



The Koch Brothers Aren't Going Anywhere

By Charles Pierce – July 1st, 2013

At *The New Yorker*, the invaluable *Jane Mayer* tips us to this equally invaluable study of the thoroughgoing involvement of the Koch Brothers in almost every aspect of conservative politics and, therefore, every aspect of American public policy, but especially their role in constructing the self-contained and highly disciplined universe within which conservative politics and policy ideas are formed and promulgated. The attempts to get something done within our politics as regards the crisis of climate change, to name only one issue in which they've meddled.

The House of Representatives voted to slash the EPA budget by 27 percent, one of the biggest cuts since President Richard Nixon and the Congress created the agency in 1970. The Senate subsequently modified the severity of these cuts, and the budget was ultimately cut by nearly 16 percent. What is less known is that more than 100 House members - all Republicans, many tea party members - signed a little-known "pledge" (similar to the Grover Norquist no tax increase pledge) backed by the Koch brothers promising to not spend any federal money to fight climate change without an equal amount of tax cuts. Most of the pledge signers received campaign contributions from Charles or David Koch or Koch Industries. The Workshop has tracked the signing of the pledge by 411 current state and federal politicians nationwide (all Republicans except four Democrats and two Independents at the state level). Among them are such prominent state officials as Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin and Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli II, the Republican nominee for governor in Virginia. The first person to sign the Koch-backed pledge was Republican Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas, where Koch Industries is headquartered. Of the 85 conservative Republicans first elected to the House of Representatives in 2010, 76 signed the pledge and, of those, 57 received money from Koch Industries' political action committee. The members of Congress who signed the pledge have also introduced several bills aimed at limiting EPA regulation of greenhouse gas emissions and limiting regulation of the nation's biggest polluters.

For the love of god, another pledge? What is it with these people?

And they're not going away.

The May-June 2012 issue of *Academe*, the magazine of the American Association of University Professors, focused on corporate influence in higher education. Kent Miller and Ray Bellamy wrote about the Koch influence in the Florida State University economics department. The

Charles G. Koch Foundation offered to give the university \$1.5 million to hire two assistant professors and fund fellowships and undergraduate curriculum on free-enterprise topics. The foundation appointed an advisory board that would award money to faculty and make sure that the work they completed fit with the foundation's mission. Miller and Bellamy wrote, "In exchange for his 'gift,' the donor got to assign specific readings, select speakers brought to campus and instruct them with regard to the focus of their lectures, shape the curriculum with new courses and specify the number of students in the courses, name the program's director, and initiate a student club." It's not just at Florida State, which was a high-profile case, but also at other universities where the Kochs and John Allison, retired chairman and CEO of the financial institution BB&T, have donated money. Allison is on the board of directors at the Mercatus Center, which is funded by the Kochs, and following an intense fight in which the Kochs backed him, is now the president of the Cato Institute. BB&T sponsors chaired professors, typically in economics departments, and the universities where they sponsor a chaired professor often line up with where the Kochs donate. An Investigative Reporting Workshop analysis found that the Kochs had donated to 10 universities where there were BB&T-chaired professors, including West Virginia University, Clemson University and smaller universities, such as Hampden-Sydney College and Barton College. According to Inside Higher Ed in 2011, Clemson "spent several years cultivating the Charles G. Koch Foundation to support its Clemson Institute for the Study of Capitalism, and has received \$1 million thus far."

This would have hit me like merely a ton of brocks had Josh Marshall's joint today not mentioned another well-nourished pool for like-minded *larvae*.

One of the fastest-growing conservative alternatives is the Benjamin Rush Society, whose members support a free-market, limited government approach to medicine. The organization says its ranks have swelled since passage of the federal Affordable Care Act. *"Thirty to 40 years ago, the rule of law was a joke. It wasn't taken seriously," said Dr. Beth Haynes, executive director of the Rush society, named for an 18th Century physician who signed the Declaration of Independence. "It had no intellectual weight to it upon law campuses. That's a very similar place to where free market in academic medicine is. It's considered laughable." "I want to get free market back to the point where it's a respectable point of view that has to be seriously considered. There's no way that can happen until students are aware of what that really means, and they start having conversations," he said.*

I am amused by the weepy victimology present in the lamentations that the "free-market" approach to medicine hasn't been given its proper due, as though the rest of us haven't been living under the "free market" approach to medicine while the rest of the industrialized world laughed at us and got healthier than we are. However, I am taking none of this lightly. The academic and intellectual superstructure that grew out of the Powell Memo years ago is stronger than ever, better financed than ever, and utterly self-perpetuating. No victory won by any progressive president at any time ever should be seen as being a permanent one. You can ask John Lewis if you don't believe me.

