

Michael Joyce: Changed Lives, Shaped the Future and Will Never Be Forgotten

Contributed by Deborah Weigel

Michael Joyce, former president of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation in Milwaukee, died recently. As its first president, the board hired Michael Joyce, a savvy administrator skilled at lubricating the levers of power from the conservative John M. Olin Foundation.

To celebrate his life, I feel the need to let everyone know how substantial his contribution was to conservatives everywhere and what an amazing man he was. I find it difficult to look at a conservative idea, whether school vouchers or faith-based initiatives, without seeing the fingerprints of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. "His move to the political big time came in 1978," wrote Barbara Miner in the Spring 1994 issue of the Milwaukee-based education newspaper *Rethinking Schools*, "when he went to New York to work for the Institute for Educational Affairs, a neoconservative organization started by right-wing trailblazer Irving Kristol and William Simon, secretary of the treasury for Presidents Nixon and Ford. The following year Simon asked Joyce to head the Olin Foundation." Joyce was a well-connected man who served on President Reagan's transition team in 1980. The *Milwaukee Business Journal* claims that Joyce helped William Bennett get his job as secretary of education under Reagan and remained close his entire life. Bennett says, "When I've needed his advice, he has returned my calls saying, 'This is Coach Joyce and this is what I want you to do.'" (Miner in *Rethinking Schools*). Joyce's viewpoints were far beyond average traditional values and have a major emphasis on the view of family and community. He exemplifies this trait in the fact that an extremely large portion of his money goes to major colleges and universities. Joyce "believes that investment in academia is vital to the long-term success of the conservative movement, and has directed millions toward academic research and program development." Bradley has helped pay for the work of over 600 graduate students. The Milwaukee-based foundation has quietly pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into think tanks and public policy experiments such as welfare reform. The foundation has strong ties to the Bush administration and is credited with producing more than a decade of "intellectual fuel for conservative lawmakers."

Bradley and a number of smaller conservative foundations have "channeled tax-exempt dollars through a national network of highly paid scholars and nonprofit groups, giving the ideological right, some contend, a sharper edge in the battle of political ideas."

To his dismay, Chip Berlet, senior analyst at the liberal Boston think tank Political Research Associates, has found the strategy shrewdly effective, especially in contrast to that of left-leaning foundations, which he says tend to fund bureaucratic programs more than adventuresome ideas.

Berlet says the conservative funding "has been significantly responsible for the shift of American politics to the right in the last 20 years."

In a speech at Georgetown University, Joyce reflects, "At Olin and later at Bradley, our overarching purpose was to use philanthropy to support a war of ideas to defend and help recover the political imagination of the (nation's) founders — the self-evident truth that rights and worth are a legacy of the creator — not the result of some endless revaluing of values."

Joyce was the best at what he did. "Bradley has been able to pick winners," said Capuchin Brother Bob Smith, a Bradley board member, president of Messmer Catholic Schools and a national figure in the school voucher movement. "That's why some on the left are so angry."

One early pick was Bradley's \$75,000 grant in 1986 to publish the book "Politics, Markets and America's Schools," by John Chubb and Terry Moe. It argued for more competition and choice through privatization of education and is considered primary reading for the voucher movement.

Media Transparency, a liberal watchdog group, has compiled an online database that can calculate Bradley funding of specific groups from 1985 to 2001. It shows that Bradley recipients range from non-political groups like the Zoological Society of Milwaukee County (\$1.7 million) to the Heritage Foundation (\$14.3 million) and the American Enterprise Institute (\$14.9 million), two of Washington's most influential conservative think tanks.

When he visited Milwaukee a couple of years ago, Bush stopped at the Bradley-supported Holy Redeemer Institutional Church of God in Christ. The church operates schools in a "parental choice" program that allows low-income children to attend private, religious schools with public funds, a program supported by the foundation, which also paid the lawyers to defend the program in court.

The presidential appearance highlighted how Bradley has helped make Wisconsin a laboratory for conservative experiments. Under former Governor Tommy Thompson, now Bush's secretary of Health and Human Services, the state used Bradley-funded research to pioneer welfare reform, which inspired national reforms. In his Milwaukee speech, Bush praised Bradley for its ability to see different solutions. "They have been willing to challenge the status quo. They say where we find failure, something else must occur."

Friends said Sunday that Joyce, 63, died Friday after a long battle with liver illness.

When Joyce announced in 2001 that he was taking early retirement after more than 15 years as president of the Lynde

and Harry Bradley Foundation, he described his approach: "My style was the style of the toddler and the adolescent: fight, fight, fight, rest, get up, fight, fight, fight. No one ever accused me of being pleasant. I made a difference. It was acknowledged by friend and foe."

The Journal Sentinel online sums up his accomplishments beautifully:

- Joyce led the Bradley Foundation to be the key financial supporter of building the private school voucher program in Milwaukee. The foundation largely paid for the legal battle that led to a state Supreme Court ruling in 1998 that allowed the program to expand and to include religious schools. It also funded thousands of scholarships for students while the battle was under way.

- He was a central figure in creating the political environment, through financing studies and other advocacy, that led to then-Gov. Tommy Thompson's advocacy of the W-2 welfare reform that took thousands of Wisconsin women off of welfare rolls in the 1990s and generally required them to get jobs or take part in job training programs. It was a forerunner of welfare reform nationwide.

- At a point when efforts to put together a financing package for Miller Park appeared to have hit a dead end in the late 1990s, he arranged for the foundation to put up \$20 million as a loan at highly favorable terms for the Milwaukee Brewers, reviving the stadium effort. Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig later called him "clearly one of the heroes of Miller Park."

- He led the Bradley Foundation to prominence as one of the pivotal forces in the rise of conservative think tanks and similar efforts. Neoconservative leader Irving Kristol once referred to him as "the godfather of modern philanthropy" related to conservative causes.