

GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE

QUARTER FOUR 2025

# BUSH INSTITUTE BRIEFING



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



*Veterans Day weekend Warrior Ride in Crawford, Texas, on Nov. 7, 2025. (Photo by Grant Miller for the George W. Bush Presidential Center)*

## A NOTE FROM DAVID J. KRAMER

Happy New Year from the Bush Institute, where we're kicking off the celebration of America's semiquincentennial, our country's 250th anniversary. Throughout this year, we will continue our focus on the values that made America great – the same values which are dear to President and Mrs. Bush – freedom, opportunity, accountability, and compassion.

Last quarter, I introduced you to the Bush Center's new president and CEO, [Shilo Brooks](#). Today, I'm delighted to introduce another important member of the senior leadership team: [Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau](#) joined the Bush Institute in January as the Bradford M. Freeman managing director of global policy. She previously held senior State and Defense Department roles in Washington and at NATO, in Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa, and the U.K. She already has hit the ground running with some insightful takes on [Iran](#), [NATO](#), and the importance of [soft power](#).

We finished 2025 with a bang, hosting a successful Governors Forum on literacy in December attended by the leaders of 12 states, with representation from 28. We also continue to advocate for veterans, immigration reform, and a strong economy.

In October, we celebrated 10 wonderful years of the [Presidential Leadership Scholars](#) program, which we do together with the presidential centers of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and Lyndon B. Johnson, with many of our 594 alumni. Last fall, *The Catalyst: A Journal of Ideas from the Bush Institute*, tackled "[Building the New American Economy](#)," and we held a successful [Engage at the Bush Center event](#), presented by NexPoint and moderated by Cullum Clark, building on the theme as part of our larger work in support of democratic capitalism.

Please be sure to go to the Bush Museum and view the special exhibit, [Game Changer: United by Sports](#), presented by Garry Weber, which explores how sports are interwoven with American history.

We are excited about the year ahead and know that our work would not be possible without your unwavering support, for which we thank you.

Sincerely,



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

## POLICY IN FOCUS

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### STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRACY

The team launched [Democracy is a Verb](#). Led by Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, the Bush Institute's Kelly and David Pfeil Fellow, this weekly series explains what a healthy democracy looks like as the nation approaches its 250th anniversary.

The Bush Institute co-hosted an [event](#) with More Perfect, the American Journalism Project, and Press Forward on Dec. 16 that underscored the Bush Institute's commitment to a vibrant, locally rooted press.

Chris Walsh, director of freedom and democracy, participated in Interfaith America's U.S. Religious Liberty and Pluralism Roundtable in October, and Anne Wicks, the Don Evans Family managing director of opportunity and democracy, attended the Texas

Lyceum Civility Roundtable in October as part of the organization's Campaign for Civility.

Margot Habiby, deputy director of communications, participated in a conversation on [Patriotism or Nationalism](#) as part of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum's Better Conversations series on Oct. 15. The event was covered by [The Oklahoman](#), [KOCO News 5](#), and [KWTW News 9](#).

Bill McKenzie, senior editorial advisor, published articles on local journalism and civic trust, such as "[Where do rural Texans go for news?](#)," "[Journalism explainer: The role of opinion journalism](#)," and "[The 1960s were just as disruptive as today. Here's how America made it through.](#)"

Walsh also contributed pieces connecting pluralism to civic leadership, including [A Call for Courageous Pluralism](#) and [Mayors Commit to Pluralism and](#)

[American Democracy](#), the latter of which was highlighted in the U.S. Conference of Mayors' newsletter.

The "[Magnificent Seven](#)" – the seventh cohort of the Stand-To Veteran leadership Program – concluded in December, joining the more than 240 alumni across the nation, as related by Will Cullen, program manager of education and opportunity. During the program, which involved reflections at [Arlington National Cemetery](#) described by Megan Dutra, senior manager of communications, the Scholars learned about what Michael Bailey, deputy director of leadership programs, calls "[the power of collaboration](#)."

Román Baca, a member of the class of 2024, [wrote](#) about a visit to the U.N. General Assembly by his contemporary dance company, Exit12, in the fall.

## ENSURING OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE

For the Governors Forum in December, the education team prepared state-specific briefing packets with tailored data, research, and best practices grounded in the [Bush Institute's literacy policy framework](#). The Bipartisan Policy Center presented results from a poll commissioned for the event on how education and literacy are winning policy priorities. Indiana Education Secretary Dr. Katie Jenner appeared on [The Strategerist](#) podcast discussing her state's literacy priorities.

Robin Berkley, the Ann Kimball Johnson director of education, moderated an October Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) Network session that reinforced the value of statewide assessments. Berkley also [submitted testimony](#) to the Texas comptroller on Education Savings Accounts and [released a recording](#) on what parents should know about Texas' replacement state test.

In October, Anne Wicks, the Don Evans Family managing director of opportunity and democracy, moderated a Houston ISD improvement panel directly connecting the Bush Institute's accountability work to on-the-ground school improvement strategies.

Cullum Clark, director of the Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative, concluded his [America the Exceptional](#) series that explained how the United States built the world's best and most effective model for innovation and economic growth.

Laura Collins, who directs our immigration work, shared policy recommendations on immigration at a [panel discussion](#) for the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum's Civil Discourse Series and in a [World Migrants Day article](#) reaffirming the Bush Institute's belief that America benefits from immigration. She took [common immigration questions](#) in a social media conversation.

Check-In, the safe, efficient, reliable tool powered by the Bush Institute's Veteran Wellness Alliance that connects veterans to high-quality compassionate mental and brain health care, added 1,328 connections and 531 referrals in 2025.

Jason Galui, director of veterans and military families (VMF), testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs during the hearing "[A Grateful Nation: Maximizing Veterans' Success after Service](#)" on veteran transition and connecting veterans and their families to high-quality mental and brain health care.

D'Juan Wilcher, deputy director of veterans and military families, spoke on veteran transition and employment at a Veterans Day keynote at SMU, a Military Veteran Community Index (MVCi) [panel hosted](#) by the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in November, the inaugural [Uniformed Services Symposium](#) hosted by Texas Tech University in November, and the Spacepower Conference hosted by the Space Force Association in December. He also published an [op-ed](#) through the Milken Institute that frames veteran transition as a shared civic responsibility in November.

On Veterans Day, President Bush invited a group of veterans to Prairie Chapel Ranch in Crawford, Texas, for mountain-bike riding and to honor their service to our nation.

## ADVANCING FREE SOCIETIES

The new [Unparalleled Partnerships with Africa](#) series by Natalie Gonnella-Platts, director of global policy; Hannah Johnson, deputy director of global policy; and corruption and kleptocracy expert Albert Torres underscores why reprioritizing communities and countries across the continent is critical to U.S. security and economic interests.

In October, Senior Editorial Advisor Bill McKenzie and Gonnella-Platts launched a new interview series on independent media in [Africa](#), featuring initial Q&As with journalists [Philip Obaji Jr.](#) and [James Okong'o](#). Gonnella-Platts and Johnson also published a piece

in November on how the United States must act in response to [Sudan's Darfur genocide](#).

For World AIDS Day, Johnson, Senior Fellow Dr. Deborah L. Birx, and Dr. Bill Steiger coauthored a [piece](#) on the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) which outlined key policy recommendations for the State Department as it works to complete bilateral health agreements with partner countries.

To mark *Go Further's* milestone of 10 million screenings for cervical cancer, the Bush Institute released a [video](#) on the impact of the partnership among PEPFAR, the Bush Institute and UNAIDS, which aims to end AIDS and cervical cancer in sub-Saharan Africa.

Torres and Bush Institute Executive Director David J. Kramer published a series on [Russian corruption in Europe](#) with the Center for the Study of Democracy. Kramer also wrote a number of pieces about how to end [Russia's war against Ukraine](#) and [isolate](#) Russian President Vladimir Putin. In October, Gonnella-Platts authored an [oped](#) for *The Hill* examining first lady Melania Trump's recent advocacy for Ukrainian children abducted by the Putin regime and urging continued U.S. leadership on behalf of Ukraine's missing and targeted children.

Igor Khrestin, senior advisor of global policy, wrote about how rare earths are becoming [the new battlefield](#) between the United States and China.

He published "[The Ukraine Security Guarantee Dilemma Won't Be Easy to Solve](#)" in 1945. He also spoke on a cybersecurity norms panel in October at the 10th annual [CyberFuture Summit](#).

Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, the Bush Institute's Kelly and David Pfeil Fellow, wrote articles in October on how [backing democracy abroad](#) strengthens U.S. economic prosperity and why the [United States should reassert global leadership](#) on religious freedom. In December, she wrote about newly freed [Belarusian political prisoners](#) while more than 1,000 remain unjustly detained.

Gonnella-Platts was cited in a *NY Sun* [article](#) regarding the Taliban's use of kleptocracy in Afghanistan. She and Laura Collins co authored a piece warning against turning our backs on all Afghans in America.

Khrestin and Chris Walsh, director of freedom and democracy, appeared on the [Horns of Dilemma](#) podcast in October about U.S. policy toward North Korea.

The [Struggle for Freedom](#) series on democracy and human rights advocates abroad featured a profile of Chinese journalist [Zhang Zhan](#) by fellow Jessica Ludwig and an update on Hong Kong democracy advocate [Jimmy Lai](#) by Celia Siade-Cox, global policy associate.



*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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