



BY ROBERT A. LEVY

“
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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Playing the Long Game for Liberty

After a 26-year affiliation with the Cato Institute—11 years as senior fellow in constitutional studies and 15 years on the board of directors (14 of those as chair)—I’ve now stepped down from official duties. Unofficially, I’ll remain an enthusiastic donor, occasional author, speaker-on-demand, and ardent libertarian.

Our new chair, Jay Lapeyre, has been a Cato board member for eight years, a civic and business innovator, and director of several other organizations. Jay is a born leader, an entrepreneur, a man of integrity and uncompromising principles, a staunch libertarian, and—I can say with complete confidence—the ideal person to preside over the extraordinary men and women who serve on Cato’s board.

Looking back, I’ve had the pleasure of collaborating with all three of Cato’s incredible CEOs. First, of course, was Ed Crane, our cofounder and president for 35 years. More than any other person, Ed was responsible for building the Cato Institute into an effective and renowned advocate for individual liberty and limited government. Ed is a hero among libertarians, a global force for human freedom.

Ed was succeeded by John Allison. When I first approached John about becoming Cato’s CEO, I cautioned that he’d have to address an internal governance dispute that jeopardized the Institute’s mission. John was not intimidated. He not only reestablished a sense of unity and steered Cato through a difficult transition process, but he also laid the foundation for our continued growth.

In April 2015, after his agreed-upon two-year tenure, John passed the mantle to our current CEO, Peter Goettler. Under Peter’s leadership, the Institute has prospered and matured—enhancing its reputation for intellectual rigor, advocacy of libertarian principles, and influence in the public policy arena. Peter is the consummate libertarian—combining policy expertise, extensive management experience, vision, judgment, and decisiveness. Cato is indeed fortunate to have enlisted Peter as our chief executive over the past seven and a half years.

Numerous other individuals have made significant contributions to Cato. In particular, let me recognize three whose efforts and remarkable achievements are an enduring part of the Institute’s success story. First, my predecessor, the late Bill Niskanen. For 23 years, Bill chaired the board at Cato. No person better exemplified the phrase, “a gentleman and a scholar.” He brought wisdom

and insight to the study of public policy—earning the affection and respect of his colleagues and devotees.

Second, Cato’s longest-serving employee at 41 years, David Boaz, formerly our executive vice president, is now our distinguished senior fellow. David has been Cato’s indispensable man, our intellectual godfather, and an acknowledged superstar of the libertarian movement. Second to no one, David has been responsible for injecting libertarian ideas into the public policy debate.

Third, Roger Pilon was my immediate supervisor for more than a decade, during which I worked in Cato’s Center for Constitutional Studies, which is now in its 33rd year. Under Roger’s innovative leadership, the Center has been a vigorous advocate for a textual interpretation of the Constitution and principled judicial engagement in binding the legislative and executive branches with the chains of the Constitution. Thanks in large part to Roger, the Center’s impact has been profound.

In the coming years, Cato will vigorously promote pro-liberty ideas, such as entitlement reform, the right to bear arms, equal rights for all Americans, fundamental tax revision, downsizing government, property rights, drug legalization, school choice, free trade, immigration liberalization, criminal justice reform, and the rule of law. With equal energy, we will resist proposals such as corporate welfare, socialized medicine, campaign finance restrictions, government constraints on the internet, global warming excesses, overreaching executive power, infringements on civil liberties, impermissible delegation of legislative authority to administrative agencies, imperial wars in the name of national greatness, dubious foreign entanglements, and unnecessary government secrecy.

That’s quite an agenda. Still, we have made considerable progress over the past 45 years, with more to come—a testament to the professionalism, acumen, and commitment of our management, staff, and board of directors, as well as the generosity of our donors. My modest role in helping advance our institutional objectives has been a source of personal pride and an immensely enriching experience. For all of that, I am deeply grateful to my fellow board members, my colleagues at Cato, and our multitude of supporters.

Robert A. Levy