

A Foundation of Trust: Jordan and Lyn's Multimillion-Dollar Bet on the Future of Freedom

By Audrey Grayson



From Austin dinner tables to mountain trails: Jordan and Lyn Weingarten have spent thirty years building a libertarian legacy rooted in community and principle.

Jordan Weingarten came to economics the way many scientists do—reluctantly, then obsessively. A physician by training, he had never taken an economics course, and the discipline remained largely foreign to him well into adulthood. That changed when a friend in Austin passed along a policy paper from the Cato Institute. With the same methodical instinct that had guided Jordan through years of medical study, he didn't just read the paper—he chased down every reference, ordered textbooks, sought out academic articles, and gradually built a working understanding of how markets and incentives shape human life.

"I don't take things as given," Jordan says simply. It's a philosophy that has defined not only how he thinks but also how he gives.

That intellectual journey brought Jordan and his wife, Lyn, to make one of the most

significant planned gifts in Cato's history: an eight-figure legacy contribution to the institution they have supported since 1995. For the couple, it is the culmination of three decades of conviction, community-building, and a deeply considered trust in an organization they believe will remain philosophically steadfast long after they are gone.

Jordan and Lyn's relationship with Cato has never been passive. In their hometown, the two founded the Austin Civil Society, a gathering of libertarian-minded neighbors, professionals, and thinkers who met monthly—almost always at Jordan and Lyn's home—for nearly seven years. Lyn, a trained chef, would prepare a simple meal: spaghetti and salad, perhaps, with a glass of wine and good conversation to follow. The group was deliberately informal, resistant to the heavy hand of organized debate, though

that informality occasionally made topical discussions a challenge. “Herding cats,” Jordan recalls with a laugh. Members arrived at libertarianism from vastly different directions—some through economics, some through personal freedom, some through a single animating issue. What they shared was a willingness to sit together and think.

That experience sharpened something in both Jordan and Lyn: an appreciation for ideas held with integrity, and a wariness of institutions that drift. When it came time to think seriously about a legacy gift, they approached the question with the same rigor Jordan had once applied to those early economics textbooks.

“We looked around at a lot of opportunities,” Jordan explains. “The

question was: Who do I trust with the unknowable future?” Many organizations, he notes, shift their missions over time—sometimes gradually, sometimes dramatically. Foundations change priorities. Leadership turns over. Names get fought over. He and Lyn wanted their resources directed somewhere with a proven record of philosophical consistency. Cato, in their view, stood apart. “Past results predict future performance more with Cato than with most,” Jordan says. “That’s simply a matter of trust. And we trust Cato.”

One area where the couple is especially eager to see Cato’s principles applied is environmental conservation, a cause that might surprise those who assume libertarianism and environmentalism occupy opposite ends of the political spectrum. For Jordan and Lyn, the connection is natural and even inevitable.

As wealth increases, Jordan argues, societies reliably demand cleaner air, cleaner water, and healthier natural environments. The challenge isn’t whether people want conservation—it’s how to achieve it without the coercive tools of government mandates and forced takings. He points to examples from his own backyard. The Barton Creek Watershed—a roughly 12,000-acre expanse of hill country that encompasses but extends well beyond the familiar Barton Creek Greenbelt—was assembled through a combination of city bonds approved by voters in a landslide, private donations, land swap agreements with developers, and conservation easements. No eminent domain was involved. Market logic and civic goodwill, not compulsion, created something genuinely beautiful. It’s a view that reflects something Cato has long argued across domains: that when people have a genuine stake in what they steward, when rights are clearly defined and incentives are properly aligned, better outcomes follow



Austin's Barton Creek Watershed, preserved through negotiated land agreements rather than forced taking, illustrates what Jordan and Lyn Weingarten have long believed: that libertarian principles, properly applied, can be among conservation's most powerful tools.



Watching wildlife through a long lens, Jordan and Lyn Weingarten embody the connection between libertarian principles and genuine conservation.

than any mandate can reliably produce. Jordan also points to cautionary tales. When Texas designated certain lands as habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler, landowners responded not by protecting trees but by clearing them preemptively—every backhoe in the state deployed against the very habitat the regulation was meant to save. The unintended consequence was devastating. “Not all conservation is equal,” Jordan observes. Connected corridors of land serve migrating birds and wide-ranging animals far better than scattered, isolated parcels, and smarter policy design, he believes, can achieve more with less imposition.

Ecotourism, private land trusts, conservation easements, and development negotiations like the one that created Austin’s greenbelt all illustrate what Jordan believes Cato’s principles make possible: conservation achieved not through compulsion but through the alignment of incentives, rights, and willing human action. For Jordan and Lyn, supporting Cato means supporting the ideas that make that kind of stewardship conceivable in the first place. Conservation, in this light, isn’t a detour from the liberty argument. It’s one of its

clearest expressions.

Jordan and Lyn’s eight-figure gift is less a conclusion than a continuation—of a curiosity sparked by a single policy paper, a community built around a dinner table, and a conviction that liberty and stewardship of the natural world are not in conflict but deeply intertwined.

“It ultimately comes down to liberty versus power,” Jordan says. “What you think government is intended for. The concepts of left and right aren’t important. What’s important are the principles you hold.”

After thirty years of holding those principles alongside Cato, Jordan and Lyn Weingarten are betting on the next thirty and beyond.



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