

# [***The Gates Foundation is losing its smarter half, Warren Buffett says***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1D-7RP1-DY7V-G004-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; On Monday, Melinda French Gates [*announced her resignation*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/13/investing/melinda-gates-resigns-foundation/index.html) from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, officially ending one of the world's leading philanthropic partnerships.

If you ask Warren Buffett, the foundation is losing its smarter half.

In a 2008 Fortune profile, the Berkshire Hathaway CEO said French Gates helped focus the foundation's mission. "He's smart as hell, obviously," Buffett said of Microsoft cofounder and former CEO [*Bill Gates*](https://www.cnn.com/2013/05/07/us/bill-gates-fast-facts/index.html). "But in terms of seeing the whole picture, she's smarter," referring to French Gates.

French Gates' departure marks the end of an era for the 24-year-old foundation, which she cofounded with her ex-husband, Bill Gates

"This is not a decision I came to lightly," French Gates said in a statement on social media, announcing that her last day of work would be June 7.

Since its founding in 2000, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has grown into one of the world's largest private charitable organizations, paying out a total of $77.6 billion in grants through the end of 2023.

In her departure announcement, French Gates said she plans to continue her philanthropic work independently, focusing on issues [*affecting women and girls*](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/asequals/anti-gender-equality-threat-explained-as-equals-intl-cmd/) in the United States and around the world. Here's how she became one of the world's preeminent philanthropists.

From early Microsoft hire to billionaire donor

French Gates started her career at Microsoft, where she was hired after graduating from Duke University, according to a 2008 profile in [*Fortune Magazine*](https://fortune.com/2016/03/16/melinda-gates-fortune-classic/). She began her philanthropic life in 1997, one year after she left her job at Microsoft, cofounding the Gates Library Foundation with her then-husband, Bill Gates. The foundation's mission was to help US public libraries offer free internet access, [*according*](https://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/our-story) to the Bill and Melinda Gates' Foundation's website.

That foundation was a precursor to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which officially launched in 2000 with a focus on global health, science and education.

The foundation has launched funds to fight diseases such as AIDS, polio and malaria, fight malnutrition and help women gain access to contraceptives, [*according*](https://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/our-story) to the foundation's website.

"We literally go down the chart of the greatest inequities and give where we can effect the greatest change," French Gates said of the foundation's strategy in Fortune.

After a few years in operation, the foundation got an early boost from Buffett, who pledged a lifetime gift of more than $30 billion dollars to the foundation.

Outside of the foundation, French Gates made a significant impact on the world of philanthropy by helping to create The Giving Pledge in 2010. According to The Giving Pledge's [*website*](https://givingpledge.org/), the pledge, which has more than 240 signatories, is a promise among the world's richest people to dedicate a majority of their wealth to charitable causes during their lifetimes or in their wills.

In addition to French Gates, Gates and Buffett, The Giving Pledge counts billionaires like Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk and MacKenzie Scott as signatories.

"I recognize the absurdity of so much wealth being concentrated in the hands of one person, and I believe the only responsible thing to do with a fortune this size is give it away- as thoughtfully and impactfully as possible," French Gates wrote in her [*pledge letter*](https://givingpledge.org/pledger?pledgerId=428).

French Gates has a net worth of $13.3 billion, according to the [*Bloomberg Billionaires Index*](https://www.bloomberg.com/billionaires/profiles/melinda-f-gates/?embedded-checkout=true), while Bill Gates' net worth is $153 billion. But as part of their agreement when French Gates departed, she will receive an additional $12.5 billion to give away.

Breaking out on her own

Over the past decade, French Gates has increasingly added a new focus to her charitable work: [*gender equality*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/11/business/melinda-gates-money/index.html). She created her own organization, Pivotal Ventures, in 2015. Pivotal is an investment company that "expands opportunity and accelerates equality in the United States through high-impact investments, partnerships and advocacy," [*according*](https://www.pivotalventures.org/about) to its website.

One of Pivotal's earliest grantees was Rutgers' Center for American Women in ***Politics***, which conducts scholarly research about women's political participation in the US.

French Gates' departure from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has been hinted at since the couple [*announced their divorce*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/03/tech/bill-and-melinda-gates-divorce/index.html) in May 2021. She will not continue her work that she was performing at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the organization said Monday. So French Gates hinted at a new path foward.

"I'll be sharing more about what that will look like in the near future," French Gates said in her departure announcement.

By Samantha Delouya, CNN

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