



Jack Wenders's Legacy of Liberty

Jack Wenders was a scholar, an activist, and a patriot. And when he died last November—just a week after another great libertarian economist, Milton Friedman—he made sure his contributions to the cause of freedom would live on long after his own death. He made the Cato Institute the beneficiary of his Individual Retirement Account in which he had accumulated \$1.9 million.

In a letter to Cato Institute president Ed Crane just two weeks before his death, he had noted that he had just turned 70-1/2 and thus was required by law to begin making withdrawals from his IRA. “In order to avoid having to pay taxes on these funds, which I am loath to do,” he wrote, he was passing along his annual withdrawal to Cato. In addition to the annual withdrawal, he also named Cato as the beneficiary of any balance remaining at death.

John T. Wenders received his PhD in economics in 1967 from Northwestern University, and taught at Middlebury College and the University of Arizona before settling at the University of Idaho in 1981. He became a noted expert on regulation and published books such as *The Economics of Telecommunications*. He also took a great interest in the quality of education, in particular the shortcomings of bureaucratic, monopolistic school systems, and how they could be overcome through parental choice and market incentives. Among his many publications were articles in both *Regulation* and the *Cato Journal*.

After his retirement from active teaching in 1998, his interests shifted toward local activism. When the government of Moscow, Idaho, planned to build a public pool, Wenders took the unorthodox approach of suing the city officials for taking his (and the public's) money to pay for, as he wrote in a letter to the

local newspaper, “their own children’s summer recreation.”

But few issues raised his ire more than the government monopoly over education. Wenders served as a member of the board of Idahoans for Excellence in Education, and he was often busy making presentations about the wasteful nature of public schools in Idaho as well nationwide. In an article in *Cato Journal* in 2005, Wenders demonstrated that 36 percent of the expenditures of public schools is wasted.

His precise debating style—especially when it came to refuting irrational economic arguments—was with him up to his death. An AP report in 2006 claimed that, “the U.S. must borrow more than \$2 billion per day from foreigners to finance its huge trade deficits.” Wenders’ response on an Idaho website was succinct: “Maybe a better way of putting this would be to say: ‘Foreigners must sell the

U. S. more than \$2 billion per day in goods and services to finance their huge purchases of U.S. assets.’”

Wenders’ philosophy on the role of government in society was perhaps best summed up by a line in one of his essays, “Politicians are people who have what it takes to take what you have. Politics may not be the world’s oldest profession, but the results are the same.” Indeed, “I voted for Lyndon Johnson in 1964 because I thought he would keep us out of Viet Nam. I haven’t voted since.”

Because of his generous bequest to the Cato Institute, Jack Wenders’s commitment to sound economics and individual liberty will live on for many years, not just in his scholarly books and articles but in the activities of the Cato Institute. For information on planned giving opportunities at Cato, contact [Gayllis Ward at \[guard@cato.org\]\(mailto:guard@cato.org\) or 646-717-2080.](mailto:GayllisWard@guard@cato.org)

