

GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE

QUARTER TWO 2026

BUSH INSTITUTE BRIEFING



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



FORUM ON
LEADERSHIP



David M. Rubenstein, Co-Founder & Co-Chairman of the Carlyle Group, accepts the 2026 George W. Bush Medal for Distinguished Leadership at the Forum on Leadership in April.

A NOTE FROM DAVID J. KRAMER

Hello from the Bush Institute, where we are gearing up for a busy fall after a jam-packed spring and summer celebrating our nation's semiquincentennial.

The [Forum on Leadership](#) in April focused on the *Heart of America* and [recognized](#) the leadership and heart of three great Americans: David M. Rubenstein, co-founder and co-chairman of the Carlyle Group, was awarded the George W. Bush Medal for Distinguished Leadership; Eboo Patel, founder and president of Interfaith America received the George W. Bush Institute Citation; and Joni Carsell, CEO and president of Texans By Nature, was presented with the George W. Bush Institute Trailblazer Citation.

We were also privileged to host a [conversation](#) on freedom of expression with *New York Times* columnist David French, one on [preserving](#) our natural heritage with National Park Foundation President and CEO Jeff Reinbold and National Park Trust Executive Director Grace Lee, and a [panel](#) on historic milestones with Mark K. Updegrove, LBJ Foundation president and CEO; Michelle Ferrari, 42nd Parallel Films director, producer, and writer; and Richie Butler, senior pastor of St. Luke Community United Methodist Church.

In May, we welcomed author Allison Pataki at the annual [Laura Bush Book Club](#), which celebrates storytelling that enlightens, empowers, and endures.

We published "[Education, Workforce, Opportunity: A Toolkit for State Leaders](#)" in June, outlining policy priorities to provide

opportunities for young Americans. We also rolled out our [Malign Alignment](#) series on how China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea – or CRINK – threaten the United States and our allies and what we can do about it.

Our [More Than a Match](#) digital platform with the ONE Campaign over the summer used the World Cup to explain the economic, civic, and diplomatic ties connecting African countries with the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the 16 host cities.

In our work to develop future leaders, the Presidential Leadership Scholars Program with the presidential centers of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Lyndon B. Johnson, welcomed 57 members into the alumni network, increasing the PLS alumni total to 651. We also convened the eighth cohort of the Stand-To Veteran Leadership Program.

We thank you all for your support, which makes possible our important work promoting our core principles of freedom, opportunity, accountability, and compassion.

Sincerely,



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

ENSURING OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE

[Mrs. Laura Bush's 2026 Summer Reading List for Kids](#) was released in May with titles recommended for the earliest readers through middle schoolers that celebrate America's 250th birthday.

The Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries [announced](#) in May that it had awarded \$1.1 million in library grants to 220 schools from 38 states across the country. The libraries will use the funds to update and diversify their book and print collections.

The monthly [immigration](#) and [education](#) newsletters continued to reach Capitol Hill staff and experts.

The immigration team helped shape public conversations about how immigration policy affects the economy and regional migration. Immigration Policy Director Laura Collins contributed to *New York Times* reporting on the Texas restaurant industry and workforce, while Fellow Theresa Brown discussed her Q1 regional migration report on a policy podcast. Collins also co-authored a [Dallas Morning News](#) [op-ed](#) with Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau, the Bradford M. Freeman Managing Director of Global Policy, arguing that the United States should reverse the decline in international student enrollment.

The [Milestone Moments That Shaped America's Economy](#) series by Cullum Clark, the Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative Fellow, expanded in Q2 with three essays connecting foundational policy choices to current debates. They examined the [right to go into business, transformational infrastructure investments](#) in early America, and the [Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862](#).

In April, the Bush Institute informed Stand-To Veteran Leadership Program alumni that the program will sunset after the current Class of 2026 as the Bush Institute looks to maximize the impact of the 280-member alumni network and its Veterans and Military Families work.

D'Juan Wilcher, Deputy Director of Veterans and Military Families, delivered a June keynote address to campus leaders and military-connected students at the National Veteran Leadership Foundation's Leadership Forum.

Members of the Bush Institute's Veteran Wellness Alliance, which connects high-quality care providers and veteran peer networks to empower veterans to seek treatment, convened in April at Home Base in Boston.

STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRACY

The [Democracy Is a Verb](#) series continued through Q2, bringing the total to more than 36 features. Twelve new pieces used explainers, interviews, and popular culture to make democratic institutions and civic participation accessible, with topics including checks-and-balances, the Supreme Court, jury service, federalism, public service, faith communities, and the nation's Charters of Freedom.

The Strategist podcast featured interviews with biographer [Walter Isaacson](#), former New York [Governor George Pataki](#) and author [Allison Pataki](#), Interfaith America's [Eboo Patel](#), Fox News host [Dana Perino](#), Business Roundtable President and COO [Kristen Silverberg](#), and Momentous Institute Executive Director [Dr. Jessica Gomez](#).

Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, the Kelly and David Pfeil Fellow,

delivered a plenary address on "[American independence and Identity at 250: Examining Democracy in the United States and Globally](#)," in June at a Gordon College conference co-sponsored by the Lilly Network of Church-Related Colleges and Universities, Christians in Political Science, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, the Center for Faith & Inquiry, and the Center for Public Justice.

The 2026 class of Presidential Leadership Scholars wrapped up the program with Module Four on influence and persuasion at the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Module Five on strategic partnerships at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, and the capstone module on reflection, democratic institutions, and the Scholars' continuing responsibility to lead across differences in Philadelphia.

ADVANCING FREE SOCIETIES

On the 23rd anniversary of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR, in May, Global Policy Deputy Director

Hannah Johnson [called for](#) U.S. policymakers, particularly those in Congress, to hold partner governments accountable

for tracking their health investments, ensuring resources are directed to those who need them most, and maximizing efficiency, results, and transparency.

Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau, the Bradford M. Freeman Managing Director of Global Policy, and Johnson published a piece titled "[The compassionate compact: How U.S. foreign assistance can best reflect American values](#)," on how the Millennium Challenge Corporation provides an excellent example of how to weave both compassion and accountability into U.S. foreign policy.

Trudeau and Global Policy Director Natalie Gonnella-Platts published a Mother's Day piece titled "[Mothers at the frontlines of hope](#)," which celebrated moms' persistence as they advocate for their families in conflict zones, refugee camps, prisons, and classrooms.

Trudeau also discussed why sanctions still matter in a piece about the Kremlin going after a teenager titled "[When sanctions become personal: Russia targets Bill Browder's 17-year-old son](#)."

As part of the [Malign Alignment](#) series on the collaboration between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea – or CRINK – Igor Khrestin, Senior Advisor of Global Policy, and Dr. Dave Venable, chairman and president of the Institute for Strategic Risk and Security, published "[Synthetic asymmetry and the CRINK Challenge: A new framework for an emergent threat](#)" in May.

In June, the Bush Institute hosted a Capitol Hill briefing on CRINK for congressional staffers. Representative Young Kim delivered the keynote, and Khrestin, Global Policy Program Manager Joseph Kim, and Senior Fellow Victor Cha presented findings and recommendations. A June 4 virtual panel with the Institute for Strategic Risk and Security, the University of North Texas, and the National Security Institute drew more than 50 participants and extended the policy conversation beyond the Hill.

Khrestin [discussed](#) CRINK at the [Asan Plenum](#) in Seoul, South Korea, and on [The Hill TV](#), while Khrestin, Kim, and Cha joined the Center for Strategic and International Studies' programming and a CBS [The Takeout](#) interview to explain why the four regimes' alignment matters to U.S. interests.

Executive Director David J. Kramer and Trudeau discussed "[Increasing military support for Ukraine to win the war with Russia](#)" in June.

[The Struggle for Freedom](#) series continued to spotlight political prisoners and human-rights defenders at moments of heightened policy attention. We featured Chinese pastor [Ezra Jin](#), Iranian human-rights lawyer [Nasrin Sotoudeh](#), and Iranian wrestler [Sardar Pashaei](#), whose story became the series' first video spotlight.

The [Voices from Iran](#) series elevated anonymized reflections from people living under the regime.



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

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