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Laurie Bennett,

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A Tip for Kochologists

Before the Koch brothers became libertarian icons, the phrase “Koch-funded” carried some promise.

It suggested that the author of the news story or blog post had unearthed new information about the always-secretive Kochs and their money.

In the past few years, “Koch-funded” has devolved into a sort of shorthand. Readers on the left will ascribe bias to any organization attached to it. Readers on the right will declaim any media outlet using the phrase.

A new twist has emerged in recent weeks, in the wake of lawsuits the Kochs have filed for control of the Cato Institute. Some on the right who have sided with the libertarian think tank are apt to dismiss the media outlet, the writer *and* the organization receiving Koch money. Indeed, the Kochs are such a hot topic these days that the phrase is often implicit, whether stated or not. (See the [Washington Post ombudsman's comments](#) about recent coverage of a Mercatus Center report on President Obama's health care package.)

Yet readers with decidedly different political viewpoints share a fascination for billionaires Charles and [David Koch](#), their political strategies and the ways they dole out their significant fortunes. [Brian Doherty](#), in his “Radicals for Capitalism,” used the term “Kochology” for this activity. It's the kremlinology of libertarianism.

In the five years since publication of Doherty's book, the pastime has spread well past the libertarian movement.

In today's highly charged political environment, where so much relies on deep pockets, friends, foes and media hunt assiduously for clues about the brothers' spending.

So here's a tip for Kochologists out there: If you can't follow the money, follow Richard H. Fink.

Fink, a former economics professor, is a longtime associate of the Kochs who oversees much of their influence spending.

Jane Mayer of the New Yorker described him as "the central nervous system of the Kochtopus."

He is an executive vice president of Koch Industries, the privately held conglomerate with products ranging from toilet paper to oil and gas.

He is also chairman and CEO of Koch Companies Public Sector, the corporation's lobbying arm, which Koch spent \$8.36 million last year lobbying in Washington.

Yet Fink's sphere of influence goes well beyond corporate duties.

He heads the both the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation and the Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation, which is directed by the Koch family. (According to a speech Charles Koch gave in 1982, the family set up the foundation after the death of Lambe, a family friend and Wichita real estate developer who left his estate in Koch's care.)

Fink is also president of the Knowledge and Progress Fund, a little-known Koch foundation that has donated money to DonorsTrust, which then redirects money to "organizations that promote liberty."

He is a co-founder of Mercatus Center and sits with Charles Koch on the center's board. He was also founding president of Citizens for a Sound Economy, a free-market group that later became the Americans for Prosperity Foundation.

In the early days of the Citizens for a Sound Economy, he wrote a syndicated news column about limited government. He testified before

Congress, sat on a White House panel on privatization and was singled out by President Reagan in his announcement that Conrail would become a private company.

Fink has continued to write, particularly on the issues of government and spending.

“Both Democrat and Republican majorities have looked the other way when hard decisions needed to be made. Consequently, we have an epidemic of budget deficits,” he wrote last year, in a post published by [Koch Industries](#).

“We must continually and effectively communicate with our elected officials, letting them know we will stand by them when they cut spending. But if they don’t, we won’t.”

The threat and promise are implicit, even if we don’t always know where the money goes.

The map below shows the known universe of Richard Fink and Charles Koch. An [interactive version](#) can be found on Muckety.