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Federalist Society Founders Awarded \$250,000 Prize

The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation awarded the founders of the Federalist Society a \$250,000 prize yesterday in honor of their role in shaping the conservative legal movement.

“The Bradley Foundation selected the founders and leaders of the Federalist Society for their ingenuity in forming and nurturing an organization dedicated to preserving rule of law,” said Bradley Foundation President Michael Grebe in a statement. “The Federalist Society has become a vital resource in American legal education.”

Spencer Abraham, Steven Calabresi, David McIntosh and Lee Liberman Otis were law students when they founded the Federalist Society in 1982. The idea, says Liberman Otis, was not to start a national organization. The four chapters even went by different names.

At Yale and the University of Chicago, the group went by the Federalist Society. The Stanford chapter called itself the Foundation for Law and Economics, and at Harvard it was the Society for Law and Public Policy.

“It was only when we started getting letters asking ‘how do we start a chapter of the Federalist Society at our law school?’ that we said, well, I guess we are starting a national organization,” Liberman Otis, now the society’s senior vice president, says.

Since 2004 the Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation has awarded prizes to a yearly batch of conservative luminaries. Past recipients have included Washington Post columnist George Will, former United Nations ambassador for the Bush Administration John Bolton, and University of Chicago economics professor Gary Becker.

Though the society may be their most lasting legacy, the four founding members have each gone on to high profile jobs in academia, government and the private sector.

Abraham and McIntosh were elected to the Senate and House, respectively, and Abraham later became energy secretary under President George W. Bush. McIntosh is currently a partner in Mayer Brown’s public policy practice.

Calabresi held positions in the first Bush and Regan administrations, and is currently a professor at Northwestern University Law School. Otis served in a variety of government and private practice jobs, including associate deputy attorney general at the Bush Justice Department, and now serves as the Federalist Society’s senior vice president.

Both Calabresi and McIntosh are also on the Society’s board of directors.

The Bradley Prize will be presented during a ceremony at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on June 3. The four founders will split the \$250,000.

According to the Bradley Foundation’s last available annual report, it donated \$10,000 to the Federalist Society in 2007. That year it donated more than \$37 million dollars to a collection of academic institutions, conservative think tanks and social policy groups.

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