



I'm worried about the future of the Cato Institute

BY

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If you follow the libertarian movement at all, you've mostly likely heard that Charles and David Koch, who fund many conservative grassroots organizations, [are suing the Cato Institute](#) over the shares owned by William Niskanen, who passed away late last year:

Charles and David Koch, owners of a Wichita-based conglomerate that ranks as one of the largest private corporations in the world, filed a lawsuit this week in Kansas seeking an option to increase their 50 percent control of the Cato Institute.

Cato President Ed Crane blasted the lawsuit Thursday as an attempted "hostile takeover" of a venerable Washington institution that he co-founded with Charles Koch in the 1970s.

"Mr. Koch's actions in Kansas court yesterday represent an effort by him to transform Cato from an independent, nonpartisan research organization into a political entity that might better support his partisan agenda," Crane said in a statement. He vowed to fight the move "vehemently."

Charles Koch said in a statement that he and his brother were only seeking to uphold the terms of the shareholder agreement that governs Cato and were not "acting in a partisan manner."

"We support Cato and its work," he said. "We want to ensure that Cato stays true to its fundamental principles of individual liberty, free markets, and peace into the future, and that it not be subject to the personal preferences of individual officers or directors."

When it comes to the Koch brothers, I'm typically defensive. I think they've become a boogeyman for the Left. With that said, however, the [Cato Institute](#) is well-respected for their work promoting free markets, school choice, civil liberties, and an non-interventionist foreign policy. The folks at Cato are willing to call out all sides, including conservatives and Republicans, for trying to increase the size and scope of government. Making the Cato Institute a partisan would be a disaster, ruining the credibility of this respected think tank.

While the Koch brothers certainly have a role in American politics, I don't believe that them taking control of the Cato Institute would advance the cause of liberty. They would take a respected DC-based think tank and make it partisan, which is what Jerry Taylor, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, [says is their goal](#):

They told [Cato Chairman] Bob [Levy] that they intended to use their board majority to remove Ed Crane from Cato and transform our Institute into an intellectual ammo-shop for American [sic] for Prosperity and other allied (presumably, Koch-controlled) organizations. That statement of intent is certainly consistent with what we've been hearing from both Kevin Gentry and Nancy Pfothenauer. They've frequently complained during their short time on our board that Cato wasn't doing enough to defeat President Obama in November and that we weren't working closely enough with grass roots activists like those at AFP.

The Koch brothers haven't been all that involved in the Cato Institute in the last 20 years, though they have control of half of the governing board. They've apparently had a falling out with Ed Crane. They don't send much money to the think tank anymore either. And now that they are trying to takeover, they've got actual donors worried and wondering about the Cato Institute's future.

Let's just hope, for the libertarian movement's sake, that the Koch brothers either back off or lose their legal challenge.

If you're interested in following the news about the Cato Institute, some fans and staffers (both current and former) are keeping up with everything on the "Save the Cato Institute" Facebook page.