Klein recently wrote](#). "And yet, it's among a handful of think tanks whose work I regularly read and trust."

Klein added that he admires Cato's consistent advocacy for "small-government principles." It "advocates those principles when Democrats are in power, and when Republicans are in

power. When I read Cato's take on a policy question, I can trust that it is informed by more than partisan convenience."

Congress recognized the value of that kind of independence – from partisans and party organizations, from union bosses and from corporate barons like the Kochs – when it passed tax laws that give groups like Common Cause and Cato nonprofit status and the tax exemption that goes with it.

We're speaking up for Cato because we value that independence too. The Kochs have every right to express their political views and to invest their money in groups that share and will advance their partisan goals. But no one should expect the rest of us to subsidize their partisanship by providing them with a tax break.