

# FIRST THEY CAME FOR RUSS FEINGOLD, THEN THEY CAME FOR CATO

As I've followed all the really interesting commentary on the Koch Brothers' efforts to take over Cato ([Dave Weigel](#), [Jonathan Adler](#), [Jane Mayer](#), [Brad DeLong](#)) I keep thinking back to [this Adam Serwer post](#) last year, pointing out one of the most anti-libertarian moves they made: dumping \$25,000 to beat the biggest defender of civil liberties in the Senate.

Another way to put this is that the Kochs will happily put their money behind candidates who agree with their economic agenda but disagree with their social agenda. They will never put their money behind candidates of whom the reverse is true.

The best example of this I can think of is the Senate's lost liberaltarian Russ Feingold. Feingold was the only senator to vote [against](#) the PATRIOT Act. He was one of the first senators to [endorse](#) marriage equality. He voted against the war in Iraq, against TARP and [financial reform](#), and has consistently sought to rein in the surveillance state. He was, however, also one of the architects of campaign-finance reform along with John McCain and a supporter of the health-care bill and the stimulus.

When Feingold's candidacy was in danger, the Koch's poured their money into the coffers of Feingold's opponent, Ron Johnson. [According](#) to the FEC, the Koch brothers each gave him individual contributions of \$2,400, while KochPAC [gave](#) him \$10,000. Charles Koch's son Chase Koch gave Johnson \$5,800, while

David's\* wife Julia Koch gave another \$2,400. An Elizabeth Koch from the same zip code in Wichita as Charles and Julia gave an additional \$2,400. All in all, the Koch family gave Johnson more than \$25,000 to send Russ Feingold home. What type of candidate were they supporting?

Johnson is [anti-marriage equality](#), [anti-choice](#), has no problem with [open-ended](#) military engagements and he [supports](#) the PATRIOT Act with some caveats, but only because "you have Barack Obama in power versus George Bush. I wasn't overly concerned with George Bush in power."

[snip]

In other words, faced with one candidate who shares their views on social issues and national security and another who shares their views on economic issues, the Kochs chose the latter.

Libertarianism, which was fostered to offer ideological cover for laissez faire capitalism, is now being actively replaced by its biggest patrons with a TeaParty ideology that has been co-opted over the last three years to offer populist cover for unrestrained capitalism.

So while I am fascinated by [Corey Robin's critique](#) of [Julian Sanchez' presignation](#),

When the Kochs wield their money at Cato, that's hegemony. But when they do it in Wisconsin, that's democracy.

I think [Robin's comments](#) on this year's Ron Paul debate among the left is far more important.

Our problem—and again by "our" I mean a left that's social democratic (or welfare state liberal or economically progressive or whatever the hell you want to call it) and anti-imperial—is that we don't really have a vigorous national spokesperson for the issues of

war and peace, an end to empire, a challenge to Israel, and so forth, that Paul has in fact been articulating. The source of Paul's positions on these issues are not the same as ours (again more reason not to give him our support). But he is talking about these issues, often in surprisingly blunt and challenging terms. Would that we had someone on our side who could make the case against an American empire, or American supremacy, in such a pungent way.

This, it's clear, is why people like [Glenn Greenwald](#) say that Paul's voice needs to be heard. Not, Greenwald makes clear, because he supports Paul, but because it is a terrible comment—a shanda for the left—that we don't have anyone on our side of comparable visibility launching an attack on American imperialism and warfare. (Recalling what I said in the context of the death of [Christopher Hitchens](#), I suspect this has something to do with our normalization and acceptance of war as a way of life.) In other words, we need to listen to Paul, not because he's worthy of our support, and certainly not because the reasons that underlie his positions on foreign policy are ours, but because he reveals what's not being said, or not being said enough, on our side.

[snip]

Ron Paul is unacceptable, and it's unacceptable that we don't have someone on the left who is raising the issues of imperialism, war and peace, and civil liberties in as visible and forceful a way.

Russ Feingold is gone from the Senate. As of last night, Dennis Kucinich will be gone

from the House next year. For what it's worth, Ron Paul, too, will be gone from the House. In my own neighborhood, we hope Justin Amash, who hopes to assume Paul's mantle, is gone from the House too.

There are other voices stepping up. But even Ron Wyden, who is a lonely voice criticizing the Obama Administration's most egregious civil liberties abuses, offered [somewhat tempered criticism](#) of Attorney General Holder's [speech](#) on Monday.

Attorney General Holder's speech today is a welcome step in the right direction, but further steps need to be taken, and they need to be taken soon.

The government—both Republican and Democratic—has spent billions to create a climate of fear. It has succeeded in leading people to [accept the assault on civil liberties](#) without even questioning efficacy, much less constitutionality or abuse.

Meanwhile, even more money is being dumped into a reframed ideology of unrestrained capitalism, one with a populist face unembarrassed by its own inconsistency.

So I'll go even further than Alex Pareene, who [lists all the reasons](#) we should care about the Koch takeover attempt on Cato. There is a case to be made for the Constitution and for executive restraint. We on the left need to get more effective at making it. Because the capitalist case is in the process of being bought out.