



Bradley Foundation's Grebe to Leave Philanthropy but not Politics

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The CEO of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Michael Grebe, has announced his retirement. In his letter posted on the Bradley Foundation website, Grebe's explanation was enigmatic. "I still love my job and, because I am fortunate to be in very good health, I could continue doing it for several more years," Grebe wrote. "However, I have decided that it's time for me to move on to other pursuits." About ready to turn 75, Grebe could stay as CEO as long as the end of June of 2016 as the foundation searches for a replacement.

There is little question that Grebe, on the Bradley board since 1996 and its CEO since 2002, has been the éminence grise of philanthropic support for conservative political thought for more than a decade, not only through his leadership of the Bradley Foundation, but as chairman of the board of the Philanthropy Roundtable, the national association of politically conservative foundations, the Charter School Growth Fund, and, in the past, the Hoover Institution. In the for-profit corporate world, Grebe has been a longtime board member of Church Mutual Insurance, the nation's leading provider of insurance services to religious institutions, though he retired from the board earlier this year, and the Oshkosh Corporation, a builder of specialty trucks and truck bodies, though he is no longer listed on the corporation's board,

Grebe may be leaving the Bradley board, but he doesn't appear to be ready to leave politics. Grebe co-chaired both of Scott Walker's gubernatorial campaigns and this year took over Walker's presidential campaign. The composition of the Bradley board is heavy with Republican Party political donors and activists, and the foundation itself has edged close to—and, in the eyes of some observers, over—the boundary of nonpartisan political engagement, most notably its grant support to an entity associated with billboards in minority neighborhoods in Milwaukee aiming to deter voter turnout.

Despite leaving the foundation, Grebe told the Journal-Sentinel that he is "not capable" of leaving politics. However, Grebe's recent foray as Walker's presidential campaign manager, though not leaving the foundation during that time, was a bit of a botch. Starting off as the leader in polls for the Iowa caucuses, Walker flamed out in embarrassing fashion, becoming little more than a blip among the dozen or so Republican presidential aspirants. Grebe had long contended that he was able to segregate his political activities from the foundation's work and offices, but

the convergence of Republican stalwarts in the foundation must have made that an intellectual and professional challenge.

Under Grebe, the Bradley Foundation supported an infrastructure of conservative think tanks and activist organizations, including the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, the American Civil Rights Institute, the Alliance for School Choice, the Americans for Tax Reform Foundation, Black Alliance for Educational Options, the Hoover Institution, the Heartland Institute, the National Center for Policy Analysis, the Heritage Foundation, the Mackinac Center, the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, the Cato Institute, the Hudson Institute, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, the Federalist Society, the Institute for Justice, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, the Capital Research Center, the David Horowitz Freedom Center, the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, and more, a veritable compendium of the most influential intellectual support for conservative politics today.

Does Grebe find philanthropy too constraining for his political DNA? Did the foundation find the porous boundary between Grebe-the-foundation-leader and Grebe-the-political-strategist in need of greater clarity and distinction? One would think after the Walker debacle, Grebe would refocus on philanthropy, where the Bradley Foundation has been unchallenged in its support for conservative political ideas. Is there a second act for an unparalleled foundation leader who thought Scott Walker should and could be president of the United States?—Rick Cohen