

In Memory of Dr. J. Chris Leach

The W.W. Reynolds Foundation and the world of business education have lost an extraordinary mind, a tireless mentor, and a dear friend.

Dr. J. Chris Leach, a tenured professor at the University of Colorado's Leeds School of Business and the inaugural W.W. Reynolds Capital Markets Quasi-Endowed Chair, passed away on March 14, 2024. His profound contributions to education, particularly through his leadership in the Hernando de Soto Capital Markets Program, have shaped the lives of tens of thousands of students, and his legacy will continue to inspire for generations to come.

Chris was a man of deep intellect, boundless curiosity, and unshakeable integrity. He saw business education not as a static field but as a living, evolving conversation that required engagement, challenge, and innovation. This vision led him to us. Through our partnership, he drove the development of the World of Business course, an innovative and gamified approach to business education that has transformed how students engage with economic principles, entrepreneurship, and ethics. The course, designed for first-year business students, quickly became foundational at Leeds and has since influenced similar programs at universities across the country.

But Chris's impact did not end in the classroom. His work with the W.W. Reynolds Foundation helped expand the boundaries of business education beyond higher education, reaching younger students and underserved communities. His vision for innovative, interactive learning inspired multiple initiatives, including:

A Partnership with the Bill of Rights Institute – The foundation awarded a 2023 grant to fund the development of interactive, gamified tools to complement the digital textbook *Government and Politics: Civics for the American Experiment*. Designed with input from scholars and game designers—including Chris—this initiative encourages students to engage in critical thinking and debate on civic and economic concepts. The program, launching in 2025, is expected to reach tens of thousands of students nationwide.

Business Quest with Junior Achievement Rocky Mountain – Chris's groundbreaking work with the World of Business curriculum directly inspired Junior Achievement's gamified middle school business program, *Business Quest*, which focuses on entrepreneurship and financial literacy. *Business Quest* will serve over 10,000 students in its first year, providing early exposure to fundamental economic principles and career readiness.

Expanding Business Education for High School Students – With Chris's support and guidance, the W.W. Reynolds Foundation partnered with the MBA Research and Curriculum Center's initiative to create a high school version of the World of Business course. Set to pilot in the 2025–2026 school year, this initiative aims to equip young students nationwide with business fundamentals

and economic literacy, ensuring that Chris's work continues to shape future leaders.

Chris was more than an academic. He was a champion of intellectual curiosity and critical thinking, a man who understood that education was not just about memorization but about learning how to think. He embodied what he called the "Western ethic"—a spirit of independence, self-reliance, and entrepreneurship, always seeking prosperity beyond his own.

Reflecting on their three-decade-long collaboration, Bill Reynolds shared,

"Chris's optimism, loyalty, and dedication to education challenged and inspired me. His belief in the power of free-market ideas and his dedication to empowering students will live on in the programs he built and the lives he changed."

Chris Leach's passing is an immeasurable loss to the world of education and to the W.W. Reynolds Foundation, but his legacy will not fade. His ideas continue to take root, inspiring a new generation of students, educators, and entrepreneurs to think critically, debate freely, and pursue a life of meaning.

We will miss him greatly, but we are comforted knowing that the work he began will continue to thrive and evolve, just as he always envisioned.

Rest in peace, Chris. Your work, your vision, and your spirit live on with the Foundation and within the tens of thousands of minds you've helped develop.