



## Chris Rickert: Guilt by association is political cheap trick

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Tuesday, February 7

They came, as such things usually do, via that great information dumping ground known as the Internet.

"The Ideological Lineage of Madison Prep: If you haven't seen this, you really should: History, Not 'Conspiracy,'" [read the Feb. 1 tweet](#).

Included was a link to a [Jan. 27 blog post](#) that in 1,776 words has Kaleem Caire — head of the Urban League of Greater Madison and the main backer of controversial Madison charter school Madison Preparatory Academy — connected to more than a dozen conservative causes or leaders, including such bogeymen of the left as the American Legislative Exchange Council and the Charles G. Koch Foundation.

Similarly, a 1,357-word, [Dec. 22 essay](#) published on the website of a local liberal magazine points to Caire's work with "right-wing organizations" such as the Black Alliance for Educational Options and describes the people behind charters like Madison Prep as being about the "business" of "obtaining a secure stream of public funding to attract more private investment in what are essentially private ventures outside of the scrutiny or accountability systems of democratically elected school boards."

Well, OK ...

Call me naive, but I'm always a bit puzzled by this guilt-by-association tactic, so common in politics and a favorite tool of those who opposed Madison Prep.

I'm not saying either author had the facts wrong. But what does it mean, exactly, to show that Caire spoke at events sponsored by the libertarian Cato Institute, or, for that matter,

that Scott Walker took campaign donations from the Koch brothers, or that President Obama belonged to a church whose pastor once preached "God damn America"?

Certainly, it's important to consider what connections or interests motivate people in power. It's just that it's more important to focus on their specific proposals and the problems they aim to solve.

Madison Prep wanted to help close the racial achievement gap, and its solution had smart people who have studied education lined up as both supporters and opponents.

Your average, nonexpert citizen, then, would do well to look at the solution, what smart people with expertise say about the solution, how much the solution will cost and the seriousness of the problem. What do ALEC or Charles G. Koch have to do with any of that? Besides, it's not like they (or Caire) control the school board.

You know that old saying about how a little knowledge is a dangerous thing? In an online world with easy access to reams of information, the danger isn't a little knowledge, but little perspective on knowledge.

I thought Madison Prep was worth a shot; the school board, at least for now, did not.

But even though I disagree with the board, I like to think its decision was based on whether Madison Prep would work for Madison, not on whether it was a harbinger of some alleged national conservative agenda to bust teachers unions and privatize public education.

More important is that this is what Madison school children and their parents should be able to expect.