



# David Koch, we owe you. Signed, Liberty

by **Richard Fields** on June 8, 2018 in **Features**

David Koch, the Libertarian Party's 1980 vice presidential candidate, recently retired from his roles at Koch Industries and Koch-affiliated groups because of ongoing illness. All too frequently, kudos for a life purposefully and masterfully dedicated to the advancement of human liberty come in the form of an obituary. Libertarians would like to salute the leadership and achievements of David Koch while he's still here with us.

I had the opportunity to spend a couple of days with David Koch in

1980, during his campaign as the running mate of the Libertarian Party's presidential candidate, Ed Clark. The Libertarian Party was only eight years old at the time, but David donated \$1 million because he believed in its principles. David not only provided funding for that presidential campaign, which at the time was a major financial investment, he also conducted an active and personal campaign.



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In a campaign swing through Wisconsin, I had the opportunity to be David's advance man and driver. I set up a press conference for him in Milwaukee, then drove him to Madison for a second press conference and a reception and fundraiser at my home. After the reception, he slept in my spare bedroom — or, at least, tried to. The reception party continued long after he retired for the night, and I would like to offer my long-delayed apologies for that probable interruption of his sleep. David treated me, the press, and the Wisconsin Libertarians who came to meet him with the utmost kindness and respect. His only complaint was that I insisted on obeying the era's freeway speed limit of 55 mph out of fear of getting yet another speeding ticket.

The Clark/Koch campaign eschewed limo transportation, slept in private homes, and flew commercial airlines. This thrift was emblematic of the method through which Charles and David Koch became the eighth wealthiest man in the world. The Koch brothers' grandfather, Harry Koch, a Dutch printer's apprentice and immigrant. Their father, Fred Koch, was a chemical engineer who developed a better way of refining oil that allowed small refineries like his to compete with the major ones. His company was promptly sued by larger firms for patent infringement, and he prevailed after many years of litigation, but in the meantime he went to work building refineries in the Soviet Union. Through direct observation, he learned the evils of crony communism and socialist idealism.

Fred Koch vowed never to let his sons "turn into country club bums." He put them to work "milking cows, bailing hay, digging ditches, mowing lawns, and whatever else he could think of," according to Sons of Wichita author Daniel Schulman. The training that the Koch brothers received evidently worked. Under the management of Charles and David Koch, the value of Koch Industries has increased by 476,000 percent since 1961. By comparison, the S&P 500 returned 5,600 percent.

David's political activism has continued and increased exponentially since his Libertarian Party candidacy in 1980. The Kochs have, over the years to various degrees, backed the Reason Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Institute for Humane Studies, Americans For Prosperity, American Encore, Freedom Partners, the Heritage Foundation, the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, the Bill of Rights Institute, the Institute for Justice, the Foundation for Economic Education, the Pacific Legal Foundation, the Young Americans for Liberty Foundation, libertarian-leaning political candidates, and a wide range of other civil and charitable causes. Their political contributions have sometimes extended across multiple party lines, including support of North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp for her work on banking deregulation.

They specifically did not support the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump because of his proposed Muslim travel ban and anti-free trade policies.

The Kochs have teamed with the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for American Progress, Families Against Mandatory Minimums, the Coalition for Public Safety, and the MacArthur Foundation

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to reduce incarceration and promote criminal justice reform. It's informative that Koch political activism and charitable activities are motivated by classical liberal idealism, not by crony capitalist self-interest. They have changed the political atmosphere in a way that both conservatives and liberals can comfortably move in a more libertarian direction.

David was diagnosed with prostate cancer more than two decades ago, and he has become a major benefactor of cancer research. A true renaissance man, he is a huge supporter of the arts.

"The first thing is to understand what your innate abilities are, what you have a passion for and you're really willing to work hard at," said Charles Koch, expressing one of his management credos. "Then, think through how that translates into how you create value for others, because that's going to determine how successful you are, what life you have [and] how fulfilled you are. In an organization, you need to create value, first of all, for your customers. Then you need to create value for your employees and partners. Then you need to create value for society at large."

David Koch, you have done a fabulous job of creating value for society at large. Libertarians and honest people of all political persuasions thank you.

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