



## Cato Senior Fellow: Koch Brothers Want To Take Over Cato Because ‘Cato Wasn’t Doing Enough To Defeat’ Obama

By **Ian Millhiser** on Mar 5, 2012 at 9:50 am

As ThinkProgress reported last week, energy barons Charles and David Koch recently filed a lawsuit attempting to seize majority control over the libertarian Cato Institute. According to Jerry Taylor, a senior fellow at Cato, this effort is part of a longstanding effort by the Kochs to transform Cato from a warehouse for radical libertarianism into something more purely concerned with electoral politics:

Last year, [the Kochs] used their shares to place two of their operatives – Kevin Gentry and Nancy Pfothenauer – on our board against the wishes of every single board member save for David Koch. Last Thursday, they used their shares to force another four new board members on us (the most that their shares would allow at any given meeting); Charles Koch, Ted Olson (hired council for Koch Industries), Preston Marshall (the largest shareholder of Koch Industries save for Charles and David), and Andrew Napolitano (a frequent speaker at Koch-sponsored events). [...]

Why are they forcing out Cato board members, all strong, principled libertarians who have been heavily involved with Cato – financially and organizationally – for years? The answer was given in early November of last year when David Koch, Richard Fink (he of many Koch hats), and Kevin Gentry met with Cato board chairman Bob Levy. **They told Bob 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 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.**

In its present incarnation, Cato combines a kind of Randian social Darwinism with several less extreme positions on issues such as defense and gay rights. Cato doesn’t just oppose Social Security and Medicare, it believes that they are unconstitutional. Yet Cato is also a genuine ally in the fight for marriage equality and it has at times been the most pacifistic major DC think tank. Among other things, Cato opposed the 1990 Gulf War. Taylor is clearly concerned that Cato will abandon its commitment to a modest defense policy and potentially even its progressive views on gay rights if the Kochs take over. Koch-sponsored board member Nancy

Pfotenauer is a former spokesperson for the McCain campaign who argued in support of both the Iraq War and Don't Ask/Don't Tell. Koch front man Kevin Gentry is a "social conservative activist." The Kochs also tried and failed to install John Hinderaker on the Cato board, a right-wing blogger who supports the Patriot Act and the Iraq War and who once called George W. Bush "[a] man of extraordinary vision and brilliance approaching to genius." If this is reflective of the Kochs' vision for Cato, then they want Cato to be nothing more than a mouthpiece for the Republican Party.

If the Kochs truly are committed to transforming America's top libertarian organization into the Campaign To Defeat The President, however, then Cato will need to moderate many of its more extreme positions on domestic policy. Jerry Taylor's job as one of Cato's top climate science deniers will no doubt be safe — as the Koch energy juggernaut is unlikely to cut back on an issue so near and dear to its bottom line — but Cato's miserly view of the Constitution is wholly inconsistent with an effort to develop a winning electoral agenda for President Obama's opponent and would have to be abandoned.

Even in 2010, when President Obama's popularity was at its lowest ebb and America's economic woes seemed to stretch on for years to come, candidates like Joe Miller (R-AK), Sharron Angle (R-NV), John Raese (R-WV) and Ken Buck (R-CO) — all of whom share the Cato view of the Constitution — were creamed at the polls, each of them significantly underperforming Republicans with less radical stances on the Constitution. Now, by contrast, President Obama's polls are experiencing a sharp upturn, and our economy is likely to experience meaningful growth in 2012 absent an economic disaster in Europe. If the Cato constitutional vision was toxic in 2010, it will be downright deadly in 2012.