

# president's note

## The Philanthropy Roundtable at 25

This has been a year of historic and sometimes surprising victories, and this should be an inspiration to all of us. If the Chicago Cubs can win the World Series, then we should raise our sights and think more boldly about how we can strengthen our free society through charitable giving.

As some of you may have noticed, our country recently held an election. Whichever side of this bitter contest you were on, you are welcome at The Philanthropy Roundtable. Unlike presidential politics, philanthropy is not a winner-take-all activity. It is not either-or, but both-and. Donors with different world views, and different passions, can channel their energy and resources into different organizations. This pluralism is diversity in the truest sense of the word.

President-elect Trump promises to make America great again. Well, charitable giving is central to American greatness. Americans are the most charitable country on earth. Philanthropy is part of our character as a free people where citizens step up to solve problems without waiting for government to act. To preserve this tradition, the Roundtable calls on the new president and Congress to preserve the full scope and value of the charitable deduction in their tax-reform proposals. Since 1917, the charitable deduction has been a lifeline for communities across the land, and a guardrail protecting civil society from government intrusion.

I would like to say a few words about the principles that have guided The Philanthropy Roundtable for the past 25 years and will continue to guide us for the next quarter-century.

We believe that a vibrant private sector generates the wealth and income that makes philanthropy possible. President-elect Trump said in his victory speech that one of his top priorities will be to double economic growth. If he and the new Congress can achieve this objective, a recharged economy will provide more jobs, more tax revenues, and yes, more charitable giving.

We believe that excellence in philanthropy is measured by results, not good intentions. Education reform offers a shining example of the kinds of results we seek. Twenty-five years ago, conventional wisdom was that low-income and minority children were doomed to failure in school. Now, thanks to charter schools, school choice, and other reforms made possible

by philanthropy, we know that children of all races and income levels can achieve high performance when they have great teachers and when parents can select the best learning environment for their kids.

We believe that voluntary private action offers solutions for many of society's most pressing challenges. Over the next 25 years philanthropy can play a crucial role in reforming dysfunctional public systems—from health care to pensions to the Veterans' Administration. Smart philanthropy can strengthen job opportunities, help curtail opioid abuse, improve public understanding of economic and constitutional principles, and address countless other crises facing our country. And as Karl Zinsmeister writes eloquently in this issue, philanthropists can play a lead role in transforming our culture, building on the remarkable achievements of the anti-slavery, temperance, Sunday school, and religious revival movements of the nineteenth century.

We believe that a respect for donor intent is essential for philanthropic integrity. One of the tragedies of philanthropy is that so many foundations ignore and sometimes violate the most cherished principles of their founders. If you are writing a mission statement, evaluating who to put on your board, or thinking about how to structure your foundation, donor-advised fund, or other giving vehicle in order to safeguard your intent, my colleague David Riggs is at your service.

And we believe that philanthropic freedom is essential for a free society. Independent private giving guarantees the independence of private institutions. It sustains our churches and synagogues and mosques, our colleges and universities, the arts and sciences, great think tanks of left, right, and center. Philanthropic freedom is also an indispensable engine of innovation. It makes possible entire new fields of research and inquiry, and enables social entrepreneurs to experiment with unconventional ideas and programs.

For the past dozen years the Roundtable and our legislative arm, the Alliance for Charitable Reform, have defeated multiple efforts by political leaders in both parties to restrict or take away your freedom. I promise you: We are never going to give up on this. As we move into our second quarter-century, the Roundtable remains committed to protecting your right to choose how and where to give away your charitable assets.



Adam Meyerson, President  
The Philanthropy Roundtable