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## **WLF PUBLICATION HIGHLIGHTS THREATS TO PHILANTHROPIC FREEDOM**

The Washington Legal Foundation (WLF) this week released the latest edition of its *CONVERSATIONS WITH* publication format, which features a group of nationally recognized philanthropic experts who examine the direct connection between philanthropy and freedom—and how some activists and elected officials are threatening to sever that important link by pursuing legal policies aimed at directing more charitable donations to their “preferred” causes.

Through an informal, question-and-answer conversational format, former Attorney General of the United States and Pennsylvania Governor **Dick Thornburgh** leads a lively and informative discussion with **Dr. Larry Arnn**, President of Hillsdale College; **Heather R. Higgins**, President and Director of the Randolph Foundation; and **Adam Meyerson**, President of the Philanthropy Roundtable.

The participants explore in depth Americans’ uniquely charitable spirit and the vital role that such widespread generosity has historically played in our democracy. Heather Higgins observes that “America has a rich charitable tradition, the logical complement to the idea that we as citizens are responsible for taking care of our neighbors, rather than presuming and waiting for the government to do it for us.” Adam Meyerson agrees, emphasizing how the same spirit of entrepreneurialism that was so successful in making America the leader in initiative and ingenuity in the business sector can also be found in the charitable sector. “Volunteering and charitable giving have been part of the American character since the founding—they’re part of our national DNA,” Meyerson states.

The participants also address the growing movement to impose further government regulation on the philanthropic sector by more narrowly defining which charitable causes are sufficiently “in the public interest.” Governor Thornburgh notes how the view that philanthropists don’t sufficiently serve the “underserved” has led to increased calls for greater government oversight of, and involvement in, the non-profit sector. The participants are unanimous in decrying this recent trend. Dr. Larry Arnn points out that the federal government is itself a seat of privilege: “When the government identifies underprivileged classes, it has a way, as it has an interest, in turning them into castes. Because unlike charity (when it is really charity), government these days hopes to receive something back from the beneficiaries: it gets political support for them.”

Meyerson agrees, adding that “[o]ne thing we should be very cautious about is who gets to decide which groups are the ‘right’ object of charity and which aren’t.”

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WLF’s publication format CONVERSATIONS WITH provides a public forum for leading experts from business, government, academia, and the legal profession to discuss current legal policy issues. Through informal question-and-answer conversations, guest participants share their frank thoughts on a wide range of important contemporary subjects. A copy of WLF’s latest edition of CONVERSATIONS WITH is available on its website at [www.wlf.org](http://www.wlf.org). To receive a hard copy of this publication, contact Washington Legal Foundation, Publication Department, 2009 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, or call (202) 588-0302. For further information about WLF’s publications, contact Glenn Lammi, Chief Counsel of Legal Studies, or Cory Andrews, Senior Litigator.