

## Liberal nonprofit that pressed Shulman to target conservatives houses his wife's group

By: Patrick Howley - July 4, 2013

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The progressive nonprofit organization Common Cause urged then-IRS commissioner Douglas Shulman to investigate activities of conservative donors despite housing the campaign-reform group that employs Shulman's wife.

In 2012, Common Cause urged Shulman and fellow embattled IRS official Lois Lerner, director of the agency's tax-exempt organizations division, to investigate the Koch Brothers' attempted takeover of the libertarian think tank the Cato Institute.

"Common Cause respectfully requests that the Internal Revenue Service initiate an investigation into whether attempts by Charles G. Koch and David H. Koch, shareholders of the Cato Institute, to take control of and manipulate the Cato Institute for partisan political purposes expose a flaw in the Cato Institute's structure that jeopardizes its tax exempt status under 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(3)," Common Cause president Bob Edgar wrote in a letter to Shulman and fellow IRS official Lois Lerner dated March 9, 2012.

Edgar, who died in April of this year, described "grave questions about whether the Kochs are exploiting Cato's corporate structure to transform the Cato Institute from its longstanding, storied reputation as a nonpartisan, libertarian think tank into a partisan organization in contravention of its educative and charitable purpose.

"For these reasons, the Internal Revenue Service should open an investigation into the impact of the Kochs' attempt to control the Cato Institute to advance their own political and economic interests, and whether Cato can maintain its charitable, tax-exempt status without changing its ownership structure," Edgar wrote.

In May, after news broke that the IRS engaged in widespread targeting of conservative groups for abusive audits and delays of nonprofit applications, Common Cause submitted written testimony to a House Ways and Means hearing expressing disappointment at the actions of IRS officials.

"All organizations, regardless of political affiliation and ideological leaning, deserve to be treated fairly, justly, and equally under the law. The IRS did not use these standards in its review of 501(c)(4) applications, and the employees and those with knowledge of what was happening should be held accountable. In addition, an independent, credible investigation must occur to ensure that these guidelines are strictly adhered to in the future," Common Cause testified.

The organization described the IRS abuse as merely an unfortunate response to the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling.

"We are deeply disappointed that the actions of IRS employees, and the failure of IRS supervisors to uphold fair and sensible standards and priorities, now undermine the credibility of an agency that must crack down on the rising flood of new 501(c)(4)s after the Supreme Court's misguided decision in Citizens United and Congress' subsequent failure to enact a common sense disclosure law," Common Cause testified.

Common Cause provides office space to the progressive campaign-finance reform organization Public Campaign which employs Shulman's wife Susan L. Andersen as a senior program advisor.

In May, Public Campaign president and CEO Nick Nyhart belittled the concerns of disenfranchised conservatives.

"There are legitimate questions to be asked about political groups that are hiding behind a 501(c)4 status," Nyhart said in a statement provided to ABC. "It's unfortunate a few bad apples at the IRS will make it harder for those questions to be asked without claims of bias."

Visitors to the 1133 19th St. NW office floor shared by Common Cause and Public Campaign are greeted at the sign-in desk for Common Cause, with Public Campaign's office located to the visitors' left-hand side. Nyhart described the close relationship between the groups in his April 23 eulogy for Edgar on the Public Campaign website.

"In 2007, [Edgar] was named President and CEO of Common Cause, the most important good government group in America. During his tenure, he strengthened the organization, building strong staff leadership, inspiring an active membership, and laying down a robust financial base," Nyhart wrote.

"We've been next door to Common Cause on the reform landscape for years, but became literal neighbors in 2009, subletting a suite of offices from them here in DC. All of us got to know Bob as the guy down the hall after that. He was quick with a pun, perpetually energetic, and always ready with a new idea," Nyhart added.

Public Campaign, an "organization dedicated to sweeping campaign reform that aims to dramatically reduce the role of big special interest money in American politics," is funded by the Common Cause Education Fund and other groups, including the pro-Obamacare group Health Care for America Now! and Barbra Streisand's the Streisand Foundation.

The DC's knock on the door of Public Campaign, which is marked within the Common Cause office only by a paper sign, was not returned during normal weekday work hours Tuesday.