

Atlas Network's quarterly review of the worldwide freedom movement

# FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

SUMMER 2019

## AGAINST THE GRAIN: PERMISSIONLESS INNOVATION IN NEPAL

BY AJ SKIERA

## A ROADMAP FOR AFRICAN PROSPERITY

BY MAGATTE WADE

## A TITANIC SHIFT: PENSION REFORM IN PENNSYLVANIA

## ALUMNI IN FOCUS: ARGENTINA'S MERCEDES COLOMBRES

## EUROPE LIBERTY FORUM 2019: THE FUTURE OF ECONOMIC LIBERALISM



ATLAS  
NETWORK

# FREEDOM'S CHAMPION

Atlas Network's quarterly review of the worldwide freedom movement

SUMMER 2019

Cover: Lorik Prasad Yadav, of Sugauli Birta, Nepal, walks through a field of wheat early in the morning before beginning work for the day. (AtlasNetwork.org Photo / Bernat Parera)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

3

Message from the CEO

4

Against the Grain: Permissionless Innovation in Nepal

8

This Quarter in World10

10

Supporter Spotlight: Rob Schimenz

12

A Roadmap for African Prosperity

14

Alumni in Focus:  
Argentina's Mercedes Colombres

16

Europe Liberty Forum 2019

18

Impact Case Study:  
A Titanic Shift—Pension Reform in Pennsylvania

**MISSION:** Atlas Network increases opportunity and prosperity by strengthening a global network of independent civil society organizations that promote individual freedom and remove barriers to human flourishing.

**OVERARCHING STRATEGY:** Atlas Network cultivates a network of partners that share a vision of a free, prosperous, and peaceful world where the rule of law, private property, and free markets are defended by governments whose powers are limited. To accelerate the pace of achievement by our partners in their local communities, Atlas Network implements programs using our unique Coach, Compete, Celebrate! strategic model.

**Coach:** Atlas Network provides world-class training and mentoring to inspire professionalism and improve performance among our independent partners.

**Compete:** Atlas Network offers grant and prize competitions that fuel our partners' efforts to achieve extraordinary outcomes.

**Celebrate!:** Atlas Network fosters camaraderie and stokes ambitions among our partners by celebrating their greatest accomplishments through events, communications, and media outreach.



*Atlas Network has been a four-star Charity Navigator member since 2008.*



*Atlas Network is a GuideStar Exchange Platinum-Level Participant.*



*Atlas Network's donation payment processor is certified to PCI Service Provider Level 1, the most stringent level of certification available.*

## An Atlas Network Publication

Editor-in-Chief Melissa Mann | Graphic Designer Teresa O'Leary | Managing Editor AJ Skiera





*Brad Lips, CEO of Atlas Network*

## MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

---

All over the world, political waters are churning in ways that are both exciting and alarming. As you know, Atlas Network does not get involved in politics, but we are mindful that our partners can have their greatest influence during moments when the political landscape is in flux. So let me offer some broad thoughts on where trends could take us:

First, it's a mistake to generalize too broadly about "populism," which has very different meanings from country to country. In some places, classical liberals can find allies among those who are weary of out-of-touch political elites and the grand plans they impose from on high. In other places, populism is fueled by illiberal sentiments that just cannot be reconciled with our shared vision of tolerant, free societies that respect the rule of law.

Our partners will make their own decisions about how to adapt to local circumstances—sometimes finding allies to achieve wins for liberty, sometimes standing fast against governments moving forcefully in the wrong direction. Our disposition from Atlas Network headquarters is to remember the long game and stick to the principles that define our efforts to advance freedom.

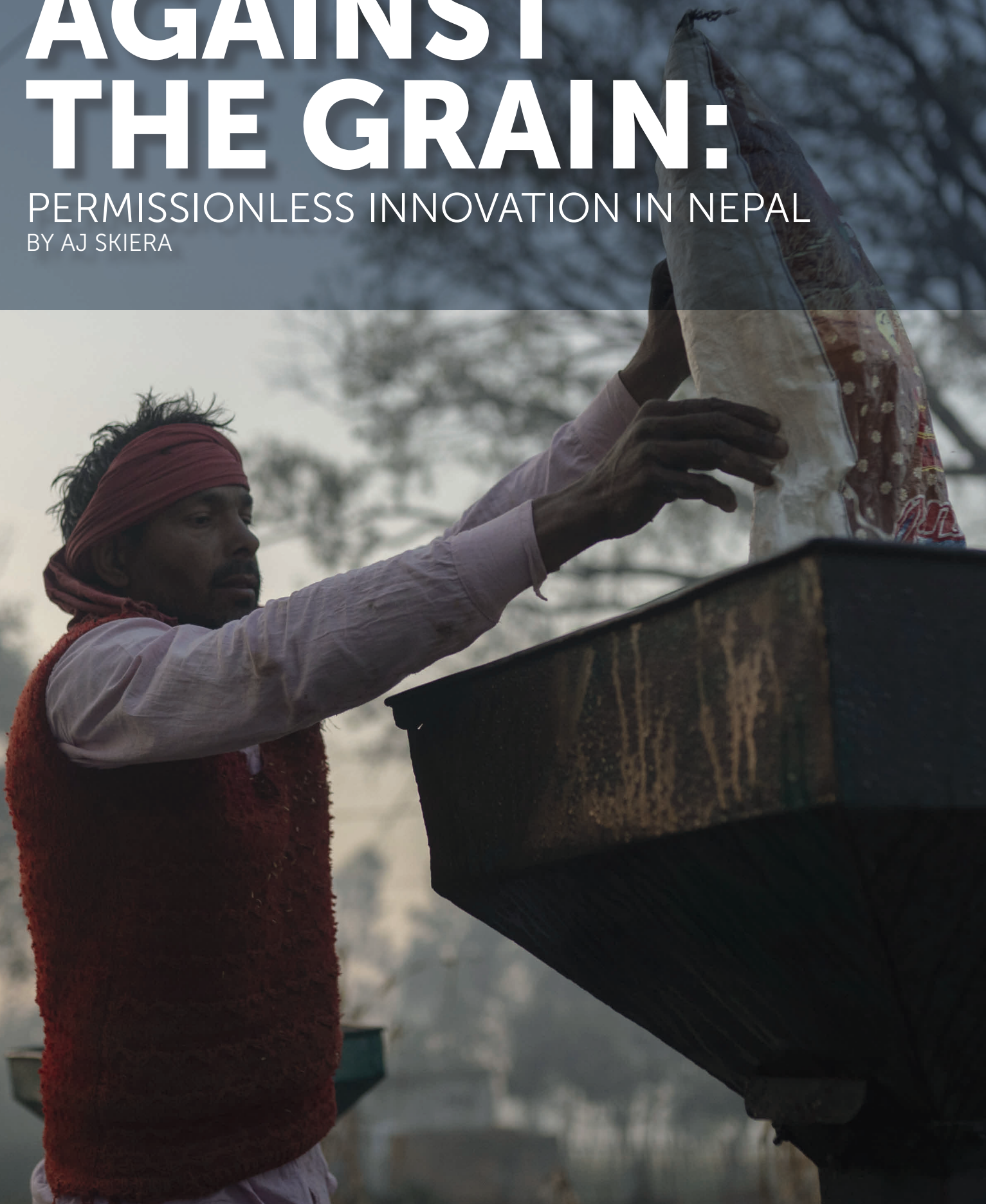
Over time, the statists on the extreme left and extreme right will burn one another out. We are positioned in the middle of a sane center—sober and pragmatic about policy options, while inclusive and compassionate as well. And I'm optimistic by nature. I believe that disaffected voters—who are tired of culture wars, gotcha politics, and impractical schemes—will ultimately embrace principled leaders who embody admirable ideals. Let us be the ones to set that example.

At Atlas Network, we've chosen to build on that optimistic perspective in our programming, and it's reflected in the launch of two new Centers that showcase two complex regions: the Center for Latin America, led by Roberto Salinas-León; and the Center for African Prosperity, led by Magatte Wade. We're looking ahead to a future of inclusive prosperity that enables people all over the world to thrive.

# AGAINST THE GRAIN:

PERMISSIONLESS INNOVATION IN NEPAL

BY AJ SKIERA





A thick fog blankets the wide expanse of farmland each morning in the small village of Sugauli Birta, an agrarian community near the Indian border of Nepal. There is an accompanying silence as women and men rise with the sun to work. Sugali Birta is a 9-hour drive—or an 11-minute flight—from the Nepali capital of Kathmandu, and the region's biodiversity is as robust as the work ethic of its people. Driving along winding roads through the Chure Hill range to the Terai plains, the hard work of the people living there is evident. Rice, wheat, sugarcane, and other crops form the foundation of the local economy.

The locals rely on agriculture not only for their livelihood but also their own subsistence. It is the norm for many to travel several hours, lugging heavy sacks of grain, to mills that grind wheat and rice. This consumes many hours that might otherwise be put toward more life-enriching activity, but families need food, so mothers and fathers have no choice but to spend time and money—25 Nepalese Rupees (NPR, about \$.20 USD) per 10 kilograms to grind their grain.

Up until recently, that was life in Sugauli Birta.

Lorik Prasad Yadav had a better idea. Why force people to travel long distances to process their grain when he could put the mill on wheels? With the help of a bank loan, Lorik bought a tractor and affixed a platform with three threshers. He drives that tractor—his mobile mill—from house to house, customer to customer, bringing an essential service directly to the people who need it.

Food is a necessity, and Lorik has made it easier, cheaper, and quicker for thousands of people in and around Sugauli Birta to process their crops. He keeps his prices low, charging only 15 NPR per 10 kilograms of grain—and he even leaves the chaff behind so that local farmers can recycle it as organic fertilizer or feed for their livestock. His customers save their chaff, save money, and save themselves the exhausting, multi-hour trip to town.

---

*(LEFT) Lorik Prasad Yadav operates a thresher on his mobile mill to loosen the edible part of rice from the husks and straw to which it is attached. (AtlasNetwork.org Photo / Bernat Parera)*



Of course, any time the status quo is upended, someone is bound to take notice.

Traditional brick-and-mortar mills saw Lorik as a threat to their continued livelihood and filed a complaint with the Nepali Office of Cottage and Small Industries (OCSI) that argued no explicit provision existed in the law for operating mobile mills and that, naturally, mills require a permanent location for their operation. The OCSI chief did not want to shut down Lorik's business, but he had no legal authority to register the mobile mill. So Lorik was compelled to suspend his operation.

But the spirit of this entrepreneur could not be so easily broken.

With the support of his fellow villagers, Lorik reached an agreement with the stationary mills. He offered to continue service for those farmers who were too far away to reach the mills easily, but he would not do business with those who were close. Despite this agreement, Lorik is still unable to register as a formal business due to Nepal's antiquated laws—laws which the Samriddhi Foundation,



*Lorik pours unprocessed rice into a thresher atop his mobile mill outside the home of one of his clients. (AtlasNetwork.org Photo / Bernat Parera)*

an Atlas Network partner based in Kathmandu, is seeking to reform.

The team at Samriddhi has worked for years to facilitate easier business registration in Nepal, but change is complicated. Nepal has had 27 governments in the last 28 years, and the tentative reforms of one administration are often rolled back by the next. That lack of political stability prevents the modernization of laws that might otherwise en-



*One of Lorik's sons sits atop the mobile mill in Sugauli Birta, Nepal. (AtlasNetwork.org Photo / Bernat Parera)*



*The economy of Sugauli Birta, Nepal is largely dependent on agriculture. (AtlasNetwork.org Photo / Bernat Parera)*

courage more people such as Lorik to create new ways to add value to their communities.

That instability has put in place many barriers to prosperity and opportunity, and the lack of opportunity at home is driving a massive outmigration of Nepal's youth. Today, about 1,500 of Sugauli Birta's young men and women are living and working in the Gulf countries. In Lorik's case, his business doesn't have a stationery address, which it must have in order to be registered. Because he can't register, he doesn't exist—which means he has no legal protection, which would help his business grow. Enterprising young people such as Lorik have become handcuffed by policies that destroy the value they've worked hard to create. And so they leave.

Samriddhi works to modernize Nepal's laws so that it's easier for resourceful problem-solvers such as Lorik to develop local solutions to local challenges. The country's outdated laws have often protected few at the expense of many. "Thirty million Nepalis like Lorik are being deprived of economic freedom," says Akash Shrestha, Samriddhi's research coordinator. The world has changed considerably in the last few decades, and Samriddhi believes Nepal's laws ought to change with it. Business-enabling reforms and the opportunities they create can do much to not only slow the outmigration crisis but also to reverse it.

By recognizing a problem that no one else realized existed, this enterprising young entrepreneur created value for his community, exemplifying the

bottom-up approach to poverty alleviation that Atlas Network partners—with the support of Atlas Network—seek to encourage and enable. Such creative people, given opportunity, lift up the country. Lorik's permissionless innovation, despite being limited by bad policy, has even inspired others to follow his model in other villages.

Lorik's cause symbolizes Samriddhi's countrywide fight for opportunity—but the team knows that the real solutions will come from communities like Sugauli Birta, where people themselves know best what difficulties they face in their communities and what is needed to overcome those challenges.



*A local client of Lorik's prepares her now-edible rice for storage. (AtlasNetwork.org Photo / Bernat Parera)*

Atlas Network supports civil society organizations like Samriddhi—where local experts work together to remove barriers to human flourishing—all over the world. Our partners provide local leadership and expertise, seeking targeted solutions to poverty that take into account local culture and the unique policy environment of each community. Our Doing Development Differently initiative, which was launched in 2017, seeks to empower those organizations in their pursuit of increasing opportunity, prosperity, and individual freedom in their local communities.

And it is working.



---

{THIS QUARTER IN}



# WORLD



The best of Atlas Network's monthly World10 email report.  
Subscribe at: [AtlasNetwork.org/World10](https://AtlasNetwork.org/World10)

---



## 1 LIMS lights up Lebanon after years of advocacy

Rolling blackouts have plagued Lebanon since the country's 1975–1990 civil war, and the government has been the sole legal provider of electricity—despite their inability to provide 24-hour availability. For years, the Lebanese Institute for Market Studies (LIMS) has advocated opening the market to private companies. Using LIMS' research and recommendations, the

Lebanese government recently passed legislation to allow private independent producers to participate in the country's future electricity needs.

---

## 2 How the would-be capital gains tax was axed in New Zealand

The New Zealand Taxpayers' Union (NZTU) successfully stopped a capital gains tax proposal that would have undermined the country's simple, predictable tax system. Following NZTU's "AxeThisTax" campaign, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern vowed that no capital gains tax would be implemented under her leadership.

---

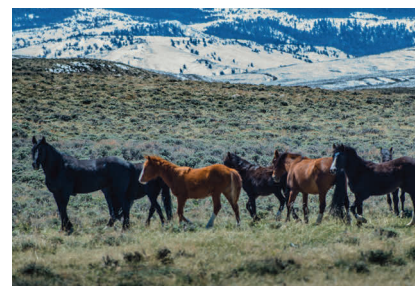
## 3 Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia the best places to eat, drink, and smoke in EU, says Epicenter

Belgium-based Epicenter's latest Nanny State Index ranks each nation in the European Union based on the freedom to eat, drink, smoke, and vape. The index has revealed no correlation whatsoever between nanny state policies and life expectancy, nor between tobacco control scores and lower smoking rates. Finland is once again the worst performer on Epicenter's index, followed by Lithuania and Estonia.

---

## 4 Quit horsing around: PERC's solution to the wild horse crisis

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has struggled to contain the overpopulation of wild horses in the American west in a cost-efficient manner. The Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) recommended an adoption incentive program for private citizens, who would receive \$1,000 to help cover costs of training and caring for these animals. The BLM has recently implemented their recommendations.





---

## 5 IMANI makes it easier to do business in Ghana

Fresh off of successfully advocating against the implementation of a government proposal to increase Ghana's value-added tax hike from 17.5 percent to 21 percent, IMANI Center for Policy and Education is now taking on contract enforcement. IMANI is trying to change the way the courts interact with businesses in a manner that helps to secure property rights, facilitate entrepreneurship, and resolve disputes.

---

## 6 Kyrgyz think tank helps open up the skies after economic freedom audit

A closed market for air travel in Kyrgyzstan has proven to be a major detriment for consumers. Thanks to the Central Asian Free Market Institute's (CAFMI) "Open Skies" policy initiative, which was recently adopted by President Sooronbai Jeenbekov, travelers will benefit from a more market-driven approach to domestic and international air travel. This comes as CAFMI recently held an economic freedom audit identifying ways the country can liberalize its economy.

---



## 7 Rolling back the outdated ban on the sale of farmland in Ukraine

A post-Communism era holdover has legally prohibited about 7 million landowners from selling their land in Ukraine, the only democratic state in the world where people cannot dispose of their own property. Kyiv-based EasyBusiness backed a successful lawsuit on the ban to the European Court of Human Rights, and other Atlas Network partners in Ukraine have also worked extensively on the issue. The Ukrainian courts have also declared the moratorium unconstitutional.

---

## 8 Can think tanks create the inevitable?

Atlas Network's Dr. Lyall Swim recently identified five inflection points—marketing, measurement, messenger, modification, and mobilization—that think tanks can use to help drive ideas to mass adoption. His ideas challenge think tanks to think beyond merely providing alternative policy solutions and waiting for an Overton Window to open, Swim's five inflection points provide a blueprint to create real change.

---

## 9 State-owned enterprises in Mexico pressured for transparency and openness

State-owned energy companies in Mexico often have poor governance, weak management, widespread inefficiency, and rampant corruption—and yet there is limited accountability for their failures because no one is watching. To measure how well state-owned enterprises are implementing standard corporate governance practices, México Evalúa created an evaluation tool that they hope will help the adoption of best practices, increase transparency, and decrease barriers to entry for private businesses.

---

## 10 Pacific Legal Foundation wins 2019 North America Liberty Award

Pacific Legal Foundation (PLF) has won the 2019 North America Liberty Award for their efforts to advance strategic, precedent-setting litigation that ends judicial deference to regulatory overreach. PLF's most recent successful appearance before the Supreme Court was in *Knick v Township of Scott*, which will allow property owners to seek compensation through the federal courts. "The Court's decision to reject barriers that unfairly deny property owners their day in court sends a message that property rights are just as sacred as all other rights," said PLF's Dave Breemer.



{SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT}

## ROB SCHIMENZ



Rob Schimenz delivers an elevator pitch for Stossel in the Classroom at Asia Liberty Forum 2018 in Jakarta, Indonesia after participating in the Lessons in Effective Fundraising—Asia training.

“Young people are smart,” says Rob Schimenz, an Atlas Club member, Atlas Leadership Academy graduate, and president of Center for Independent Thought, a New York-based Atlas Network partner. “They’ll choose freedom if they know the benefits of freedom—and if they know it’s an option.”

Schimenz’ assessment of young people is informed by more than two decades as a teacher in the New York City public school system, where he found himself swimming upstream against a constant barrage of pro-government messaging. Statist text-

books and teachers told students that government was always the best solution, that free speech was obsolete, and that socialism was their best hope for the future.

Education is Schimenz’ true calling, and one of the most important resources in his teaching toolbox were John Stossel’s videos on the benefits of free market-capitalism. “Stossel in the Classroom,” an ongoing series that is available free of charge to teachers, has introduced millions of students to the ideas of liberty and limited government. Today,



Schimenz oversees Stossel in the Classroom, working directly with John Stossel to encourage students to think critically about the unintended consequences of government control.

“Most teachers want their students to learn, but many of those teachers simply don’t know much about freedom and know even less about markets because they were taught in the same statist school systems! Having used Stossel videos for two decades, I know the impact they have.”

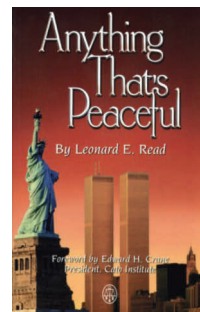


*Schimenz has brought dozens of students to Atlas Network events over the years—like the ones he brought to Freedom Dinner 2017, pictured here.*

By bringing his students to Atlas Network events in New York City, Schimenz was able to help them understand that their textbooks weren’t sharing the full story. “My students would learn far more about the world than they did in their global history classes,” he said, “and they were meeting the very people who were fighting for freedom. That’s when I started supporting Atlas Network financially.”

Schimenz, who credits the Foundation for Economic Education and Hillsdale College professor Burton Folsom’s book *Entrepreneurs Vs. the State* with sparking his lifelong passion for liberty, retired from teaching in June 2017 to take the lead of Stossel in the Classroom and its parent organization, Center for Independent Thought. He immediately discovered that leading a nonprofit required a unique set of skills. Atlas Network’s Atlas Leadership Academy courses helped him build the confidence he needed

Rob has countless moving stories to tell about his students, but one of the most poignant that captures his “Peace, Love, and Liberty” approach to teaching came on 9/11. At the time, his students were reading *Anything That’s Peaceful* by Foundation for Economic Education founder Leonard Read. The version of the book they were reading had a picture of the World Trade Center on the cover, pictured below.



*Copyright 1964 by Leonard E. Read. 1998 Edition published by Foundation for Economic Education.*

to be successful, and attending the 2018 Regional Liberty Forum in Indonesia was a chance to learn more about how other organizations operate. “Seeing hundreds of people working for liberty and free markets in Asia was inspiring,” he said. “I’ve been impressed by the camaraderie among many of the organizations in the freedom movement, and Atlas Network is setting the standard.”

As he considers how to continue to educate people about the benefits of liberty, Schimenz knows that outreach matters. “People benefit from freedom and free markets, but often don’t realize that. Yet they look to government for solutions rather than entrepreneurs, businesses, or themselves.” He is determined to change this perspective by seizing the narrative. “We also let the enemies of freedom dictate terms. Progressive? How are policies that give government more power ‘progress’? Why do WE call corrupt business-government relationships ‘crony capitalism’? That just helps give capitalism a bad name.”

Through Center for Independent Thought and Stossel in the Classroom, Schimenz is working to change the narrative. “We can find ways to improve our outreach and we should work together to do that,” he said. “Atlas Network is showing us the way.”

# A ROADMAP FOR AFRICAN PROSPERITY

By Magatte Wade



My father said, “Do not come to me with problems unless you thought of a couple alternatives. They don’t have to be right, but I just want to know that you thought of something.”

— Source: TED Global, August 2017

*At TED Global in 2017, entrepreneur Magatte Wade held the international audience spellbound as she laid bare her perspective on the obstacles to job creation in Africa. As the new director of Atlas Network’s Center for African Prosperity, Wade is focused on creating local pathways for change that will enable business growth and self-sufficiency throughout the continent. This edited transcript of her TED Global presentation shares her ideas on ways to build opportunity for all.*

So, I have this attitude in life—something is wrong, find a way to fix it.

Now, why are people poor? People are poor because they have no money. You have no money because you have no source of income. And for most of us, what is a source of income? For most of us, what is our source of income, what is it, tell me? Jobs, thank you. Where do jobs come from? Businesses, thank you.

Now, if jobs is what fixes poverty, and jobs come from businesses, don’t you think—especially, they come from small and medium size enterprises, SMEs—then don’t you think, maybe for a second, that we should focus on making it easy for a small-business person to start and run their business? Don’t you think that it makes sense? Why is it that when I look at the *Doing Business Index* ranking of the World Bank, that ranks every country in

the world in terms of how easy or hard it is to start a company, you tell me why African countries, all 50 of them, are basically at the bottom of that list? That’s why we’re poor. We’re poor because it is literally impossible to do business in these countries of ours.

But I’m going to tell you exactly what it means on the ground for someone like me. I have a manufacturing facility in Senegal. Did you know that for all my raw material that I can’t find in the country, I have to pay a 45 percent tariff on everything that comes in? Forty-five percent tariff. Do you know that, even to look for fine cardboard to ship my finished products to the U.S., I can’t find new, finished cardboard? Impossible. Because the distributors are not going to come here to start their business, because it makes no sense, either. So right now, I have to mobilize \$3,000’s worth of cardboard in my warehouse, so that I can



---

"THAT'S WHAT BROKE MY HEART. BUT AT THE SAME TIME THAT SHE SAID THAT, SHE SAID, 'BUT NOW, I KNOW THAT I AM NOT THE PROBLEM. IT IS MY ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH I LIVE, THAT'S MY PROBLEM.' I SAID, 'YES.'"



*Wade delivered a rousing keynote at FEECon 2019 about overcoming a mentality of inferiority and her attempts at answering a lifelong question why some places prospered while others faltered.*

have cardboard, and they won't arrive for another five weeks. The fact that we are stifled with the most nonsensical laws out there. That's why we can't run businesses. It's like swimming through molasses.

So, what can you do about that? I explained the same thing to my employees in Senegal. And one of them started crying—her name is Yahara. She started crying. I said, "Why are you crying?" She said, "I'm crying because I had come to believe—always seeing us represented as poor people—I had come to believe that maybe, yes, maybe we are inferior. Because, otherwise, how do you explain that we're always in the begging situation?" That's what

broke my heart. But at the same time that she said that, she said, "But now, I know that I am not the problem. It is my environment in which I live, that's my problem." I said, "Yes."

And that's what gave me hope—that once people get it, they now change their outlook on life.

---

*Magatte Wade is director of Atlas Network's recently launched Center for African Prosperity. Learn more about the Center at [AtlasNetwork.org/center-for-african-prosperity](https://AtlasNetwork.org/center-for-african-prosperity)*

## Argentina's Mercedes Colombres

From *Atlas Shrugged* to Atlas Network, my personal and happy journey to freedom



Mercedes Colombres, Communications Director for Libertad y Progreso, speaks on a storytelling panel at Liberty Forum & Freedom Dinner 2018 about Atlas Network's Doing Development Differently initiative.

*Atlas Shrugged* was probably one of the first libertarian texts that I read—not that I was a socialist. After all, in my veins there is the blood of various Argentinian Founding Fathers of Independence in 1816—prominent generals who defeated the Spanish military, the first Economy Minister of Argentina in 1853, several supporters who helped lead the road to Italy's unification in 1878. My ancestor Elena Alurralde threatened to hang the Spanish military with her beautiful long braids after they were defeated in 1812. I had this DNA bubbling in my veins. Then came Ayn Rand, Alberdi, my parents, the articles of Roberto Cachanosky, and Libertad y Progreso in 2014, when the country was struggling with *kirchnerismo*. And the magic happened. I became a classical liberal, until our “preacher” Agustín

Etchebarne and professor Martin Krause made me a libertarian.

It was not until late 2015 that I met Atlas Network at Liberty Forum in New York. It was like a brick hitting my head—the same effect the other Atlas, the shrugged one, had on me. Realizing there were hundreds of youngsters like me, fighting for ideas, had a huge impact on me. And these were cool and funny people, not boring nerds. You could actually hang out with all of them, share insights about what was happening all over the world, and even develop projects with your course mates. We learned a lot but also developed friendships, a sense of companionship and solidarity that is still alive. That's one fantastic aspect of Atlas Network courses. You can





*Colombres competed in the 2019 Latin America Think Tank Shark Tank competition at Latin America Liberty Forum, held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.*

make friends, work together, but also do very important things. You feel that you are being part of something bigger than yourself.

Then I came back and a miracle happened: the Kirchners lost the election in late 2015. Libertad y Progreso and other organizations had been working silently for years to promote other ideas. The people's mood shifted, and Argentina entered a very slow and painful path to leave populism for good. This meant a new public awareness of Libertad y Progreso. People and media started to talk about reductions in public expenditures, reducing the size of the state—all of Libertad y Progreso's ideas. Our bosses started to go on popular TV shows.

Eighteen months after my first Atlas Network event, we had one of our biggest successes. Our research that discovered that the new government increased the size of the state by 25 percent appeared on the front page of the second biggest journal in

the country. It was a scandal, and the debate on the need of reducing the size of the state, taxes, and public expenditures grew bigger and bigger. From that moment, Libertad y Progreso never stopped growing in press mentions and social media. It would be stupid to deny the influence of the Atlas Leadership Academy course I took in 2015, e-academy learning in research, and the 3,000 emails and calls between me, Agustín Etchebarne, and Manuel Solanet that Easter Weekend that ended in that front page article. A lot of the Atlas Network know-how was there.

Atlas Network taught me a wide range of practical and concrete tools to improve my work as communications officer and also gave me an overview of the general aspects of any organization: fundraising, managing, communicating, and taking care of our community. A good communications team is useless if your organization is a mess, or if you don't have strategic planning. I've learned that from Atlas Network. And again, the importance of making solid relationships with peers from all over the world is paramount. That's the other fantastic quality of Atlas Network: a sense of belonging in this amazing network of people creating wonderful products and content to make our ideas win the battle.

The road is just starting. Argentine politics are still prone to populist measures, and to apply our reforms package will require a lot of sacrifice from people. We are not selling candies as the politicians do. We are selling medicine—and it's ugly! There is a lot to do to win the cultural battle, to convince people of our very statist country that freedom and self responsibility is the better option. But I'm sure that with the help of Atlas Network, and keeping our friendships with other libertarian organizations, such as Fundación Libertad, Federalismo y Libertad, and others, we can make the rich Argentina of Juan Bautista Alberdi, the Argentina of Alberto Benegas Lynch, and the Argentina of Libertad y Progreso, happen again.

## EUROPE LIBERTY FORUM 2019

More than 200 champions of liberty from 44 countries met in Athens for Europe Liberty Forum 2019, where attendees discussed the status of economic liberalism and tax reform throughout the continent. The Think Tank Shark Tank competition, in which participants battle it out onstage for a \$10,000 prize in seed funding, was won by Nataliya Melnyk of Bendukidze Free Market Center, who is planning to develop “ENVY: Economics at School,” an educational course for middle school students that is based on the *Economics in 31 Hours* textbook developed by the Lithuanian Free Market Institute. Major sponsorship for Atlas Network’s Regional Liberty Forums was generously provided by the John Templeton Foundation, Smith Family Foundation, Freda Utley Foundation, Templeton Religion Trust, Nikolaos Monoyios and Valerie Brackett, and Rainbow@Atlas.

**Left:** Nour Bou Malhab of Students for Liberty (Lebanon) speaks with her Home Base Group at the kickoff of Europe Liberty Forum 2019. **Right:** Nataliya Melnyk of Bendukidze Free Market Center delivers her winning pitch to create a national economics curriculum for Ukraine based on *Economics in 31 Hours* in the Think Tank Shark Tank–Europe Competition. **Bottom:** The state of European liberalism and tax reform were focal points of the conference.





## 2019 EUROPE LIBERTY AWARD WINNER

EasyBusiness won Atlas Network's 2019 Europe Liberty Award for their work to end the ban on the sale of agricultural land in Ukraine. The project, which challenges the legality of the ban and is building bottom-up pressure for reform, included strategic litigation, a policy research program, an online platform to support landowners in filing applications to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and a broad communications strategy. So far, EasyBusiness has pushed the ECHR to officially recognize the ban as unconstitutional, asserting that it has violated the property rights of Ukrainians for the last 18 years. An end to the ban would force the government to develop a pro-market law in the near future; otherwise, the state will compensate 7 million landowners totaling \$50 billion USD. EasyBusiness also competed in the Think Tank Shark Tank competition, pitching a communications campaign designed to build pressure for the government to implement reform.

**Left:** Atlas Network CEO Brad Lips presents Andrew Shpakov (left) and Dmytro Lyvch (right) with the 2019 Europe Liberty Award. **Right:** Andrew Shpakov, CEO of EasyBusiness, accepts the 2019 Europe Liberty Award. **Bottom:** Dmytro Lyvch, head of analytics at EasyBusiness, was one of three contestants in the Think Tank Shark Tank—Europe competition.



{THINK TANK IMPACT CASE STUDY}

## A TITANIC SHIFT—PENSION REFORM IN PENNSYLVANIA



*Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf signs pension reform into law on June 12, 2017.  
Photo Credit: Commonwealth Foundation.*

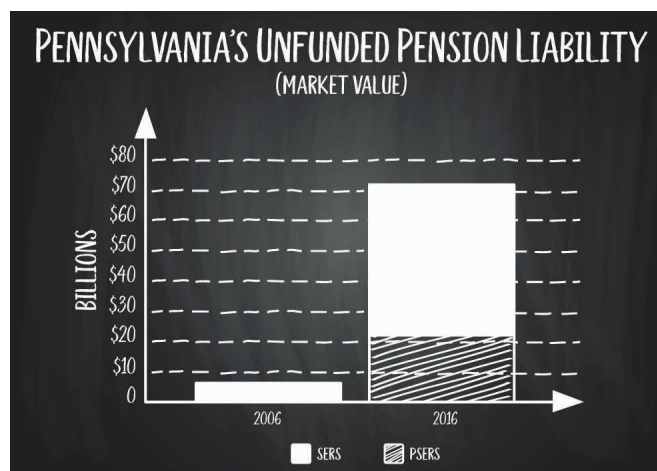
Pensions—the defined-benefit package so many government entities have promised to retirees—were never meant to provide a 30-year retirement cushion. Unfortunately, states like Pennsylvania have watched their pension debts soar as retirees are leaving work in their 50s and living for decades on defined-benefit payouts that have grown to unsustainable levels.

In 2017, after years of sounding the alarm on Pennsylvania’s billions of dollars in state pension debt, the Commonwealth Foundation’s (CF) hard work paid off with a major victory on pension reform. State policymakers—conservatives and progressives alike—signed off on Act 5, a plan that is projected to save the state billions and secure the retirements of government workers.



“Our vision is that Pennsylvania once again writes a new chapter in America’s story by ensuring all people have equal opportunity to pursue their dreams and earn success,” said Charles Mitchell, president and CEO of Commonwealth Foundation. “Pension reform is a textbook example of how, working in close partnership with lawmakers and business leaders, we are achieving that vision and securing a brighter future for the citizens in our state.”

Highlights of the reform include the beginning of an end to the state’s bankrupt pension system and putting the state on a sustainable path forward. All government workers now have the option to opt into a 401(k)-style retirement plan, and new workers are no longer automatically enrolled into the pension systems. Starting Jan. 1, 2019, all newly hired workers are enrolled in a hybrid defined-benefit/defined-contribution retirement plan.



*CF utilized many graphics in its public awareness campaign advocating for public pension reform.*

Pennsylvania’s unfunded pension liabilities had skyrocketed from \$7.6 billion in 2006 to \$71 billion by market value in 2016. The 2017 legislation CF helped shepherd will save the state an estimated \$5 billion to \$30 billion over the next 30 years.

CF provides lessons in sounding the alarm early and often on an issue needing reform. In 2006, no-



*CF President and CEO Charles Mitchell received State Policy Network’s Overton Award in 2014.*

body in Pennsylvania wanted to hear, let alone believe, that the state’s retirement system was broken. Public-sector unions went so far as to guarantee that there was nothing wrong with Pennsylvania’s government pensions. But that year, CF released a groundbreaking report showing just how dire the numbers looked, exposing an unpleasant truth before anyone else was ready to hear it and then continuing to beat the drum for 12 years.

CF also demonstrates how to crack the code in making difficult change a reality. Making meaningful changes to protect retirements and save taxpayers from financial ruin is an incredibly heavy lift in the state policymaking arena. The reason so many states have failed to realize reforms is that they’ve been unable to bring all sides to the table. CF helped broker that reality in Pennsylvania, urging all stakeholders to join the conversation. Ultimately, the state’s pension reform had overwhelming bipartisan support.

*Read the full case study on Commonwealth Foundation’s pension reform success at [www.AtlasNetwork.org/case-studies](http://www.AtlasNetwork.org/case-studies).*

"My students would learn far more about the world [at Atlas Network events] than they did in their global history classes, and they were meeting the very people who were fighting for freedom. That's when I started supporting Atlas Network financially." — Rob Schimenz



TWO LIBERTY CENTER, 4075 WILSON BOULEVARD, SUITE 310  
ARLINGTON, VA 22203 | [ATLASNETWORK.ORG](http://ATLASNETWORK.ORG)

[AtlasNetwork.org](http://AtlasNetwork.org)

#LFFD17