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POWER LINE IN THE NEWS

One of the explanations I've given in radio interviews for why I began my [Politically Incorrect Guide to the Presidents](#) with Woodrow Wilson is that I didn't think readers would be that interested in reading much on forgotten 19th century presidents like John Tyler and Rutherford B. Hayes. *D'oh!* Clearly I underestimated Barack Obama's genius in stoking public interest in the person who, as [Scott's post yesterday](#) had it, is implicated in starting the postmodern deconstruction era and also founded ZZ Top. (How long until a credulous Obama speechwriter actually uses this?)

Anyway, out this morning on the terrific Infinite Monkeys blog is [a new podcast with me](#) about the PIG book. The Ben-Joel podcast is especially notable because Ben Boychuk and Joel Mathis represent right and left and as such the conversations zip along and feature some good argument. Joel is especially cheesed off with my characterization of Obama as America's first affirmative action president.

Meanwhile, here inside the Beltway—or at least in the intellectual think tank community—everyone is talking intensely about the feud between the Koch brothers and the Cato Institute, which the Kochs helped found back in the 1970s. This morning I have [a long piece out at National Review Online](#) that takes a philosophical look at the dispute, albeit complete with a Breitbart angle. (I am that good.)

This story has involved Power Line's own John Hinderaker in a small but frustrating way, and he may or may not wish to comment here. Even though my NRO story is fairly long as these things go, I didn't go into this angle. The Kochs suggested John, along with a long list of other people, as potential board members for Cato, since John has considerable experience as a director of non-profit organizations. Cato's defenders made the comical and rather frustrating error of believing the Paul Krugman attack on John, based on a careless reading of his old "Bush is a genius" post here, and John's occasional self-description as a "neocon"—neocons, recall, are as welcome at Cato as garlic and silver spikes at a vampire convention. But John's "Bush is a genius" post was ironic, as any plain reading will show, and John's view of Afghanistan (get out now) happens to be identical to the position of . . .

the Cato Institute. And while I haven't interrogated John on this point, I suspect his self-description as a "neocoon" harkens back to the original definition as "a liberal who has been mugged by reality," and not the crazy caricature that has taken hold in recent years that bears little resemblance to classic neoconservatism of people like James Q. Wilson or Pat Moynihan. I've sent along polite corrections of the record to my several friends at Cato.

On the phone the other day John mentioned that he, like most sensible people beyond the Beltway, aren't paying any attention to this story at all—a useful reminder to all of us Beltway types that while the world may revolve too much around Washington (indeed it does), a lot of people don't pay much attention to our melodramas.

JOHN adds: I haven't written about the Cato matter because 1) it strikes me as inside baseball that is likely not of broad interest to our readers, and 2) I prefer to direct my aggressive impulses against the Left, not against my fellow conservatives. The country is going broke, Iran is developing nuclear weapons, and the Democrats are trying to socialize health care. Internecine battles on the right strike me as an unfortunate distraction, at best. But here are a few quick comments:

* Someone from one of the Koch organizations asked whether I would be willing to be nominated as a director of the Cato Institute. As a long-time fan of Cato and subscriber to Cato products, and having had considerable experience serving on the boards of similar non-profits, I said sure. Voting for directors is on a cumulative basis by the organization's shareholders, and I was not elected.

* I don't have any firm opinions on the merits of the underlying dispute between the Kochs and Ed Crane, nor have I played any role in that dispute. It may seem odd for a non-profit to be organized as a company with shareholders, but that is, in fact, the way that Cato—a non-profit corporation domiciled in Kansas—is set up. The legal question that is now at issue is what happens to a shareholder's shares in the organization when he dies. I haven't done the research that would be necessary to have a legal opinion on this question, but it is obvious that the Kochs' position on the issue is, at a minimum, not frivolous.

* Adopting an any-port-in-a-storm approach, a Cato staffer whom I have never met (nor, frankly, heard of until now) attacked me as part of his attempt to discredit the Koch brothers. It was disappointing, to say the least, that a fellow conservative did so by copying and pasting silly attacks on me that were made by Paul Krugman and Think Progress. This same individual, or possibly a second Cato staffer, also wrote that I have never done anything for the cause of liberty. This person is evidently unfamiliar with my work. Scott and I have been

writing together since 1990; I have authored or co-authored many newspaper columns and magazine articles, not to mention around 10,000 posts here on Power Line, and have given many speeches across the country. For more than twenty years, my constant theme has been liberty. From the day we started this site in 2002, our motto has been taken from Winston Churchill: “Arise and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.”

* In general, I am indifferent to attacks by our political enemies. If you want to participate in political life, they go with the territory. But one expects a higher standard of conduct from those on our side, broadly defined, of the political conflict. Let’s keep our focus on defeating the corrupt and wrong-headed principles and programs of the left. As Steve writes in his National Review article, this inevitably involves a combination of theoretical work and practical politics.