Pillars of Justice

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SPRING 2026

A Special Publication for Institute for Justice *Four Pillars Society* Members

Which book would you like to see in an upcoming IJ Four Pillars book club discussion?

Dear steadfast IJ supporter,

This issue of *Pillars of Justice* is dedicated to the enduring legacy of IJ's co-founder Chip Mellor, whose strategic vision and belief in the power of principled legal advocacy shaped IJ into the organization it is today. Chip truly believed that ideas change the world, that you can do the impossible, and that it was important to stay positive no matter how hard the fight—that's the IJ Way.

You'll see how IJ continues to translate those principles into action. Our article on IJ's challenge to an illegal traffic stop in Texas shows how our persistence helped expose a vast federal surveillance system. What began with a single stop became a breakthrough in our nationwide effort to challenge mass, warrantless monitoring of innocent people.

We also bring you a look into how IJ partners with filmmakers to dramatize our clients' stories. Movies like *Little Pink House*, *Miss Virginia*, and *Freedom Hair* honor our clients' bravery and spread IJ stories of liberty and justice to new audiences.

Of course, *Pillars of Justice* is an exclusive conversation with you, as a member of IJ's Four Pillars Society. In this issue, we want to know **which book you'd like to see featured in a future IJ Virtual Book Club.** To answer this question or provide any other thoughts, visit IJ.org/POJ.

Before closing, we want to share an important update. Beginning with the next issue, Janae Wilkerson, IJ's senior development writer, will take over as the new editor of *Pillars of Justice*. You may already know Janae as the host of many of our YouTube short videos, and we are excited for the creativity and insight she will bring to this publication!

Thank you, as always, for your generosity and commitment to liberty. ◆

With gratitude,

Kim and Janae



Kim Norberg
DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS



Janae Wilkerson
SENIOR DEVELOPMENT WRITER

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Share your thoughts!

Which book would you like to see in an upcoming IJ Four Pillars book club discussion?

Scan the QR code to let us know!

Voting ends March 12th.

INSTITUTE for JUSTICE

Virtual Book Club!

Last September, 19 Four Pillars Society members and seven IJ staff members gathered for our inaugural Virtual Book Club. We discussed *The Tainted Cup*, a fantasy murder mystery by Robert Jackson Bennett. Why this book? The author revealed that the story was inspired in part by America's recent fear of building things and how regulations can form a jar that will "pickle us in our own brine"—which IJ confronts daily! Book club attendees debated the effectiveness of the murderous "reveal" and the ways bureaucracy enabled the crime at the heart of the story.

In January, we held our second gathering to discuss *The Comfort Crisis* by Michael Easter. With 13 Four Pillars Society members and eight IJ staff in attendance, it was a lively discussion of the book's scientific rigor and whether the underlying message was offputtingly out of touch or a useful "kick in the pants." ◆

Join us for the next Virtual Book Club!

We will host the next session this spring.
Scan the code to vote on our next book!

Which book would you like to see in an upcoming IJ Four Pillars book club discussion?

STAFF NOMINEES

Jane Austen's Bookshelf
by Rebecca Romney

This book explores the forgotten women authors who influenced Jane Austen. It's also a description of life as a second-hand book dealer (Romney's day job). Anyone who loves wandering through used bookshops will find it delightful.

The Courage to Be Disliked
by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga

This book is about the psychological theories of Alfred Adler, who was a contemporary of Freud's but had very different views. It's a nice complement to Friedrich Hayek's views because it stresses the significance of the individual and the vital importance of taking responsibility for your own actions.

America First
by H.W. Brands

This book focuses on the late 1930s debate about America's role in the world, with Lindbergh representing isolationists and FDR representing internationalists. The author relies heavily on letters and speeches from those central figures, and it's uncanny how contemporary they both sound.

Little Pink House
by Jeff Benedict

This book details IJ client Susette Kelo's fight to save her home and her neighborhood from eminent domain abuse. The author does a masterful job of telling an iconic story, adding a depth of detail that will feel fresh and new even to readers who followed closely her Supreme Court case.

CAST YOUR VOTE BY MARCH 12TH



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The man who made IJ

William H. "Chip" Mellor always knew he wanted to change the world. The lessons he learned in pursuit of that goal not only led him to co-found the Institute for Justice, but also shaped the leadership and management philosophies that became part of IJ's DNA.

Chip grew up in a small town in Ohio and went to college at The Ohio State University at the height of the Vietnam War protest movement. It was while participating in one of those protests that he had what he later described as an epiphany:

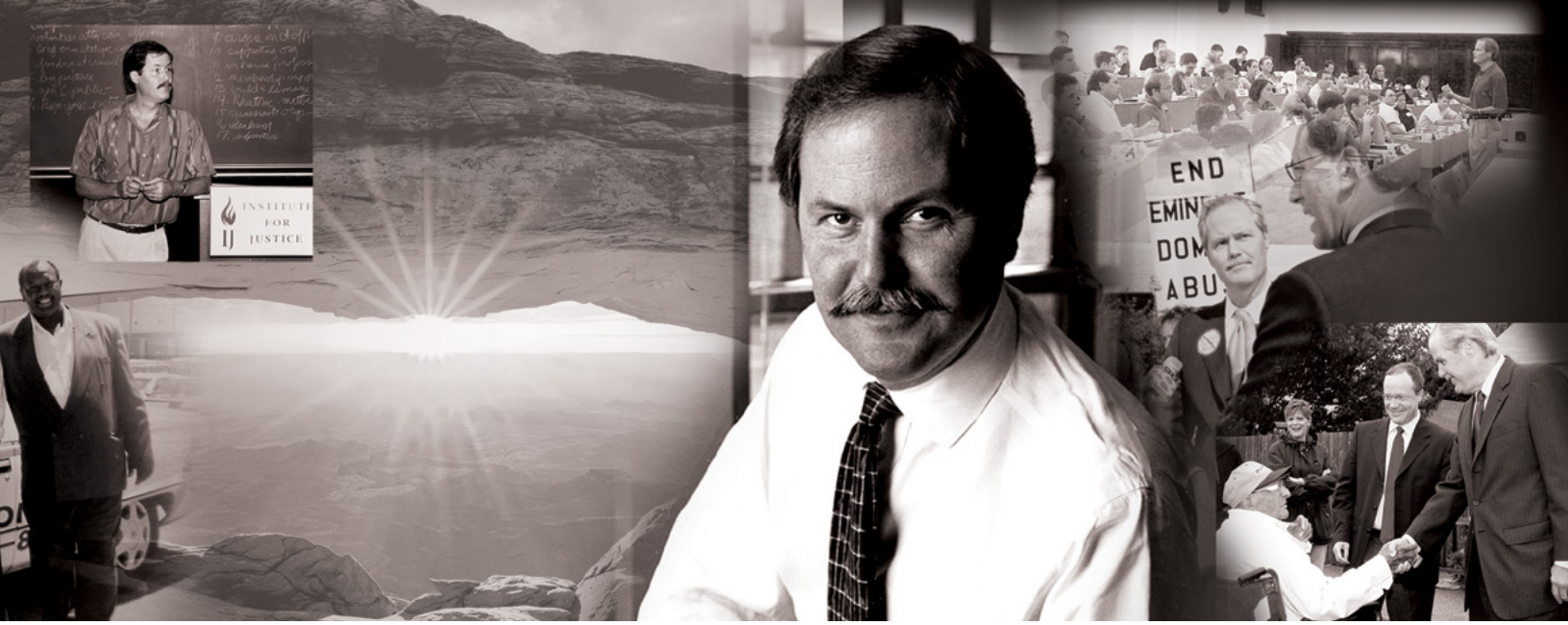
"Both the Left, in the form of the student leadership and the outside groups getting involved in the movement, and the Right—meaning everybody from Richard Nixon down to the Governor of Ohio to the police force—were after the same thing," he said. "They were both after power."

Once it became clear to him that "liberals versus conservatives" was an insufficient paradigm, Chip began to read widely. He was especially influenced by Frederick Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Ayn Rand, libertarian thinkers who persuaded him that economic liberty and private property rights were inseparable from a truly free individual.

Later, these ideas manifested at IJ in concrete ways. Chip chose the name "Institute for Justice" to reflect Hayek's insistence that ideas, not politics and power, are what move the world. Friedman's work on monopolies, cartels, and school choice directly informed the way IJ approached economic liberty and educational freedom. And Rand's depictions of heroic individuals animated by idealism, not a thirst for power, became a core part of the way IJ told the story of its cases: emphasizing sympathetic clients and clear villains, and using simple and outrageous facts to explain the issues at stake.

After college, Chip went to law school. In 1980, he got a job at a new organization named Mountain States Legal Foundation. The conservative public interest law movement was in its infancy at the time, with most groups created explicitly to provide a counterweight to more established groups on the Left. At Mountain States, Chip came to see that without a long-term, strategic, and principled approach to public interest litigation, even the most talented lawyers at the most well-funded groups would be limited in their ability to restrain government power and expand individual liberty. He and his colleague, fellow libertarian Clint Bolick, pledged to create an organization dedicated to that approach.

Over the following years, Chip worked with legal scholars and others to develop strategic litigation blueprints in private property rights, economic liberty, free speech and, later, educational choice. When Chip and Clint founded the Institute for Justice in Washington, D.C., in 1991, these blueprints—paired with a clear sense of mission and Chip's fierce commitment to independence in



a town that all too often runs on favors—guided IJ through its formative years.

"I was dedicated to following a very clearly defined mission in a principled way," he later said. "I knew that if we did that, people would be excited about joining our work on our terms, not making their support conditional on us doing what they wanted. The idea was we would be independent right from the start. And we were. And that proved to be absolutely vital."

Chip had a knack for identifying and fostering talent, and a deliberate approach to management that created a culture where those talented people could work together productively. He distilled the principles that he wanted to animate IJ into what he called "The IJ Way": being entrepreneurial, positive and open, principled, resilient, and focused on real-world results.

"The subtlety of culture is that you cannot let it evolve spontaneously," he said. "If people don't know what's expected of them, they think that what they have to do is just be nice people. And different people's interpretations of 'nice' varies tremendously. That's not a culture." Through the IJ Way, Chip articulated, in concrete terms, what he wanted the organization to be, and the right people bought into his vision, many of them making their careers at IJ.

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Taken together, Chip's experiences, convictions, and discipline created the Institute for Justice and established a way of working that outlasted any single case or era. IJ's enduring success is the result of the quiet and consistent leadership of a man who took ideas seriously, invested in people, and believed that every individual has the potential to change the world. ◆



Melanie Hildreth
SENIOR ADVISOR FOR DEVELOPMENT

LATER THIS YEAR!

IJ will soon publish ***Whip and Ride: The Pioneering Early Years of the Institute for Justice,*** a biography of Chip Mellor and the story of our founding. Stay tuned!

See pages 6-7 for more Chip Mellor stories!

IJ Staff

Remembering the man who made IJ

"Chip's 'Anything else for the good of the cause?' is a classic quote. He would end so many team meetings with that one consistent question to all of us—it spoke to his open door policy and his trust that we all had something to offer IJ. Even when I started fresh out of college as a development assistant, Chip made sure everyone knew that no contribution was too small and that we were valuable to the growth and success of IJ."

-Kyndra Griffin

Senior Paralegal



"After we (narrowly) lost *Kelo*, Chip recognized IJ would need to help states craft effective legislation against eminent domain abuse. Chip informed me—at the time IJ's most junior attorney—that he was tapping me to be a leader of those legislative efforts. Because Chip believed that I could rise to the challenge, I believed it too, and got to work. IJ's efforts ultimately resulted in the vast majority of states increasing protections for property owners.

Later, I realized there was a method to Chip's madness: He knew from personal experience that doing hard things (like starting and sustaining IJ) means pushing past the limits of what you think you're capable of doing. My story isn't unique. Chip hardwired finding a way—armed with the belief that you can do hard, even impossible things—into IJ's culture."

-Bert Gall

Managing Vice President and Senior Attorney



"I will always remember when Chip told me to 'be a cheerleader for IJ,' because a picture of myself with pom poms popped into my mind. This was back when IJ was much smaller, and Chip and I were commiserating about the state of law schools—he had an unpleasant experience, and saw them as a layer of worthless credentialism that failed to show students anything resembling IJ's worldview.

Chip knew it was crucial to expose future lawyers to IJ's ideas—and he believed IJ could not come across as angry or bitter when present at law schools. Instead, we must show applicants that we were happy warriors. Chip was completely right about this. He is the reason I have given almost a hundred talks at law schools, and I like to think he would be proud at how enthusiastically I have followed his advice—with or without actual pom poms."

-Justin Pearson

Managing Attorney of the Florida Office



"Chip loved to tell stories, and he loved to impart lessons through stories—sometimes about himself, sometimes about others (often about Ernest Shackleton). He taught me about the importance of living through stories. Chip constantly reminded me to be aware of 'IJ moments'—times when I was in the midst of unusual or difficult circumstances that would only happen working at IJ. What he meant was that I should recognize I would be telling other people about this moment in the years to come.

It's surprising aid to decisionmaking: If I'm going to be telling people the story of this outlandish thing happening to me, I want to make sure my response is something I'll be happy to tell them. 'This awful thing happened to me and then I gave up' is a terrible story, and so I have to find a different one. I think about Chip whenever I'm telling stories from my career. And I think about him whenever I'm making a new one."

-Bob McNamara

Deputy Litigation Director




SETTING THE Standard
INSTITUTE for JUSTICE
I am IJ.
www.IJ.org
Scan the QR code to read more Chip stories from IJers.

PILLARS
Mission



IJ Client
Alek Schott

Following where the evidence leads



Christie Hebert
ATTORNEY

Some of IJ's most important victories don't come from a dramatic courtroom moment. They come from asking one more question, refusing to accept "there's nothing there," and following the evidence wherever it leads—even when our opponents hope it stays buried.

The value of that tenacity was on full display in IJ's traffic stop case involving Alek Schott. What began as a challenge to a single unlawful traffic stop and invasive search by Bexar County, Texas, deputies ultimately helped expose a massive federal surveillance system with fingers in communities across the country—exactly the sort of warrantless mass surveillance IJ is taking on through our Plate Privacy Project.

The key was something deceptively simple. When IJ attorneys reviewed body-camera footage from the deputies who stopped and searched Alek's truck, we noticed something odd. During the stop, officers repeatedly checked their cell phones. That raised an obvious question: Who were they communicating with and why?

What began as a challenge to a single unlawful traffic stop and invasive search ultimately helped expose a broader surveillance system and sparked a recent Associated Press investigation read by millions nationwide.

We asked for the officers' text messages and call records during discovery. The response: nothing. County lawyers insisted there were no relevant records. After repeated back-and-forth, we asked a court to step in and compel production.

At the hearing, the government finally revealed that the deputy who stopped Alek hadn't used standard text messaging at all. He'd used WhatsApp, an internet-based messaging service—and then uninstalled the app from his phone. So, the county claimed, there were no messages to turn over.

For most litigants, that might have been the end of the road. For IJ, it was just the beginning.

Using that admission, we persuaded the court to order all deputies involved in the stop—and their supervisor—to turn over their phones to an independent forensic examiner, at the county's expense. Although the examiner couldn't recover the specific WhatsApp messages about our client Alek, he uncovered something else: group chats used by the county's criminal interdiction deputies.

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In those chats, unidentified numbers sent the deputies vehicle descriptions or license plate numbers to flag cars for traffic stops based on where drivers came from, where they were going, or which routes they took. The county deputies then used reasons like lane drifting, window tint, or a dangling air freshener to stop and aggressively search the targeted cars—exactly how deputies pulled over our client, interrogated him, and ransacked his truck.

Those recovered messages helped show that local deputies were effectively acting as an arm of a massive federal Border Patrol surveillance system. Our evidence even became a cornerstone of the Associated Press' reporting on how immigration authorities set up hidden cameras to track travelers and recruited local law enforcement to stop and search drivers far from the border.

This surveillance network echoes the constant vehicle tracking found in cities nationwide, which IJ takes on through our Plate Privacy Project and our ongoing lawsuit against Norfolk, Virginia. IJ sued after the town installed more than 170 AI-driven license plate readers that constantly track innocent people without a warrant or any judicial oversight—a dragnet search forbidden by the Fourth Amendment's protections against unreasonable searches.

Though our Texas case started with one errant county, IJ's hard work here helped us expose how pervasive such surveillance is—and how willing government officials are to conceal it—as we advocate for legislative limits and take on warrantless snooping nationwide. This is what donors to IJ make possible: not just legal arguments, but relentless truth-seeking. Not just single cases, but a strategic vision where we can harness a breakthrough like this across multiple lanes. ◆

From courtroom client to cinema star



John E. Kramer
VICE PRESIDENT FOR STRATEGIC RELATIONS

Since IJ's founding, we have elevated the struggles of everyday Americans and turned them into national causes by pairing cutting-edge public interest litigation with strategic media relations. More than a decade ago, we expanded this approach by bringing our clients' inspiring stories to the silver screen, working both in-house and with like-minded partners to achieve Hollywood-level storytelling.

IJ next collaborated with professional filmmakers to retell the story of Susette Kelo and her fight against eminent domain abuse, a case IJ litigated to the U.S. Supreme Court. Working closely with author Jeff Benedict, we adapted his award-winning book *Little Pink House* into a full-length narrative feature. Through nationwide screenings, the film helped galvanize opposition to eminent domain for private gain and advance state-level reforms. The impact endures: during a recent IJ blight case we argued before the Fifth Circuit, a judge declared, "I am Susette Kelo," invoking his own "little pink house" while grilling the government attorney.

We also provided PR guidance for *Miss Virginia*, produced by the Moving Picture Institute, which tells the story of former IJ client Virginia Walden Ford and her role in creating the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). One of the first choice programs in the country, the OSP has now given over 11,800 children the resources to leave failing inner-city public schools. And for years, IJ's activism team has organized targeted screenings to inspire parent advocates across the country and raise grassroots support for school choice—part of our efforts to secure and strengthen the 83 choice programs now active across 35 states.

More recently, we pitched Moving Picture Institute to produce *Freedom Hair*, which tells the story of former client Melony Armstrong.

IJ cases inspire documentaries as well, like the upcoming ***When Cops Become Robbers*** (featuring IJ forfeiture clients Eh Wah and Anthonia Nwaorie) and ***Crime and Parody*** (featuring free speech client Anthony Novak).

Melony overcame Mississippi's protectionist licensing barriers to start a natural hair braiding business, and defeated regulators' demand that she earn an irrelevant cosmetology license just to teach braiding. Because of her activism, as of 2022, the state now has more than 6,700 braiders. Melony herself became a nationwide advocate, helping many states roll back repressive laws and opening the door for thousands of women to earn an honest living—a legacy of activism and reform celebrated on screen.

Well-told stories have the power to change the world. They are an IJ hallmark. That's why IJ will continue telling stories on screens large and small to advance our mission. ◆



IJ IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Freedom Hair (2024)




Cast: Simona Brown (as IJ client Melony Armstrong), Jeremie Harris (Kevin), and Sophia Bush (as IJ's Dana Berliner)

Director: Dianne Houston

Production Company: Moving Picture Institute (MPI)

Little Pink House (2018)




Cast: Oscar-nominated Catherine Keener (as Susette Kelo), Emmy-nominee Jeanne Tripplehorn (as Charlotte Wells), and Aaron Douglas (as Governor)

Director: Courtney Moorehead Balaker

Production Companies: Brightlight Pictures and Korchula Productions

Miss Virginia (2019)




Cast: Uzo Aduba (as Virginia Walden), Niles Fitch (as James Walden), and Matthew Modine (as Congressman Cliff Williams)

Director: R.J. Daniel Hanna

Production Company: Moving Picture Institute (MPI)

Where to watch: These films are currently available on Apple TV, Amazon Prime Video, Fandango at Home, Google Play Movies & TV, Plex, Pluto TV, Roku Channel, Tubi, or YouTube Movies & TV.



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This exclusive publication goes behind the scenes of IJ's work and the real people it impacts. It is designed to give a deeper look into the long-term strategy and vision that Four Pillars Society members like you make possible.

Thank you for your enduring commitment to IJ as we unleash freedom and justice!

To share your thoughts on this issue, provide your pick for the IJ 4PS Book Club discussion, ask a question, or suggest future topics, please scan the QR code above or visit **ij.org/PoJ**. We'd love to hear from you!

▲ Tenants Omar and Dottie Rivera and their landlord Steve Camburn *(pictured above)* teamed up with IJ to defeat Pottstown, Pennsylvania's invasive rental inspections. The borough used "administrative warrants" with no judicial oversight to let inspectors repeatedly dig through rental homes without any evidence something was wrong. Our 2025 win is the first case to reject the U.S. Supreme Court's "administrative warrant" doctrine and to put renters' constitutional rights on the same level as owners'.