

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Editorial: Helping build Ohio's future

### *Retiring leader of CEO group shaped reforms*

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When George Voinovich first came to Columbus as governor, he brought a zeal for forging partnerships between government and private business interests to get things done. Government is slow. Government is reactive. And government tends to be short-sighted. Politicians want progress within their term of office.

But it takes time to solve intractable problems: improving the education of Ohio's youngsters; enacting tax reform; reforming a Worker's Compensation system that decades ago was viewed as "the silent killer" of Ohio businesses; and modernizing technology, workforce competitiveness and energy policy.

It takes research. It takes a plan of action. And most of all, it takes people who are able to identify the problem and comprehend its impact, because they live in the real world outside of government.

That's where Richard A. Stoff has made his mark on Ohio, and will continue to do so long into the future. Chances are many Ohio residents might not have heard of Stoff, but he was instrumental in working with Voinovich to set up the Ohio Business Roundtable to improve Ohio's quality of life and business climate. Translation: jobs.

Stoff has since been the Roundtable's only president — the executive of an executive group — since its founding in 1992. But a week ago, Stoff, 68, announced he will leave the public-policy organization at the end of the year.

The Roundtable isn't a lobbying group. Stoff has testified to the legislature only three times in his 25 years, a colleague noted. The group's mission is to take a sticky problem that has defied a solution for a long time, bring in experts, apply penetrating analysis, create a sense of urgency, mobilize CEOs to serve as a catalyst and architect for a fact-based plan of action.

Think of the Roundtable as Ohio government's very own think tank, one led by some of the state's most successful business people. These CEOs roll up their sleeves to make sure every governor — Democrat or Republican — is a success, so that Ohio is a success.

“We exist to improve Ohio's competitiveness and quality of life for the good people of this state,” he told Leaders Magazine recently. “We do this by always taking the long view — working through a methodical process of major systems change and mobilizing our CEOs to act.”

The group's membership is a list of Ohio's biggest businesses and savviest entrepreneurs and corporate leaders: George Barrett of Cardinal Health, Jane Grote Abell of Donatos, Tomomi Kosaka of Honda of America Manufacturing, Leslie H. Wexner of L Brands, Steve Rasmussen of Nationwide Insurance, Steve Allen of Nationwide Children's Hospital, and Michael V. Drake of the Ohio State University. And this is merely a smattering of the many high-profile members.

If serving this team of CEOs was daunting, Stoff never let on. A native New Yorker who settled in Columbus in 1973, he'd served 18 years as a management consultant with two of the world's largest professional service firms before taking the helm of the Roundtable.

One of the Roundtable's most successful efforts has been the Bright New Leaders for Ohio Schools program, which recruits strong leaders from diverse fields and prepares them to transform high-poverty schools.

Stoff's hard work, vision and leadership have changed lives in Ohio. “When we say ‘Ohio,’ ” he told Leadership Magazine, “I truly believe people hear heartland, work ethic and integrity.”

That sums him up pretty well.

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The above editorial can be accessed on-line at The Columbus Dispatch [here](#).