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American Politics is Getting All Koch'ed Up

Submitted by Anne Landman on August 29, 2010 - 10:56pm. [corporations](#) [democracy](#) [propaganda](#) [right wing](#)



Charles (left) and David Koch

The grassroots pressure group Americans for Prosperity (AFP), that actively fought health care reform, boasts "our citizen activists" are "the heart and soul" of the organization. So AFP wants the public and the media to believe. But an exhaustive report in the August 30, 2010 issue of *The New Yorker* magazine, shows that the heart and soul behind AFP are really the oil billionaire brothers David and Charles Koch of Koch Industries, whose privately-owned oil enterprise has made them among the richest men in America.

In addition to petroleum interests, the Kochs also own a host of familiar products like Brawny paper towels, Dixie cups, Georgia-Pacific lumber, Stainmaster carpet and Lycra. Their massive combined wealth makes them the third richest people in the country, behind only Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, who are better known to the public. The Kochs have intentionally obscured their involvement on the American political scene through the creation of an elaborate network of front groups, think tanks, foundations and astroturf organizations, but the public is quickly getting to know the Koch brothers better. Given their extreme wealth and pervasive efforts to manipulate the American public, it is a name everyone should get to know very, very well.

Pulling Strings in Secret: Koch-Funded Front Groups Galore

For decades, the Kochs have been quietly applying their massive wealth to influence U.S. policy in ways that keep the public from detecting the extent of their involvement. *The New Yorker* explains that the Koch's long-time strategy is to form "slippery organizations with generic-sounding names" that "make it difficult to ascertain the extent of their influence in Washington." Americans for Prosperity is one of those organizations. It turns out, there have been quite a few.

In 1990, the Kochs funded a group called "Citizens for the Environment" that was really an anti-environment group. It called acid rain and other environmental problems "myths." The Koch brothers also spent millions to create and fund the influential Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank that opposes political efforts to address global warming -- a position that just happens to coincide with the oil industry's point of view. In the mid-1980s, the Kochs were also the principal sponsors of the group Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE), which worked with oil companies, banks, Big Tobacco, automobile manufacturers and other businesses to promote deregulation. CSE gave itself the appearance of a grassroots organization by describing itself as a "consumer group," while its research was really funded entirely by corporations, conservative foundations and wealthy businessmen.

In 2004, internal rivalries caused a rift at CSE, and David Koch and his associate Rich Fink split off and started Americans for Prosperity (AFP). Like CSE, AFP promotes itself as a "grassroots" outfit animated by "citizen activists," but its activities are really quietly funded and organized by the Kochs, which explains the opulent characteristics AFP has displayed that real "grassroots" groups typically don't have. For example, AFP is able to make million dollar media buys. It obtained a custom-made hot air balloon for its 2008 "Hot Air Tour" to try and generate doubt about global warming. People attending AFP's rallies carried glossy, professionally-printed signs, like those with AFP's "bloody hand" logo at health care rallies -- until organizers realized this gave them away and then they started urging participants to hand-make their own signs. AFP also operates custom-painted luxury motor coaches that tour the country ginning up discontent. (A luxury motorcoach touring the country is one of PRWatch's potential hallmarks of a front group.) A former employee of Cato Institute said that the Kochs, in fact, "micromanage" Americans for Prosperity. Most real grassroots groups are not micromanaged by billionaires, nor do they have the

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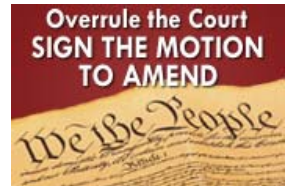
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most real grassroots groups are not merely managed by billionaires, nor do they have the millions of dollars required to engage in the above list of activities.

The Kochs also use AFP and the family's other organizations to undermine [Barack Obama's](#) Presidency, a goal that meshes with the agenda of the [Tea Party](#).

Tea Party Support

While the Kochs have tried to distance themselves from the Tea Party movement, their support for it is evident. David Koch indicated his agreement with the Tea Party when he [said](#) it demonstrates the "powerful visceral hostility in the body politic against the massive increase in government power, the massive efforts to socialize this country." Just like Tea Party candidates [Joe Miller](#) in Alaska, [Sharron Angle](#) in Arizona, and [Rand Paul](#) in Kentucky -- all of whom who want to dismantle Medicare and Social Security as we know them -- the Kochs also display hostility towards Social Security and Medicare. On a company [Web page](#) titled "Koch Industries Perspectives on Current Issues," the Kochs take aim at Social Security, Medicare and government-funded pensions, portraying them as hampering the nation, without acknowledging that millions of Americans hit hard by the recession depend on these programs for survival. Charles Koch also repeats the Tea Party's refrain about Obama being a "socialist." In a newsletter sent to Koch Industry's seventy thousand employees, Charles Koch likened the Obama Administration to the regime of Venezuelan president [Hugo Chavez](#). He spouts the same "Obama-is-a-Socialist" Tea Party spin that we [previously debunked](#) here on PRWatch. The brothers ignore that American Socialist Party leaders completely dismissed at the idea that Obama is anything close to a Socialist. Paul Krugman of the New York Times has also [noted](#) that the Kochs fund [FreedomWorks](#), another conservative pressure group that acts as a Tea Party organizer and strives to look like a grassroots outfit.

Afoul of the Law

Even though its nonprofit status prohibits it from endorsing candidates for office, AFP [announced](#) that it plans to spend a whopping \$45 million to influence the November mid-term elections, specifically targeting about 50 House races and six races in the Senate by organizing rallies, doing door-to-door canvassing and running expensive TV ads supposedly to "educate voters about where candidates stand."



Koch Industries is no model corporate citizen, either. In 1996, the Kochs operated a steel pipeline in Texas that ruptured and sent a butane vapor cloud into a nearby residential area. Just as two area residents were driving into the cloud in a pickup truck, the cloud ignited. The people in the truck were killed. Twenty five families had to be evacuated from the area. The National Transportation Safety Board [ruled](#) (pdf) that the probable cause of the accident was Koch's failure to adequately protect its pipeline from corrosion. In 1999, a federal jury ruled that Koch Industries had [stolen oil](#) from U.S. government and American Indian lands, lied about its purchases more than 24,000 times and fined the company over \$550,000. In 2000, the company paid the [largest civil fine](#) ever imposed on a company under environmental law at that time -- \$30 million -- for claims related to over 300 oil spills from pipelines the company operated in six states. The same year, Koch Industries was [indicted](#) on 97 counts of violating federal clean air and hazardous waste laws. In March 2010, [Greenpeace](#) issued a report revealing Koch Industries as the "paymaster" of global warming skeptics in the United States and Europe, and that the company had donated almost [three times more](#) money than [ExxonMobil](#) to groups opposing climate change.

Championing Cancer

After he was diagnosed with prostate cancer in the early 1990s, [David Koch](#) started giving large financial donations to cancer research. In 2004, then-President [George W. Bush](#) appointed him to the [National Cancer Advisory Board](#), which gives guidance to the [National Cancer Institute](#). At the same time David Koch was acting as a champion *against* cancer, though, his company, Koch Industries, was lobbying to stop the U.S. [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) from classifying [formaldehyde](#) -- a chemical his company produces in large quantities -- as a known human carcinogen. The growing body of scientific evidence linking formaldehyde to cancer led the [National Institutes of Health](#) to conclude that the chemical is a human carcinogen in need of regulation, but for decades Koch Industries has [funded members of Congress](#) who have [blocked](#) the EPA from classifying it as such. Formaldehyde is [a component of secondhand tobacco smoke](#) which is also rated a Group A Human Carcinogen, and the chemical is used in the manufacture of particleboard and other pressed-wood products, glues and adhesives,

ALittleHawk (not verified)
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Health Care Reform
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capitalism can be a bitch
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PBS Frontline 9pm ET
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National Association of
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Thursday, March 25, 2010 - 12:00pm -
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[Wendell Potter's Blog](#)



paints, cabinetry, clothing and draperies. It is the chemical that led to the abandonment of 103,000 FEMA trailers after they made their inhabitants sick.

The Kochs Strike Back

In the wake of *The New Yorker* article about their hidden political activities, the Kochs aren't taking their new exposure easily. Their Web site now contains a [response](#) to "recent media attacks" that says discussion of their backing of AFP is an effort to "diminish and mischaracterize important and authentic citizen efforts" to "support education and human services programs." It paints their opponents as enemies of "economic freedom." It also says, "The Koch family and their foundation have been publicly devoted to making the world a better place." What they don't say is that they've been devoted to making the world a better place for *themselves and their businesses*.

The Koch's political effectiveness depends on people knowing as little about them as possible. Further articles and radio stories about their exploits, like those recently in the [New York Times](#) and [National Public Radio](#), are contributing to their exposure. The more people know about how these mega-rich brothers are manipulating the public, the less people are likely to tolerate it.

The main point is that it is fundamentally unfair for super-wealthy people like the Kochs to pour money into hidden campaigns designed mislead people and undermine the government with such smoke-and-mirrors shenanigans. It degrades the country.

The Media Needs to Do Better in Exposing Front Groups

We are certainly grateful to *The New Yorker* for finally exposing the Kochs, but the family has operated quite freely this way decades now. The media also bears responsibility for making the Koch's pervasive exploits possible for all this time. Until now, mainstream news organizations covering the exploits of Americans for Prosperity and Freedomworks have largely been unquestioning, and treated them as though they are real grassroots operations. The media has failed to dig, question, and find the deeper story here. To be of real service in this day and age, news organizations can no longer just report on the activities of a group without also teasing out the origins and funding sources that animate the group, and telling the public about those as well. Most Americans are simply too busy trying to survive to research "grassroots" groups like those set up by the Kochs. We are past the age of innocence, where we can take groups like this at face value. The media needs to do a better job of dig deeper and showing people what is really happening behind the scenes in this country that is undermining our democracy.

[Anne Landman's blog](#)

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[Health Care Reform](#)

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Submitted by [Procon](#) (not verified) on August 30, 2010 - 3:28pm.

8/31/2010

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