

## THE HEARTLAND INSTITUTE

When ambitious individuals with conservative ideals get together, good things usually happen. Such was the case with a group of like-minded small businessmen in Chicago who some 15 years ago gathered together each month to discuss issues ranging from environmentalism to education reform. In 1984, when the decision was made to formalize what they were doing, about 50 of them banded together to form the Heartland Institute.

Heartland President Joseph Bast, who attended the original meetings while a student at the University of Chicago, remembers the group's founding well.

"I was a guest of one of the members, and I recall one point in a discussion where someone stood up and said, 'Let's put our money where our mouth is and try to make something happen here.'" About a month later, Bast accepted the position of executive director, working part time while continuing his course work, and the organization was soon off and running.

Bast literally ran the institute on his own, assuming the multifarious, and in some cases, mundane, tasks associated with directing an upstart think tank.

"I was on my hands and knees each night handling all the fundraising and bulk mailing," Bast says with a laugh. "There isn't a job in this organization that I haven't done."

Since the beginning, the institute has been a boon to the conservative movement, providing the nation's 8,000 state and federal legislators and its 1,000 members with extensive, in-depth coverage of issues through a conservative lens.

The most important subject the institute is dealing with right now is environmentalism. Of particular interest for Bast and his group is global warming. and Heartland has been ahead of the curve in unraveling some of the confusions and obfuscations spewed by left-wing environmentalists on that very issue.

With the global-climate summit currently underway in Kyoto, Japan. it is crucial that the scientific facts surrounding climate change are made known. Too often, Bast says, ideology gets in the way of sound science.

"This is an environmental issue that never would have gained anything like this kind of prominence on the merits of the science alone." he says. "The only reason we are spending a lot of time debating it is because the left-wing of the environmental movement saw this as an opportunity to turn off the engine of capitalism and growth."

The institute's contributions to environmental policy and the battle over global-warming have been considerable. In addition to Heartland's numerous policy studies and essays on property rights and clean-air regulations, Bast co-authored *Eco-Sanity: A Common-Sense Guide to Environmentalism* in 1995. The book received the prestigious Sir Antony Fisher International Memorial Award and more than 40,000 copies have been sold.

Other publications of note include Dr. Hugh Ellsaesser's policy study *The Misuse of Science in Environmental Management*, which exposes "environmental" science as nothing more than politics wrapped in fancy jargon.

Education issues also demand much time at the Heartland Institute. *School Reform News*, published monthly by Heartland, gives readers a closer look into school reforms nationwide.

At the center of its education research effort lies a committed team dedicated to bold reforms, including school vouchers and education savings accounts.

"We want to push for anything that will break up the public school monopoly and empower parents in their decision-making about their children's education," Bast explains. Private schools, he says, are simply outperforming many public ones, as the preliminary results from voucher experiments in Cleveland and Milwaukee demonstrate.

Another area of concern for the institute is the federal government's role in education. Abolishing the Department of Education is the ideal, according to Bast, but short of that, the best answer is to block-grant federal dollars directly to the states and local school districts.

"If you're going to keep the Department of Education, then give the money directly to the states with no strings attached," he says. "Education is not a federal responsibility, its a local one."

Aside from its own work, the institute acts as a clearinghouse for research conducted by think tanks and advocacy groups across the country. Heartland's bimonthly publication *Intellectual Ammunition* neatly summarizes an enormous amount of policy information being generated by dozens of groups such as the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and the National Center for Policy Analysis. Whether it's health care, welfare reform or tax law, the publication is a must for any reader interested in what conservatives are saying about the most pivotal issues of the day.

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It thus comes as no surprise that the Heartland Institute has become such a success in fulfilling its original and enduring purpose, which is to promote conservative ideas. And beyond that, Heartland remains a testament to the power and influence of the grassroots.

For more information, write: The Heartland Institute, 800 East Northwest Hwy, #1080, Palatine, Ill. 60067 (847-202-3060).

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Heartland Institute President Joseph Bast

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BY MICHAEL J. CATANZARO

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