

GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE

QUARTER ONE 2025

BUSH INSTITUTE BRIEFING



The Bush Institute is focused on ensuring opportunity for all,
strengthening democracy, and advancing free societies.



The incredible story of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, nicknamed the Six Triple Eight, came to Engage at the Bush Center, presented by NexPoint. The conversation was moderated by DJuan Wilcher, Deputy Director of Veterans and Military Families at the George W. Bush Institute, and featured Retired Army Col. Edna Cummings; former U.S. Ambassador Nicole Avant, producer of the Netflix film; and Milauna Jackson who portrays Captain Campbell in the Netflix film. Feb. 12, 2025.

(Photo by Grant Miller for the George W. Bush Presidential Center)

A NOTE FROM DAVID J. KRAMER

In this complex environment, the George W. Bush Institute remains focused on our core values that guide our solutions-oriented policy work, designed to bring about a safer and more prosperous future both at home and around the world.

We took our new policy recommendations on ensuring opportunity for everyone, strengthening our democracy, and advancing free societies to Washington in February for lawmakers and the media, including C-SPAN, NBC, and others. An issue of *The Catalyst: A Journal of Ideas from the Bush Institute* titled "[Memos to Washington: Advice for the New Administration](#)" also amplified our ideas.

Helping raise the profile of our democracy, foreign policy, freedom, human rights, and leadership work, we were excited to welcome Nicole Bibbins Sedaca to our full-time staff in the first quarter. The Bush Institute's Kelly and David Pfeil Fellow, she is the former Executive Vice President for Strategy and Programs at Freedom House.

Senior Fellow Dr. Victor Cha testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March on U.S.-Indo-Pacific alliances, and our team submitted a statement for the record for a hearing held by the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa.

Ken Hersh, President and CEO of the Bush Center; Igor Khrestin, the Bradford M. Freeman Managing Director of Global Policy; and I also published an [article](#) about how "America First" shouldn't put Russia second.

We welcomed Oklahoma Senator James Lankford and former Texas Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison to the Bush Center in March for an *Engage at the Bush Center*

event presented by NexPoint, on navigating global policy turbulence. It followed an incredible February *Engage* event on the quiet heroism of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only Women's Army Corps unit of color during World War II and recent recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal.

Immigration and housing gained considerable attention throughout the quarter, and Laura Collins and Cullum Clark, Directors of the Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative, were in the thick of things. They were interviewed by outlets including *POLITICO*, *USA Today*, and *The Dallas Morning News*. Clark spoke regularly on housing and "eds and meds" institutions – the focus of this year's and last year's [Blueprint for Opportunity](#) series.

Our education team was also busy discussing the latest Nation's Report Card data and the government's role in education. In January, Anne Wicks, the Don Evans Family Managing Director of Opportunity and Democracy, and Andrew Kaufmann, Director of Communications and Marketing at the Bush Center, interviewed Mike Morath, Texas State Education Commissioner, on our *Strategerist* podcast.

At the Bush Institute, we will continue to model civility as we work to advance President and Mrs. Bush's values of freedom, opportunity, accountability, and compassion. We thank you for your generous support which makes our efforts possible.

Sincerely,



David J. Kramer
Executive Director, George W. Bush Institute

POLICY IN FOCUS

STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRACY

Following the opening module in January in Philadelphia, the Presidential Leadership Scholars' 10th anniversary class came to the [Bush Center](#) in February to learn about decision-making through the lens of the George W. Bush presidency. President Bush addressed the Scholars, and Mrs. Bush took them on a tour of the Laura W. Bush Native Texas Park. Kelley Jiou, Director of Leadership and Programming, discussed the program during a [live interview with Fox 4](#).

The Bush Institute hosted a convening of Stand-To-Veteran Leadership Program alumni Feb. 21 in Dallas. The event featured former U.S. Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson and Medal of Honor recipient Florent Groberg.

On March 13, Anne Wicks, the Don Evans Family Managing Director of Opportunity and Democracy, co-led a democracy listening session at the Hoover Institution's Civics Learning Week National Forum, as part of our work on pluralism.

Global Policy Director Chris Walsh published “[How to escape groupthink](#)” Feb. 5 in the *Houston Chronicle* as part of a nationwide effort to promote pluralism by Interfaith America and the New Pluralists. The invitation to join the campaign led to a March 12 [profile](#) on the *Pluralism Challenge* in *Interfaith America Magazine*.

Walsh published an [interview](#) with Jon Bennion, a 2018 PLS alum, and an accompanying blog piece on the fourth annual sausage-making event he hosts for incoming members of the Montana Legislature, on March 12. Bennion discusses how the event helps build bipartisanship and advises others on how to develop similar events in their communities.

Andrew Kaufmann, Director of Communications and Marketing, and Senior Editorial Advisor Bill McKenzie hosted a *Strategerist* podcast on [local journalism with Chuck Todd](#), an Emmy award-winning journalist as NBC's Chief Political Analyst and former moderator of *Meet the Press*. It went live March 18.

ADVANCING FREE SOCIETIES

Bush Center President and CEO Ken Hersh spoke about the economic benefits of continued support for Ukraine in January at a [panel](#) hosted by Ukraine House at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

On March 2, Hersh, Bush Institute Executive Director David J. Kramer, and Igor Khrestin, the Bradford M. Freeman Managing Director of Global Policy, published a piece on the Oval Office meeting between President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the need to maintain support for Ukraine. It was cited on-air by MSNBC.

Khrestin [moderated](#) a discussion about Ukraine and Russia policy with John Sullivan, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State and Ambassador to Russia, at the Dallas-Fort Worth World Affairs Council.

On March 2, an [episode of the *Strategerist*](#) debuted featuring Russian democracy activist Natalia Arno. Hosts Andrew Kaufmann, Director of Communications and Marketing, and Global Policy Director Chris Walsh discussed how Arno's nongovernmental organization, the Free Russia Foundation, evolved from her kitchen table to a worldwide organization and has taken the Kremlin head on.

Global Policy Program Manager Hannah Johnson was interviewed by CBS News in March to explain what the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is, the 26 million lives it has saved, and what would happen if the United States were to abruptly

discontinue it. Johnson was quoted twice in POLITICO about why PEPFAR is a [strategic investment](#) in our own national security. Kramer also wrote an [op-ed](#) published in *The Dallas Morning News* on why the State Department was right to grant an emergency humanitarian waiver for PEPFAR.

The Global Policy team submitted a [Statement for the Record](#) for the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa's hearing on China's engagement in Africa, amplifying key policy recommendations such as maintaining PEPFAR and the Millenium Challenge Corporation.

In January, Global Policy Director Natalie Gonnella-Platts, Global Policy Fellow Jessica Ludwig, and Global Policy Senior Program Manager Albert Torres launched the [Taliban Travel Tracker](#) to document United Nations travel ban exemptions for Taliban members and spur action. Gonnella-Platts and Torres were interviewed for a [piece](#) for *The Diplomat*, and Gonnella-Platts was also [interviewed](#) by Afghan outlet AMU TV.

Several Bush Institute [experts reflected](#) on the personal and historical significance of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe after it was temporarily shuttered by an executive order. Torres published a piece in January on the administration's [designation](#) of cartels as foreign terrorist organizations and in February on how Europe must [seize](#) Russian assets.

Global Policy Fellow Jessica Ludwig published a piece in March for the *Struggle for Freedom* series with an [update](#) on Jimmy Lai's show trial in Hong Kong.

ENSURING OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE

In January, Chris Vidaurre, Senior Program Manager of Veterans and Military Families, spoke about Check-In at the Student Veterans of America National Convention. BlueStar Families joined the Veteran Wellness Alliance peer network during the quarter, linking the 1.5 million military families it serves each year with the Alliance's Check-In tool – which connects veterans and their families to no-cost, high-quality, compassionate mental and brain health care.

Veterans and Military Families Deputy Director D'Juan Wilcher was asked to lead policy and advocacy efforts on employment pathways for transitioning veterans for the Milken Institute Veteran Working Group launch in January, bringing our employment policy work to a new audience.

In March, Jason Galui, Director of Veterans and Military Families, and Wilcher attended the Face the Fight Coalition Meeting, the first time the Bush Institute has been represented at the gathering.

Anne Wicks, the Don Evans Family Managing Director of Opportunity and Democracy, and Robin Berkley, the Ann Kimball Johnson Director of Education, did Two-Minute Takes explaining issues such as [school choice](#) and the [role](#) of the federal government in education to explain the Bush Institute's policy priorities.

Wicks presented at a Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) Network Executive Directors meeting about state roles in accountability in February in New Orleans. Berkley opined in a piece for [The 74](#) in March that whatever changes the federal government makes to education, it must keep requiring annual state exams.

Cullum Clark, Director of the Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative, was quoted on our economic growth policies in [POLITICO](#), [USA Today](#), [The Dallas Morning News](#), the [Dallas Business Journal](#), and the [Austin-American Statesman](#). Clark also spoke to about 100 people visiting Dallas as part of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce delegation and was a featured speaker for about 120 Atlanta-area CFOs. He moderated three events in a series

called "North Texas 2050" sponsored by the North Texas Commission. Each was attended by 200+ elected officials, local leaders, nonprofit leaders, and business leaders.

In March, Clark released "[Texas Metropolitan Blueprint 2025](#)" with the University of Texas at Austin LBJ School of Public Affairs and the University of Houston Hobby School of Public Affairs. *The Dallas Morning News* ran an [op-ed](#) by Clark and the LBJ School's Steven Pedigo highlighting the recommendations. Clark continued to raise the visibility of "eds and meds" findings. He spoke to more than 30 University of Texas-Southwestern Medical Center researchers who can act on those recommendations.

Laura Collins, Director of the Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative, was interviewed on immigration issues regularly throughout Q1. Outlets included POLITICO, *USA Today*, the *Arizona Daily Star*, [Los Angeles Times](#), [NBC](#), CBS, Fox 4, and *The Dallas Morning News*. She also went on the *Immigration Nerds* podcast. Collins published three explainer pieces on U.S. immigration policy, one on [immigration executive orders](#), one on the [pause in immigration applications](#) for certain migrants, and another on President Trump's proposed [immigration "gold card."](#) The immigration application explainer garnered over 80,000 page views and attracted attention from national media.



GEORGE W. BUSH
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Located on the SMU campus in Dallas, Texas, the George W. Bush Presidential Center is a nonpartisan institution advancing the timeless values of freedom, opportunity, accountability, and compassion. The Bush Center comprises the George W. Bush Presidential Museum and the George W. Bush Institute, a solution-oriented policy organization focused on ensuring opportunity for all, strengthening democracy, and advancing free societies through policy solutions and public engagement. The Bush Center also houses the George W. Bush Presidential Library, operated by the National Archives and Records Administration, which provides access to official documents and artifacts from the George W. Bush Administration.

Learn more about the Bush Center at

BUSHCENTER.ORG