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## *Laissez Cato Faire*

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Like many other longstanding friends of the Cato Institute, I am appalled to learn of the Koch brothers' attempt to take it over and convert it into some kind of weapons factory for conservative and Republican organizations. Over the last 35 years, a combination of strong libertarian principles, sound leadership and integrity have built Cato into the pre-eminent libertarian think tank on the planet. I can't for the life of me understand why anyone who supports the principles for which Cato stands would wish to mess with such a successful formula and risk destroying it all.

A Koch-controlled Cato would no longer be the same Cato Institute, and would strike a major blow at some of Cato's key principles, not least its commitment to nonpartisanship and libertarian non-conservative causes (such as support for gay marriage, an end to the war on drugs, opposition to overseas adventurism, etc.). It would also strike at Cato's independence and institutional integrity, and do enormous and probably irreparable damage to its stellar reputation. This reputation took decades to build up, but could be destroyed in an instant.

The most likely outcome of a Koch takeover is that Cato would be eviscerated, the brand would be destroyed and the Kochs would take over an empty shell -- in short, the outcome would be a catastrophe, and even the winners would gain nothing.

Cato's success is due in great part to the quality of its existing leadership and to the confidence that that engenders in those of us who work for or with the Institute -- as I have had the honor to do for almost a quarter of a century. One thinks especially of Ed Crane, David Boaz, Jim Dorn and the late and much missed Bill Niskanen. If a Koch takeover were to lead them to step down, then I (and doubtless many other affiliates of Cato) would have no choice but to follow them and sever our links with the Institute as well, before rejoining them in a new start-from-scratch Cato II. But it would be a real shame if it ever came to that.

Message to the Koch brothers: Cato ain't broke; please don't try to fix it.