

Making a Difference

The Philanthropist in Public Life

An Interview with Howard P. Milstein,
Co-Chair, Howard & Abby Milstein Foundation



A rendering of the new Tappan Zee Bridge across New York's Hudson River

EDITORS' NOTE Howard Milstein is the third generation to lead the Milstein business and philanthropic family. Milstein's ability to marshal business, government, philanthropic, and family resources drives a breadth of initiatives across health, civic, educational, and security matters. Milstein is currently Chairman and CEO of New York Private Bank & Trust and its operating bank, Emigrant, and chairs and operates the Milstein family's real estate companies. In the philanthropic arena, Milstein is Chairman of the New York Blood Center, the American Skin Association, and the Milstein Medical Asian American Partnership Foundation. He is a Trustee at Cornell University and an Overseer of Weill Cornell Medical College, and serves on the Dean's Advisory Board of Harvard Law School. He also serves on the boards of the National September 11th Memorial and the Nicklaus Children's Healthcare Foundation. Milstein was Chairman of the New York State Thruway Authority from 2011 to 2014, where he successfully led the design and procurement process for a new Tappan Zee Bridge, the largest infrastructure project in the nation.



Howard P. Milstein

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The Howard and Abby Milstein Foundation (howardandabbymilsteinfoundation.org) participates actively in the organizations it supports, with hands-on leadership and long-term financial support. The foundation's involvement, leadership, and giving align with the essence of its home-grown "Venture Philanthropy," which brings the principles of venture capitalism to philanthropy.

You have a strong belief in the need to apply private sector thinking to public sector problems. Why do you feel this is so critical to achieving transformative impact?

Our nation has a long history of business leaders adapting ideas forged in the private sector for the improvement of our public institutions: leaders like Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Mellon and, more recently, Michael Bloomberg and Bill Gates. Many of the issues facing our nation today cannot be successfully addressed by government alone. Business and philanthropic leaders must help bridge the gap. Those of us who have enjoyed success in the private sector have an obligation to future generations: to ensure that our public institutions foster the kind of opportunity that has made this nation a success for nearly 240 years. Our approach to philanthropic and civic causes

is to develop innovative solutions in a hands-on, entrepreneurial manner that uses the intensity and skills honed in the business world.

Would you highlight your vision for The Milstein Symposium?

The Milstein Symposium is developing practical ideas to tackle some of the critical challenges facing America in the 21st Century. Starting with the Miller Center at the University of Virginia, we established a platform to advance original, consensus-based approaches. Future Milstein Symposium

commissions will take place in locations like New York and Washington, D.C., all with the goal of connecting distinguished members of the public and private sectors to produce bipartisan ideas on issues vital to the survival of the American Dream.

What are some of the key issues at the heart of the Milstein Symposium's work?

The first two commissions in our symposia examined small manufacturing and entrepreneurship – two areas at the heart of the American Dream. Our manufacturing commission was led by former Governors Haley Barbour and Evan Bayh, while our entrepreneurship panel was co-chaired by Steve Case and Carly Fiorina.

Quality manufacturing jobs and the ability to start and grow a business has been central to upward mobility and economic security for the middle class. These first two panels produced a series of practical ideas designed to help ensure that quality middle-class jobs and entrepreneurial opportunity remain at the core of the American experience. Our current commission is focused on infrastructure, another area essential to fostering economic stability and growth. That panel is led by former Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

How critical is infrastructure investment and development to American life?

Infrastructure investment is often viewed in terms of safety and convenience, but it is actually at the core of our nation's economic strength and stability. It is very easy to lose sight of the fact that fixing our crumbling infrastructure is a requirement for ensuring our competitiveness, creating the most efficient and cost-effective supply chain for goods and services, and delivering the best backbone for business innovation and talent.

You recently concluded your tenure as Chairman of the NY State Thruway Authority, considered by many to be the most

successful in history. Under your leadership, the Authority reorganized staffing, implemented best practices and cut \$200 million from its annual operating budget, along with \$375 million from the capital program. What excited you about this role, and would you discuss the keys to your success?

It was a tremendous honor to be appointed by Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2011 and unanimously approved by the New York State Senate. It is also a testament to Governor Cuomo's leadership and vision that he allowed us to very aggressively apply private sector, entrepreneurial thinking in ways that empowered the considerable professional talent already present in the ranks of the Thruway Authority. This brought about a sharp focus on results – often a missing ingredient in all governmental undertakings.

Your leadership in the procurement of a replacement for the Tappan Zee Bridge resulted in almost \$2 billion in taxpayer savings. What made this massive project work, and how can this serve as a model for infrastructure projects nationwide?

The assignment to lead the procurement of a new Tappan Zee Bridge was the biggest challenge the Thruway Authority had confronted. We learned some valuable lessons that can be applied nationally. Tough choices had to be made in procurement, construction, and financing. The essential decision to use design-build contracting, expedited permitting, and the application of private-sector principles resulted in a cost savings to taxpayers of about 40 percent. The entire procurement took only about 11 months – unheard of for a project of this size, where procurement usually takes six to seven years. It is a testament to the vision of men and women of the Thruway Authority, all of whom understood that a results-oriented, entrepreneurial approach was critical to the success of our venture. It is very gratifying that President Obama has declared the Tappan Zee replacement project a model for infrastructure projects nationwide.

Do you take time to reflect and appreciate on all that you have accomplished?

I consider it an honor to serve in the many roles to which I have been called – in the private sector, in philanthropy, and in public life. Winston Churchill once stated that "a man makes a living by what he gets...but he makes a life by what he gives." I am pleased to play even a small role in giving back to the city, state, and nation that I love. ●