

Vox

Why Trump just attacked the Koch brothers on Twitter

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President Trump has aimed his ire on Twitter at the Koch brothers, two of the conservative world's biggest and best-known donors and fundraisers, calling them "globalist" and saying that "their network is highly overrated."

The tweets come a day after representatives of the Koch network — founders of the Cato Institute, one of the main funders behind the Tea Party movement and a major force in GOP politics over the past decade — announced that the group will not support North Dakota Republican Rep. Kevin Cramer in his incredibly tight race against Democratic Sen. Heidi Heitkamp.

The Koch network has argued that Cramer is "inconsistent" on issues that matter to them, including free trade. A Cramer win would help Republicans keep control of the Senate, but Cramer has voiced **some support** for Trump's planned tariffs aimed at Chinese goods — tariffs to which the **network is highly opposed**.

And it's not just North Dakota. In fact, the network is only taking an active part in four Senate races this election cycle: Wisconsin, Missouri, Tennessee, and Florida.

According to Politico, Koch network representatives like Americans for Prosperity president Tim Phillips **told donors** at a weekend meeting, "We can't support [Cramer] at this time. And to be clear, we've met with his team, explained this, and lobbied him on this to change their ways," **adding**, "For those who stand in the way, we don't pull any punches, regardless of party."

But the Koch network — which, despite a **contentious relationship** with Trump, **had previously voiced support** for the president's tax bill and other planned legislation — is pushing away from not just Trump but the GOP, with founder Charles Koch **telling reporters** at that weekend event that his groups had made "mistakes" and that he has "regrets" about the one-party focus the network has had in past elections.

Specifically, while Koch-connected groups have **worked closely with the White House** on issues like **criminal justice reform**, the Koch network is unhappy with the GOP's handling of two specific policy areas: trade and immigration, issues on which the Kochs' libertarian leanings cause them to break with the administration.

Brian Hooks, co-chair of the Seminar Network, a Koch-run organization, told reporters that the White House and the party have no positive messaging to guide Americans forward. “You see this on trade. In order to get to a good place on the debate, you have to convince the American people that trade is bad,” **he said over the weekend**, according to NBC’s Leigh Ann Caldwell. “You see it on immigration, in order to get to a good policy, you have to convince people that immigrants are bad. That’s not a sustainable tactic or achieving good policy.”

Contrary to Trump’s tweet, however, the Koch network remains incredibly important within Republican circles. Koch network groups had **planned in January** to spend as much as \$400 million on the 2018 midterms — including \$20 million on selling the GOP tax cuts to voters. During the 2016 presidential election, the network **planned to spend nearly \$900 million** supporting state-level Republicans across the country — but **not, it should be noted, to support Trump**.

Former Trump campaign CEO and White House chief strategist Steve Bannon also railed against the Koch network, telling **Politico** that voters didn’t want free trade and the Koch brothers should “get with the program,” and adding, “We can have a theoretical discussion later, OK? This is why they don’t know what it means to win, OK?”