

The Guardian

Five key ways the Koch brothers pushed their rightwing agenda

Edward Helmore

August 23, 2019

Charles and David Koch long claimed to belong to a system of belief based in the freedom of the individual, unimpeded trade and lives lived free from the intrusion of tax, drafts, business regulations, welfare support and laws designed to curb free expression.

To that end, and in particular with the financing of the Tea Party revolution, the Kochs spent in excess of \$100m to promote conservative candidates and causes. Their actions provoked dismay and anger among liberals and devotion among the conservatives and libertarians whom they funded.

The death of David Koch, which was announced on Friday, is unlikely to diminish the power of the network of influence the brothers created. Here are are five ways they pushed their agenda:

Americans for Prosperity

Among the institutions the Kochs support is Americans for Prosperity, a conservative group behind many public campaigns promoting conservative causes on healthcare, fighting climate crisis rules and advocating for more limited government. It has also turned its fire on public transit, opposing the construction of light rail trains and new bus routes in many cities across the US.

The Cato Institute

The Cato Institute is a key thinktank co-founded by the Kochs and supporting much of the brothers' rightwing and libertarian agenda, including lowering or abolishing taxes and the privatization of numerous government agencies and social welfare programs. In 2012, the Kochs sued Cato after some of its libertarian positions supporting same-sex marriage and drug decriminalization angered conservatives. "We want to ensure that Cato stays true to its fundamental principles of individual liberty, free markets and peace into the future," Charles Koch said.

Annual gatherings

The brothers hold regular gatherings often described as highly secretive mega-donor conferences that features a who's who of Republican political elites. Almost certain to attend are conservative political candidates looking to show off their ideological credentials in exchange for

campaign funding. It is estimated that the Kochs' political network raised \$126m in 2014 alone and distributed millions to conservative groups in the 2018 midterm elections.

The climate crisis

While the Cato institute acknowledges the climate crisis, it holds that there is time to find privately funded solutions. The recent book Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power in America offered a detailed account of power the Kochs exerted to cripple government action on the climate crisis, including their role in a 1991 conference of climate crisis deniers who opposed George HW Bush's support of a treaty limiting carbon emissions. Despite opposing Donald Trump's presidential candidacy, he delivered for them by withdrawing from the Paris climate accord, nominating pro-carbon appointees to lead regulatory agencies and slashing personal and corporate taxes.

Supporting the arts and philanthropy

To offset negative publicity, the Kochs donated hundreds of millions to cultural institutions, including Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York and the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC. "We must build a positive reputation based on reality, or others will create one for us based on speculation or animus and we won't like what they create," Charles Koch wrote in 2007's The Science of Success.