

GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE

QUARTER ONE 2026

# BUSH INSTITUTE BRIEFING



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

  
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*Shilo Brooks, President and CEO of the George W. Bush Presidential Center, moderated a conversation with Rick Atkinson and Ken Burns.*

## A NOTE FROM DAVID J. KRAMER

Greetings from the Bush Institute, where our commemorations of America's 250th birthday are in full swing!

The latest issue of [The Catalyst: A Journal of Ideas from the Bush Institute](#) tackled "The American idea turns 250" with essays from former top Bush Administration officials Karl Rove, Karen Hughes, and Carlos Gutierrez; Medal of Honor recipient Florent Groberg; and a modern-day descendant of Alexis de Tocqueville, among others. In February, two of the most compelling chroniclers of our nation's founding – acclaimed filmmaker Ken Burns and Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Rick Atkinson – took to our stage to [discuss](#) the framers' dreams, dilemmas, and defining choices.

I'm delighted to introduce [Megan Bunce](#), our new Director of Veterans and Military Families. Megan leads our work to ensure veterans, service members, and their loved ones successfully transition to civilian life. She's had a distinguished career in the veteran space, most recently at The Boeing Company. She is a daughter of a U.S. Air Force fighter pilot, and draws inspiration from her brother, a Marine severely wounded in Iraq.

I also want to highlight a few things we're doing to provide a strong future for this great nation for the next 250 years.

In February, we published "[We the People: Pluralism in Real Life](#)," a plainspoken playbook for community leaders navigating social polarization.

Immigration Policy Director Laura Collins moderated a panel on shared purpose and the urgent need to rebuild trust in

democratic institutions with Republican Governor Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma and Democratic Governor Wes Moore of Maryland at the [National Governors Association](#) meeting in March. Our education team also [partnered with the National Parents Union](#) in March to host a congressional briefing and reception in Washington on the science of reading and shared our [Leading on Reading framework](#) with attendees.

On the global front, marking the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I co-authored a piece with Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau, the Bradford M. Freeman Managing Director of Global Policy, and Igor Khrestin, Senior Advisor of Global Policy, titled "[Ukraine can still win](#)."

We also published the latest chapter in the [PEPFAR Beyond 2030 series](#) on countries and communities likely to be left behind if we turn too much to bilateral agreements. And, more than a month before the Iran war began, Global Policy Director Natalie Gonnella-Platts discussed the situation facing dissidents and why there is "[Hope for the future of Iran](#)."

Our work to build a better future for our nation and our world wouldn't be possible without your support, and we thank you.

Sincerely,



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

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## ENSURING OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE

Cullum Clark, the Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative Fellow, started a new series, [Milestone Moments That Shaped America's Economy](#) with essays on Alexander Hamilton's economic policies and the [birth of America's patent system](#).

Clark spoke at the North Central Texas Council of Governments, on a [Dallas Business Journal](#) panel, and at the Plano Chamber of Commerce and Leadership. He was featured on an [NBC 5 segment on housing affordability in North Texas](#), a Lincoln Institute convening at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, a Greater Dallas Planning Commission event on metropolitan infrastructure, and a national webinar on the future economic role of graduate schools. He published several pieces including "[A record](#)

[year for pro-housing reforms: 2025 in review](#)" and "[Housing challenges in the City of Dallas: Headline facts and possible steps forward](#)."

Immigration Policy Director Laura Collins moderated a panel at the [National Governors Association Winter Meeting](#). Collins also spoke with the [Dallas Morning News](#) on how immigration policy affects the restaurant and hospitality industry and how H-1B tensions are playing out in North Texas communities; she also continued her [monthly newsletter](#).

Collins appeared on [Minnesota Public Radio's statewide call-in](#) show to discuss solutions after the federal immigration crackdown in the state. Andrew Kaufmann, Vice President of Communications and Marketing, moderated a panel of experts including Collins at the American Enterprise Institute/

Bush Institute/SMU Spring Summit and SMU's Public Policy and Administration immersion program. Bush Center CEO Shilo Brooks also did a conversation at this event. Igor Khrestin, Senior Advisor of Global Policy; Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau, the Bradford M. Freeman Managing Director of Global Policy; and Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, the Kelly and David Pfeil Fellow, also appeared.

Fellow Theresa Brown published an immigration [policy report](#) for federal policymakers, outlining ways to move beyond reactive responses and help prevent future border crises. The monthly immigration newsletter also continued to post strong engagement among Hill staffers and immigration experts.

The Veteran and Military Families team used a series of targeted briefings with federal policymakers – including a Feb. 12 briefing with the For Country Caucus, made up of veteran members of Congress – to raise awareness of Check-In and the broader landscape of veteran mental health and well-being. Collins and Blayne Smith, the Veterans and Military Families team's Interim Director of Health and Well-Being, also joined the briefing.

The team also convened the latest Veteran Wellness Alliance gathering in Boston at the end of March, with a focus on veteran mental health and well-being and the [Check-In resource](#).

The education team's March 26 event with the National Parents Union in Washington drew coverage from The Associated Press, Politico, and ABC.

The education team also released a video on what Texas

parents should know about new Education Freedom Accounts and updated the long-running explainer "[An Overview of School Choice](#)."

Following the [Governors Forum on Reading](#) in December, the education team met with 16 participating states and fielded a needs-assessment survey that confirmed continued demand for Bush Institute programming on reading policy. Robin Berkley, the Ann Kimbell Johnson Director of Education; Will Cullen, Program Manager of Education and Opportunity; and Charlotte Schorr, Assistant for Opportunity, provided 24 state-specific versions of their briefing document, [A Republic of Readers](#), to governors unable to attend the December convening and initiated follow-up conversations with education advisors.

The education newsletter went out on [Jan. 29](#), [Feb. 26](#), and [March 31](#), reinforcing the team's message around literacy, assessment, accountability, and opportunity.

Anne Wicks, the Don Evans Family Managing Director of Opportunity and Democracy, spoke at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Master Class on Building Business Leadership for High-Quality Curriculum and moderated a session at the PIE Network Executives' Meeting. Berkley presented the Bush Institute's reading policy framework at the Council of Chief State School Officers Legislative Conference.

Berkley and Senior Fellow Nina Rees [submitted a letter](#) to the Treasury Department and IRS regarding the tax credit for individual contributions to scholarship-granting organizations under the One Big Beautiful Bill.

## ADVANCING FREE SOCIETIES

Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau, the Bradford M. Freeman Managing Director of Global Policy, published a number of pieces since arriving in early January, including one reminding Americans of the [importance of NATO](#).

Hannah Johnson, Deputy Director of Global Policy, published [PEPFAR transition plan: Congress' oversight is crucial](#), in *The Hill* in March, along with [global health newsletters](#) twice a month.

The [U.S.-Afghan Women's Coalition](#), a new Bush Institute-led effort to advance policy, encourage solidarity and action, and elevate the perspectives of Afghan women, children, and other vulnerable populations, launched in March. Global Policy Director Natalie Gonnella-Platts and Ambassador Paula J. Dobriansky, a member of the Bush Institute Advisory Council, published a [Newsweek op-ed](#) linking the coalition to overdue policy action.

Gonnella-Platts published an [article](#) in January on the Taliban's new penal code and what it means for Afghan communities, especially women and children. She also appeared on [The Afghanistan Podcast](#) and highlighted the Bush Institute's Captured State work and the [Taliban Travel Tracker](#).

Trudeau participated in podcasts and panels throughout the quarter on [soft power](#), [transatlantic resilience](#), and [public diplomacy](#).

Executive Director David J. Kramer and Bibbins Sedaca wrote a piece in early January on "[A democratic opportunity for Venezuelans](#)", and Bibbins Sedaca published a *Dallas Morning News* op-ed in March on [what Venezuela would need](#) to hold free and fair elections. Margot Habiby, Deputy Director of Communications, published a [conversation](#) in February with Venezuelan human rights activist Rodrigo Diamanti.

Trudeau and Gonnella-Platts wrote [recommendations](#) in

February for the African Union as the continent's leaders gathered for a summit in South Africa. Trudeau shared the recommendations on a nationwide morning television show.

Habiby published "[The Iran war has sent gasoline prices surging, but not for the reasons you may think](#)" in March.

Chris Walsh wrote a piece in January [defending funding](#) for the National Endowment for Democracy.

Khrestin published an [op-ed](#) with Michael Schiffer in *The Hill* in February on U.S. policy options toward North Korea as well as a *National Review* [op-ed](#) on succession in the Kim

Jong-un regime. Khrestin joined the Center for Strategic and International Studies' [Impossible State podcast](#), moderated by Senior Fellow Victor Cha, to discuss North Korea and the new U.S. national defense strategy. Cha also appeared on [The Strategerist](#) podcast in March discussing China's weaponization of trade.

Walsh, Trudeau, Bibbins Sedaca, and Kramer [offered initial observations](#) on the situation in the Middle East after the start of the U.S. military campaign against Iran.

## STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRACY

The [Democracy Is a Verb](#) series added 12 articles this quarter, including explainers on [political parties](#) and the [freedom of association](#) and a pop-culture piece on how a generation of girls learned history through [American Girl dolls](#).

The Bush Institute partnered with the [Center for News, Technology & Innovation](#) on Jan. 28 to host an off-the-record discussion on growing threats to press freedom in the United States and abroad.

The team also published pieces that advanced local journalism work, such as "[Citizens lose without access to reliable information](#)" and "[Fort Worth Report: Journalism as Part of the Solution](#)." Senior Editorial Advisor William McKenzie's article on the [history of partisan news](#) in America prompted a Canadian television station to interview him on the history of U.S. influence-driven media.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Rick Atkinson sat down with [Strategerist](#) host Andrew Kaufmann to reflect on the idea of perspective and history; how to make judgment calls with 250-year-old material; and how to approach a cliffhanger when the story has been told many times before.

In January, the Presidential Leadership Scholars program announced the 58 members of the Class of 2026. Module One on leadership foundation was held in January in Washington, D.C. Module Two on vision and communication was at the Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock, Arkansas. Module Three on decision-making was held in March at the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas.

PLS' annual alumni survey, conducted in January, had a 47% response rate, representing 277 of 594 active alumni. About 91% reported having the leadership ability they need to achieve positive impact, 88% said PLS improved their leadership approach, 93% said relationships with PLS alumni contributed to their growth as a leader, 82% said they are more likely to consider diverse perspectives when making decisions, 77% are more comfortable having difficult conversations with people who disagree with them, and 88% reported that PLS has influenced their opportunities to make a positive impact.

The Bush Institute entered Q1 2026 with 1,252 alumni across leadership programs.



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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*

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