



FALL 2024



The Future of Philanthropy: Honoring Legacy and Maximizing Impact



Tracie

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OUR VISION

State Policy Network is pursuing a vision of an America where personal freedom, innovation, opportunity, and a more peaceful society help all Americans flourish. State Policy Network was founded to support the growth of a collaborative and entrepreneurial network of state think tanks, including 62 independent state think tank affiliates, over 66 state partners in key capacities, and more than 100 national partners.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

State Policy Network's mission is to work side by side with these leaders to catalyze thriving, durable freedom movements in every state, anchored with high-performing, independent think tanks.

OUR STRATEGY

- Incubating organizations and accelerating their development through strategic planning, training, and coaching;
- Connecting talented state leaders so they can learn, challenge, and grow together, with the aim of cultivating state policy solutions that yield national impact; and,
- Promoting federalism and the authority states have to make decisions without federal government intrusion. This, in turn, protects the hard-fought victories of our 50-state Network.

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visit spn.org/staff.

Dear Friends,

The presidential election is on the horizon. Americans are turning to Washington, DC, for what they hope will be solutions to the struggles they face daily. As the cost of living continues to rise, Americans are feeling the crushing weight of the poor policies that have come from the nation's capital.

No matter how the election this November plays out, I can say one thing with certainty: **The states remain the most effective, and most innovative, source of hope for positive policy reform.**

These reforms would not be possible, however, without your partnership. Your support fuels historic victories, carrying them from mere ideas into legislative reality. This issue of *SPN News* features an inside look at the future of philanthropy from leaders of major philanthropic organizations, examining the role you have in improving the lives of Americans and how you can continue to leave a lasting impact for generations to come.

This issue also features good news from somewhere you may not expect—Washington State! For too long the Evergreen State has been deep blue, and the center of many controversial policy decisions, especially in the Seattle area. But, thanks to the efforts of leaders from this Network, things are changing. Our Network leaders have formed a coalition to stop the tide of harmful policies and fight back through important ballot measures that challenge the status quo. You can learn more about this coalition, and what their success means for other blue states, inside.

Our National Partner Spotlight series continues with a profile of one of our newest affiliates—the Cicero Institute—and demonstrates the momentum our Network can have when we work together to pass reform. We also sat down with Carol Platt Liebau, president of the Yankee Institute in Connecticut, to learn more about how she has built the necessary capacities to score big wins for freedom in a politically challenging state.

You'll also have the pleasure of meeting the newest member of our board of directors, Nicole Hoplin, and learning more about her dedication to and record of raising up organizations and leaders to advance free enterprise and liberty. It's been an honor to welcome Nicole to the board and we are confident she will help guide us in the years ahead.

Thank you for all you do to support SPN. Your support fuels policy wins that span the nation and make a tangible impact on the lives of Americans.

Tracie Sharp

Tracie Sharp
President and CEO
State Policy Network



The Future of Philanthropy: Honoring Legacy and Maximizing Impact

Philanthropic leaders gathered at SPN's invitation-only Roe Retreat to discuss strategic philanthropy and mission-driven impact.

President Ronald Reagan famously said in his 1981 inaugural address, “All of us need to be reminded that the federal government did not create the states; the states created the federal government.”

He was a firm believer in the critical role states play in governing their citizens without excess intrusion from the federal government.

President Reagan and his trusted advisor Thomas Roe, a successful businessman from South Carolina, shared a concern that one day, Washington, DC, would extend its influence so much so that people would have less control, and less of a voice, over the decisions that impact their lives. As the story goes, President Reagan challenged Tom *to do something about it*.

And he did.



SPN Supporters and Network leaders convene for the inaugural Roe Retreat in Asheville, NC, to discuss key issues in the states with national implications.

He began to build a movement in the states that would fundamentally reshape American public policy – and American lives. He created a vision of a country where every state had a beacon for freedom that championed free-market policies and defended citizens against threats to their individual liberties. This movement in the states could serve as a firewall against the growth of government in DC and illustrate to the American people why and how problems are best solved closer to home.

Tom launched the first state think tank in his home state. And soon after, leaders from across the country took notice and started their own state think tanks.



MY PARENTS INSTILLED IN US THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CIVIC-MINDED, PATRIOTIC, WELL-EDUCATED, AND ENTREPRENEURIAL—VALUES THAT HAVE STAYED WITH ME TO THIS DAY.

And thus, State Policy Network was launched by Tom Roe in 1992, to bring together this national coalition of think tanks so good ideas spread around the country for national impact.

More than three decades later, SPN has grown into a formidable force with over 100 national partners and 62 independent state-based affiliates advocating for personal freedom, economic opportunity, and free enterprise. To celebrate Tom's legacy and his devoted wife, Shirley, and the incredible Network they established, SPN supporters gathered from across the country in Asheville, North Carolina, for the inaugural **Roe Retreat** to engage in strategic conversations about the critical issues shaping our nation's future.

One of the key discussions held during the retreat focused on the future of philanthropy. Lawson Bader, incoming SPN board chairman and CEO of DonorsTrust, Carrie Tynan, SPN

board member and CEO of the Adolph Coors Foundation, and Garrett Garcia, president of the Garcia Family Foundation and CFO of Pinehill Capital Partners, led an insightful discussion in which they explored the evolving landscape of charitable giving, emphasizing the importance of strategic investments in state and local initiatives to drive lasting change.

Privacy Concerns in Philanthropy

Today, philanthropists are often concerned about the growing issue of donor privacy. Both state and federal levels of government are imposing more stringent regulations, which can create a complex landscape for donors and foundations to navigate. Because of your support, SPN incubated People United for Privacy (PUFP) in 2018, an organization dedicated to advocating for policies that protect donor privacy and free speech. Through legislative efforts, PUFP ensures that individuals can support the causes they care about without fear of retribution from political activists. To date, 20 states have passed donor privacy laws thanks to model legislation crafted by PUFP. This initiative is crucial in maintaining a robust and vibrant philanthropic sector where donors feel secure in the confidentiality of their contributions.

Privacy is not just a compliance issue, but a principle deeply rooted in America's long history of private giving. Ensuring that donors can contribute without reservation is crucial to maintaining the integrity and appeal of philanthropic activities. "Private giving is something that is part of our American history," said Lawson Bader. "The freedom movement is about the institutions safeguarding our values and creating more of those institutions. There are so many different reasons why people choose to give privately, and no nonprofit is required to share its donors or their private information."

Donor Intent and Generational Shifts

Another persistent challenge in the philanthropic sector is the issue of honoring donor intent. Foundations originally established with specific principles, such as those promoting free enterprise, can often drift away from these founding values over time if their leaders are not intentional about honoring the original mission. This “mission creep” can dilute the impact and effectiveness of philanthropic efforts. To avoid this, Carrie Tynan emphasized the importance of aligning current giving strategies with the original mission to uphold donor intent. “As the first family member to lead our organization, it is my privilege and responsibility to ensure that where and in whom we are investing our resources matches our founders’ vision,” said Carrie.



“MY FAMILY AND I ARE DIRECT BENEFICIARIES OF THE AMERICAN DREAM AND WANT TO PRESERVE THAT FOR OTHERS, WE LIKE TO THINK ABOUT OUR FAMILY FOUNDATION AS A WAY TO PERPETUATE VALUES AND PASS THEM ON TO THE NEXT GENERATION.

—Garrett Garcia

Generational shifts also pose a challenge to the mission of foundations and how families and individuals make giving decisions. Younger people today are not giving as much as previous generations, and values can sometimes diverge from those of older generations. This trend necessitates innovative approaches to engage the next generation, as well as contingency planning through donor-advised funds (DAFs). “DAFs provide donors with a flexible and strategic way to manage their charitable giving while ensuring their privacy and maximizing the impact of their contributions,” said Lawson. By leveraging DAFs, donors can navigate regulatory challenges more effectively and continue to support the causes they are passionate about.

The Impact of Strategic Partnerships

As a third-generation American and philanthropist, Garrett Garcia shared that values and strategic planning are essential to ensuring that philanthropy remains impactful, especially with family foundations like Garrett’s. The key is to ensure that future generations align with the mission of the organization and are committed to carrying forward the philanthropic vision. **“My family and I are direct beneficiaries of the American Dream and want to preserve that for others,”** said Garrett. **“We like to think about our family foundation as a way to perpetuate values and pass them on to the next generation.”**

Strategic partnerships are vital in creating lasting impact and driving significant reforms. For example, Carrie Tynan shared about the partnership between Coors and SPN on a request for proposal (RFP) grant program through the foundation’s Excellence First Project. **“The idea was to focus on education, particularly parent empowerment, teacher training, and elevating the stories of students and parents who benefited from education reforms,”** said Carrie. **“Through SPN and their polling and messaging, SPN is helping to amplify our grants by connecting us with a Network of state affiliates to accelerate reforms that are happening in the states.”**

Leaving a Legacy

Thank you for your generous support of SPN and the critical work we are doing together in the states to advance freedom and opportunity. The values we fight for every day are those that you, very likely, feel deeply in your own life and are ones you wish to protect for future generations. As you think about the future and the legacy you want to leave, please consider joining SPN’s **Thomas Roe Legacy Society**.

By joining the **Thomas Roe Legacy Society**, you are preserving the incredible Network we’ve built together over the last 30 years and ensuring there is a voice for freedom in the states no matter what happens in Washington.

“By making a contribution through the Thomas Roe Legacy Society, you not only secure SPN’s mission of building institutions that promote free-market principles but also sustain our efforts to empower the states and uphold those principles for our children and grandchildren,” said Lawson.

To learn more about the Thomas Roe Legacy Society, please contact Nitsa Jennings at legacy@spn.org.



Board Member Spotlight: Nicole Hoplin

SPN is proud to announce the addition of Nicole Hoplin, president of Hoplin Jackson Charitable Advisors, as the newest member of our board of directors.

This spring, SPN's board of directors unanimously voted to bring on Nicole Hoplin as our newest member because of her extensive track record in both philanthropy and the freedom movement, and her strategic counsel that will serve as an invaluable guide to SPN.

"Nicole's dedication to and record of raising up organizations and leaders to advance free enterprise and liberty will be a tremendous asset to our Network leaders and SPN," said Tracie Sharp.

For Nicole, it all started on a dairy farm in northwest Minnesota. Her father managed the family farm, and she and her two brothers were expected to pitch in at an early age, taking care of the land and animals. They had all sorts of freedom at a young age and learned the personal responsibility that came along with it. Hard work was baked into her DNA, as was her commitment to family, faith, and traditional values.

She attended St. Olaf College in Minnesota, and there she met students on campus associated with Young America's Foundation (YAF). She had her "aha" moment meeting people with similar worldviews—a hard thing to find on a predominantly liberal campus. She quickly became involved with College Republicans and soon met the team at the Center of the American Experiment (CAE), a SPN state think tank affiliate. Annette Meeks, who was CEO of CAE at the time and is currently the head of the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota, and other staff mentored her and other young conservatives at the school, inviting them to exclusive lectures and events.

"They helped me see that there were businesspeople and policy leaders who think like me. It was refreshing, invigorating, and inspired me to become more active," said Nicole. "Annette's mentorship fostered courage to be conservative on a college campus in the 1990s. I look back and am so grateful."

After college, Nicole packed up her moving truck and headed to Washington, DC, to work as the assistant to the president of YAF. Development was a major component of her work, and she made contacts with several supporters and got to know



Nicole Hoplin with her husband Eric and their three children.



them as people. She had the opportunity to coauthor a book, *Funding Fathers: The Unsung Heroes of the Conservative Movement*, that profiles several of the most consequential philanthropists who have helped build the freedom movement.

"Philanthropy is so critical on the Center Right. We are outfunded by the Left when you think of the efforts of labor unions, the education establishment, culture, and media. What we're up against is so substantial that conservatives have to do all they can to invest in nonprofits," she said. **"There's no question that donors are the reason why we have such a strong freedom infrastructure today."**

Nicole rose to become a vice president at YAF over her 17-year career at the institution and now serves on its board and that of the Reagan Ranch. Over time, she decided to venture out on her own and start a philanthropic advising company with John Jackson, formerly the executive director of the Adolph Coors Foundation. Through their company, they have advised on millions of dollars of investments and connected philanthropists with worthy organizations.

Nicole's first major engagement with SPN came in 2019 at the Annual Meeting in Colorado Springs, where she was introduced to dozens of leaders in the Network. She and her husband of 22 years, Eric, even brought their three sons to experience a taste of the event. At the Bob Williams Awards Ceremony and Thomas Roe Awards Celebration, they heard about numerous victories that this Network makes possible in partnership with our supporters, and Nicole left inspired to get more involved.

Nicole then joined SPN's first LaunchPad program as a project advisor, seeing firsthand the innovation coming from our state leaders. At LaunchPad, project owners presented new ideas to address pressing issues, including health insurance for small businesses, removing red tape for startups, preserving the Electoral College, and finding alternatives to government unions. She saw the magic in bringing together private-sector experts and nonprofit leaders to take on these challenges rather than relying on top-down mandates from Washington, DC.

"As the federal government is increasingly gridlocked, the action is taking place in the states. SPN has always been ahead of its time, as more nonprofits pivot to build operations in the states," she said. **"No doubt SPN is the most consequential network out there that already exists. The knowledge, strategies, track record of success . . . there really is no better investment a donor can make than to make one with SPN with how it supports so many organizations across the country at the local level."**

We are at a critical time in our nation's history, and we are so grateful to Nicole and our dedicated board of directors for their partnership. For over 32 years, SPN has cultivated free-market leaders and organizations in the states. Today, we have 62 state-based affiliates, 100 national partners, and more than 33 states that have built a "durable freedom infrastructure" of partner organizations such as litigation centers, advocacy organizations, leadership academies, and investigative journalism outlets. Together, we are creating a powerful force in the states pushing back on the chaos in Washington. While



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many focus on the federal battles, there is a lot of opportunity to gain ground if we look to the states as laboratories of democracy from which good policies spread to make national impact.

"Elections come and go, and so do the politicians, for that matter. If you believe in freedom and preserving our country's founding principles, you have to invest in the long term of our country, and that long-term freedom infrastructure SPN provides," Nicole said. "For my three children and their futures, being involved with SPN is one of the most important things I can be doing right now."



The Hoplin family celebrating Halloween at SPN's 2019 Annual Meeting in Colorado Springs.

A New Day in Washington State

Project 42 and Let's Go Washington are putting the political status quo on defense with their innovative durable freedom infrastructure and ballot initiative strategy

Washington is one of the bluest states in America, consistently voting Democratic in federal elections and with a Democratic governor for over three decades. In that time, Washington has become one of the most challenging states to live in and build a business. Crime has gone up, housing and gas prices have soared, and the state ranks high on education spending but low on results. For that reason, and many other policy decisions, more residents are moving out of the state than those moving in.

Some people look at the situation in Washington and think it is hopeless—that the only thing left to do is to leave it behind. But Washington is also a state with significant promise. It is a global leader in aerospace and agriculture. It is home to major tech innovators like Amazon and Microsoft. It has some of the most breathtaking views in all of America with its national parks. It is a state that can turn around, like other states have before, with the right leadership and structure in place to make sure bad ideas don't go unopposed.

About three years ago, the former president of the Washington Policy Center, Dann Mead Smith, decided to take the leap and help create that structure with Sally Poliak, Brian Heywood, Steve Gordon and others. They formed a new organization focused on building a durable freedom infrastructure in Washington State, rooted in the sound economic research from the Washington Policy Center. What that means, put simply, is they wanted to bring together partners with different strengths to complement traditional think tank work that, when put together, build momentum for change.

With Project 42, they created the critical capacities necessary to gain ground in a politically challenging state. **Those include:**

- Policy Research
- Strategic Communications
- Litigation
- Data and Targeting
- Grassroots
- Media and Investigative Journalism
- Candidate Recruitment and Training
- Orchestrating Ballot Initiatives

The organizations are independently run and operated, but they collaborate to advance free-market solutions and stand against harmful policies.

One of those organizations is Let's Go Washington. Founded in 2022 by Brian Heywood, Let's Go Washington has created a way to challenge the status quo at the ballot box. Ballot initiatives are something progressives have deployed successfully for social issues like gay marriage and marijuana legalization to help drive voter turnout. Let's Go Washington saw this mechanism as an opportunity to advance free-market reforms where there isn't likely to be movement from the legislature or governor's office.

Just in the last year, Let's Go Washington launched seven ballot initiatives with enough signatures to go through the legislative process to get on the ballot. More than 320,000 signatures are required to certify, but in the case of these ballot initiatives, they received over 420,000 signatures each. No other organization in the country has ever successfully gotten seven initiatives qualified in one year.

The three most popular initiatives passed the legislature earlier this year with bi-partisan support after significant public pressure and a full-stop campaign from Project 42, Lets Go Washington, and other allied organizations. They built awareness and demand so that it became politically unpopular to vote against them. The other four remain in the hands of voters this November and will serve as both a media and financial distraction for the opposing politicians who also have to worry about winning their elections this fall.

"The ballot initiatives mark an important shift in Washington State politics where progressives are on the defense and having to respond to public pressure in support of free-market ideas," said Dann Mead Smith.

Ballot Initiatives That Passed:

State and Local Income Tax Ban— Washington is one of the few states that does not have an income tax. Despite this, some policymakers have tried to pass one in the last few years, as has the city of Seattle. This initiative bans future attempts to create a state or any local income taxes.

PASSED INTO STATE LAW



I-2111 NO STATE INCOME TAX
• Keep Washington Prosperous



I-2113 REASONABLE POLICE PURSUIT
• No Fake Solutions



I-2081 PARENTAL NOTIFICATION
• Parents Have The Right To Know

On the November Ballot:



I-2117 STOP THE HIDDEN GAS TAX
• The Carbon Tax = Higher Gas Prices



I-2109 REPEAL THE CAPITAL GAINS TAX
• Don't Punish Innovators & Family Businesses



I-2124 OPT OUT OF STATE-RUN LONG TERM CARE COVERAGE ACT • Let Workers Choose



I-2066 STOP THE GAS BAN
• Protect Energy Choice

LET'S GO WASHINGTON
Fix what's broken!

Reasonable Police Pursuit—The legislature and governor said police cannot pursue criminals by car, one claim being that it is racial profiling. This initiative returns the law back to where it was before 2020 and helps protect citizens from dangerous criminals who try to flee police.

Parental Notification—This initiative requires K-12 schools to disclose academic curriculum to parents. There is also a requirement that parents are notified of medical and mental health changes to their children, but that is currently tied up in the courts.

Ballot Initiatives to the Voters:

Stop the Hidden Gas Tax—This measure aims to repeal the state's cap and trade program that is driving up gas prices. Washington gas prices are typically a dollar over the national average and one of the top three most expensive in the country. This initiative was the most popular among those who signed the original six initiatives and is the subject of fierce opposition from the far-left environmental community.

Repeal Capital Gains Income Tax—Washington's capital gains tax levies a 7 percent tax on the sale or exchange of long-term capital assets. Critics such as the Washington Policy Center say it is a step towards a broad base income tax and imposes significant costs on job creators.

Long-Term Care Program Opt Out—The SEIU, a major public sector union in the state, ran a successful ballot initiative that said all home healthcare workers needed to be union members. Then, they helped create a state-run, long-term care program funded by the payroll tax. This initiative would allow citizens to opt out of the program and require the government to stop taking this payroll deduction from every W2 employee in the state's paychecks.

Stop the Natural Gas Ban—The governor and majority Democrat legislators passed a de facto ban on natural gas for businesses, restaurants, and homes. This highly popular initiative would ensure it is not banned and will give people energy choice.

The opposition has spent significant resources and more than \$17 million dollars to fight these initiatives. But ultimately, the decision will be up to voters in November.

Let's Go Washington and their partners are leveraging Project 42's unique capacities—whether it be journalism, research, or grassroots outreach—to educate the public about the issues at stake and what it means for Washington's future.

This strategy is not just for short-term wins, but long-term impact. Now that the structure has been built, the Washington coalition can use the same playbook for different policy battles. What originally took Let's Go Washington six months to accomplish with the first wave of ballot initiatives took them just seven weeks to collect a record number of over 550,000 signatures to qualify the natural gas ban.

"We can replicate success faster, and with the backing of the durable freedom infrastructure, we can start to turn the tide in one of the bluest states in America," said Dann.

**You can read more about Project 42
and Let's Go Washington at
www.pfortytwo.com and
www.letsgowashington.com**



CEO Spotlight: Carol Platt Liebau

YANKEE INSTITUTE

In this series, SPN highlights leaders within our Network who are driving positive change in their states and achieving victories that serve as a model for others.

The third smallest state, Connecticut has a rich history that is deeply entwined with the nation as a whole. One of the original 13 colonies, Connecticut was originally settled by Puritans and over time served as the birthplace of many American staples, including lobster rolls and hamburgers.

In recent years, the Constitution State's legislature has been largely blue. With this overwhelming majority has come a host of policy decisions with negative impacts on the state's residents and businesses. Connecticut has been ranked as one of the nation's most burdensome tax climates, is home to a declining education system, and is expanding an electric vehicle program looking to replace gas vehicles.

While some might take an "all-is-lost" attitude in the face of this adversity, that isn't an option for Yankee Institute. Yankee fights tirelessly every day to expand freedom and serve as a watchdog against harmful government policies. Led by President Carol Platt Liebau, Yankee Institute has remained a beacon of hope in even the toughest of landscapes. It has pushed back against some of the governor's top priorities, like tolls and the electric vehicle mandate, while also instituting positive fiscal reforms, such as a constitutionally mandated spending cap. Thanks to Carol's leadership, Yankee Institute has become a voice that's impossible to ignore.



Carol grew up in St Louis, Missouri, with her two brothers—one older and one her twin. Her father was a doctor at Alton Memorial Hospital while her mother stayed home, took care of the family, and volunteered in the community in several capacities.

After attending an all-girls school from 5th to 12th grade, Carol went on to Princeton University to study at what was then the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. During her time there, she was the editorial chairman of the school's newspaper, an experience that would serve her well in law school.

After graduation, Carol attended Harvard Law School, where she was elected the first female managing editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. This historic appointment came only a year after the *Review* elected its first black president—future president Barack Obama. Law degree in hand, Carol clerked for Reagan appointee Judge David B. Sentelle of the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit and worked as a legislative assistant to Sen. Christopher S. "Kit" Bond of Missouri, for whom she had previously interned doing opposition research. She also practiced law in her hometown.

Time eventually led Carol and her husband to California, where they raised their twin daughters. Carol also worked in freelance policy and writing.

Once her children reached school age, Carol decided to reengage in the political world. She saw that Yankee Institute was looking for a new president and—despite never having worked in state policy—decided to take the leap and apply.

I WAS SO GRATEFUL. I DON'T KNOW WHERE I WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET THAT KIND OF INFORMATION OTHERWISE. I CREDIT SPN WITH A LOT OF THE GROWTH THAT YANKEE INSTITUTE HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE, AND WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO INCREASE OUR OPERATING BUDGET BY ABOUT EIGHT TIMES SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE."

"I believe you bloom where you're planted," says Carol, "and the people of Connecticut get bullied a lot by a state government that takes too much and appreciates them too little. I thought there should be some organization that articulates a principled case for going about things a different way."

SPN facilitated her transition, helping her identify top priorities and cut through the clutter. While Carol had a wide variety of experiences that made her the perfect person for the job, one area she had no experience in was fundraising. Daniel Erspamer, SPN's former vice president of development and current CEO of the Pelican Institute, trained her in the delicate art of asking for money.

"I was so grateful. I don't know where I would have been able to get that kind of information otherwise. I credit SPN with a lot of the growth that Yankee Institute has been able to achieve, and we've been able to increase our operating budget by about eight times since I've been here."

She also joined SPN's CEO peer network, finding support from CEOs at think tanks in states with similar political landscapes. These invaluable relationships helped Carol immerse herself in the think tank world, and she forged many friendships that she continues to hold today.

From the start, Carol's goal was to make Yankee Institute an organization that would represent the interests of people and could present legislators with a more effective way of governing. To Carol, Yankee Institute is the eyes, ears, and voice of those who want a more prosperous Connecticut.

In the time since Carol has taken the helm, Yankee Institute has achieved several significant wins, both offensive and defensive. In 2018, the state legislature sought to implement 72 toll gantries. In addition to the already high gas taxes and road taxes, this would have put a significant burden on Connecticut residents who would have paid an estimated \$240 a month just to commute to work.

Enter Yankee Institute. The organization launched an awareness campaign with a demonstration on the state house lawn. Yankee placed 72 numbered "toll trolls" on the lawn—one for each proposed toll. The campaign was a success, and Yankee Institute was featured in news segments from every major TV station in the state.

The plan worked. Five days before the end of Connecticut's legislative session, the House Speaker postponed the vote due to lack of support.

In recent years, Yankee has had a hand in everything from taking down tax increases, to passing a fiscal guardrails bill outlining what kind of spending the legislature can do, to ending a government union practice that automatically approved any union contract that sat before the legislature for more than 30 days.

Most recently, Yankee Institute tackled one of Governor Ned Lamont's top priorities: an electric vehicle mandate. The law sought to ban all gas-powered vehicles in the state by 2035, requiring any new cars sold to be zero-emission. Yankee Institute



Carol chats with Connecticut governor Ned Lamont during a day at the capitol celebrating Opportunity Scholarships for low-income children.

worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the pernicious reform, urging supporters to reach out directly to their legislators to ask them to push back against it. While the reform was temporarily stalled late last fall, Yankee remains vigilant against attempts to push it through during a special session or immediately following the election this November.

But Yankee isn't always working in opposition to the state's leadership. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Yankee Institute released pandemic policy papers on reducing economic fallout, positioning Connecticut for the end of the pandemic, and emphasizing the value of deregulation not just in a crisis but in the years that follow. The governor adopted three of Yankee's provisions, including the removal of occupational licensing barriers and the creation of a task force to plan for the reopening of the state. Importantly, the task force contained a diverse makeup of residents across the state, including small business owners who are often overlooked.

One powerful tool that Yankee Institute uses to raise awareness around certain topics and reach new audiences is its investigative journalism outlet, the Connecticut Inside Investigator. The award-winning newsroom seeks to tell stories that might never see the light of day in a traditional news outlet.

"People can see through news stories written with bias," says Carol, "but they can't always see through another type of bias—when the story doesn't get written at all."

The Investigator connects with Connecticut residents who may not resonate with the Yankee Institute brand but might be interested in learning more. Dedicated to uncovering government corruption, Connecticut Inside Investigator has broken stories about the Department of Human Services falling down on the job, the botched rollout of legalized marijuana, and sexual harassment scandals.

One recent example of the outlet's impact centers around the Connecticut Green Bank, which was found to be awarding no-bid contracts to its own nonprofit, made up of Green Bank employees. Reporter Marc E. Fitch broke the story on how this nonprofit, Inclusive Prosperity Capital, was requesting bid amounts ranging from 7 to 73 percent higher than the lowest bidder. As a result, Connecticut Green Bank was stripped from a solar bill, allowing municipalities applying for school construction grants to use the contractor of their choice.

In addition to its journalism, Yankee Institute has opened up the Connecticut Center for Educational Excellence, which gives scholarships of up to \$2,500 to K-8 students for use on education-related expenses. The first scholarships were given out due to the COVID-19 pandemic when more and more parents were becoming aware of how their children were being underserved by their schools.

Yankee Institute is also a part of SPN's Organization Accelerator program. In this program, SPN forms a deep connection



Carol and other members of the Yankee team celebrate Opportunity Scholarships at the state capital.

with the organization and helps it think through strategy, messaging, and a host of other organizational positioning topics. To Carol, one of the most beneficial sessions was a branding exercise that helped Yankee refine its brand.

"I'm very grateful for the expertise that SPN shares with us. As we think ahead to strategic planning, priorities, and general strategy, especially in a state where it can be a bit of an uphill battle, the resources and professionals that SPN makes available to us are incredibly helpful."

Carol is excited to implement all that she's learned as Yankee Institute continues to hold the government accountable. The organization is looking toward the renegotiation of government union contracts in the next couple of years and has hired Frank Ricci, a former union member who works with local government officials to train them on negotiating union contracts. His work across the state and country has increased Yankee Institute's influence as well lawmakers' knowledge of the best practices in union negotiation.

As the work continues, Carol looks forward to sharing Yankee's successes with her peers, other CEOs in the SPN Network: "The peer relationships that SPN has fostered have been invaluable. You have a Network of people to consult, to learn from, and occasionally even commiserate with. I treasure the friendships I've forged through SPN, and I've learned so much from other organization leaders."

From Polls to Policy: How Understanding Public Opinion Can Drive Policy Wins

As the presidential election approaches, polling and public opinion have become the focus of major news media. There are dozens of polls that make headlines, but one consistent thread is this: The more we understand American attitudes on issues, the more we can find solutions that reflect the needs of the people.

At the inaugural Roe Retreat in Asheville, North Carolina, American public opinion pollster and president of RMG Research, Inc., Scott Rasmussen, and Lura Forcum, SPN's director of marketing communications, shared key insights into how strategic polling is not just a tool politicians use but can be a strategic lever to effectively communicate to diverse audiences and advance policy initiatives.

Making Policy Ideas Mainstream

Outside the presidential election, there are numerous topics that resonate with voters across the political spectrum, such as economic challenges, healthcare access, education quality, and community safety. Polling trends can uncover these underrepresented issues, providing a more comprehensive picture of what truly matters to people. However, this can only be accomplished if that information is presented in a way that is easily understood. "For those of us in the public policy and political arenas, we speak a different language than the average American," said Scott Rasmussen. "The general public also has values and concerns that we might not see as critical issues or recognize as such. A poll can ask people what they think about a subject, and we need to start by listening to what they're telling us." For example, at SPN's Annual Meeting in 2022, during a strategic messaging breakout session, Lura Forcum and Erin Norman, SPN's Lee Family Fellow and senior director of communications strategies, administered a brief quiz to attendees to assess their knowledge of basic economic principles. "While the national sample scored 46 percent, Annual Meeting attendees scored 91 percent," said Lura Forcum. "This highlights the necessity to tailor our message to the general public to bridge the knowledge gap."



Scott Rasmussen and Lura Forcum discuss public opinion trends at SPN's inaugural Roe Retreat.

Polling Trends and Voting Patterns

The issues that the mainstream media often overlook are crucial to understanding the broader landscape of public opinion and the concerns of the American people. Polling is a window to those perspectives and priorities that shape the electorate. While the mainstream media might highlight a social concern like the US Supreme Court *Dobbs* decision as a defining issue for voters, polling data show otherwise. "What we have seen in our polling data is a shift in the average Americans' perception of the economy," said Scott Rasmussen. "Forty-four percent of voters say that their personal finances are getting worse. Thirty-three percent say they were better off financially 30 years ago than they are today." While inflation and the economy rank as some of the most important issues among voters, immigration and border security rank even higher. As economic

concerns take center stage, the prominence of immigration and border security issues highlights the diverse range of challenges facing voters today.

With this deeper understanding of public opinion, Network leaders can craft messaging to engage key audiences and leverage this support to convince policymakers that their policy proposals reflect the will of the people.

SPN Messaging Helps Identify and Reach New Audiences

Because of you, State Policy Network has developed robust market research capabilities to enhance the Network's strategic communications, ensuring affiliates' messages resonate with Americans across diverse audiences. For example, in partnership with SPN, the **Institute for Reforming Government** conducted focus groups with suburban women in key political districts, revealing an unexpected openness to free-market policies among a demographic presumed to vote in opposition.



**AMERICA'S BEST DAYS
ARE STILL TO COME, BUT
WE HAVE A LOT OF WORK
TO DO TO COMMUNICATE
THAT TO THE AMERICAN
PUBLIC.**

SPN has also conducted research in five states with universal Education Savings Account (ESA) programs to study how families use ESA resources. "Research Erin Norman conducted found that even with the universal ESA program in place, fam-



Scott Rasmussen and SPN president Tracie Sharp at SPN's inaugural Roe Retreat.

ilies were still not signing up for the program. This reaffirmed the importance of implementing these programs effectively, and our Network leaders are actively working on the ground with practitioners to make sure these programs are accessible. It's not enough to pack our bags once an education reform has passed. We need to help families navigate roadblocks they encounter when trying to utilize the program," said Lura.

SPN's polling and messaging work equips our Network with the tools to connect with citizens and achieve policy victories. By conducting in-depth market research and strategic polling, we provide our affiliates with valuable insights into public opinion. **"America's best days are still to come, but we have a lot of work to do to communicate that to the American public,"** said Scott Rasmussen. **"Our movement should position itself as the champion of freedom and equality, emphasizing these core American ideals. Our message to Americans should not merely criticize those who might disagree with us politically but should clearly articulate our vision for a society grounded in our founding principles."**

STATE AFFILIATES

Our Network of 62 independent state think tanks plays a vital role in society by providing reliable research, analysis, and education to help lawmakers develop and advance policies that serve their communities. For more information, visit spn.org.

ALABAMA

Alabama Policy Institute
alabamapolicy.org

ALASKA

Alaska Policy Forum
alaskapolicyforum.org

ARIZONA

Goldwater Institute
goldwaterinstitute.org

ARKANSAS

Arkansas Policy Foundation
arkansaspolicyfoundation.org

Opportunity Arkansas
OpportunityArkansas.org

CALIFORNIA

California Policy Center
californiapolicycenter.org

Pacific Research Institute
pacificresearch.org

COLORADO

Independence Institute
i2i.org

CONNECTICUT

Yankee Institute for Public Policy
yankeeinstitute.org

DELAWARE

Caesar Rodney Institute
caesarrodney.org

FLORIDA

Foundation for Government Accountability
thefga.org

The James Madison Institute
jamesmadison.org

GEORGIA

Georgia Center for Opportunity
georgiaopportunity.org

Georgia Public Policy Foundation
georgiapolicy.org

HAWAII

Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
grassrootinstitute.org

IDAHO

Idaho Freedom Foundation
idahofreedom.org

Mountain States Policy Center
mountainstatespolicy.org

ILLINOIS

Illinois Policy Institute
illinoispolicy.org

INDIANA

Indiana Policy Review Foundation
inpolicy.org

IOWA

Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation
taxrelief.org

KANSAS

Kansas Policy Institute
kansaspolicy.org

KENTUCKY

Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions
bipps.org

LOUISIANA

Pelican Institute for Public Policy
pelicaninstitute.org

MAINE

Maine Policy Institute
mainepolicy.org

MASSACHUSETTS

Pioneer Institute
pioneerinstitute.org

MICHIGAN

Mackinac Center for Public Policy
mackinac.org

MINNESOTA

Center of the American Experiment
americanexperiment.org

Freedom Foundation of Minnesota
freedomfoundationofminnesota.com

MISSISSIPPI

Empower Mississippi Foundation
empowerms.org

Mississippi Center for Public Policy
mspolicy.org

MISSOURI

Show-Me Institute
showmeinstitute.org

MONTANA

Frontier Institute
frontierinstitute.org

NEBRASKA

Platte Institute for Economic Research
platteinstitute.org

NEVADA

Nevada Policy
npri.org

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy
jbartlett.org

NEW JERSEY

Garden State Initiative
gardenstateinitiative.org

NEW MEXICO

Rio Grande Foundation
riograndefoundation.org

NEW YORK

Empire Center
empirecenter.org

NORTH CAROLINA

John Locke Foundation
johnlocke.org

NORTH DAKOTA

Roughrider Policy Center
roughriderpolicy.org

OHIO

The Buckeye Institute
buckeyeinstitute.org

OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs
ocpathink.org

OREGON

Cascade Policy Institute
cascadepolicy.org

PENNSYLVANIA

Commonwealth Foundation
commonwealthfoundation.org

RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island Center for Freedom & Prosperity
rifreedom.org

SOUTH CAROLINA

Palmetto Promise Institute
palmettopromise.org

South Carolina Policy Council
scpolycouncil.org

SOUTH DAKOTA

Great Plains Public Policy Institute
greatplainsppi.org

TENNESSEE

Beacon Center of Tennessee
beacontn.org

TEXAS

Texas Public Policy Foundation
texaspolicy.com

UTAH

Libertas Institute
libertasutah.org

Sutherland Institute
sutherlandinstitute.org

VIRGINIA

Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy
thomasjeffersoninst.org

Virginia Institute for Public Policy
virginiainstitute.org

WASHINGTON

Freedom Foundation
freedomfoundation.com

Washington Policy Center
washingtonpolicy.org

WEST VIRGINIA

Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy
cardinalinstitute.com

WISCONSIN

Badger Institute
badgerinstitute.org

Institute for Reforming Government
reforminggovernment.org

MacIver Institute for Public Policy
maciverinstitute.com

Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty
will-law.org

WYOMING

Wyoming Liberty Group
wyliberty.org

The updates provided reflect activities by the time of submission for publication. For real-time updates from the Network, please visit SPN.org.



ALABAMA

ALABAMA POLICY INSTITUTE • alabamapolicy.org

Alabama Policy Institute's top legislative priority in 2024 was the enactment of universal school choice legislation. The CHOOSE (Creating Hope and Opportunity for Our Students' Education) Act was signed into law on March 8, 2024. The legislation was the first in the nation to pass in 2024 and is a top Education Savings Account (ESA) program to be modeled nationwide. Students under 300 percent of the poverty line are eligible for ESA funds beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, with every single student in the state eligible by 2027-2028. API worked tirelessly for a year and a half with the governor, her staff, and countless lawmakers to make universal school choice in Alabama a reality. Prior to the start of the session, the (API) published and trained dozens on legislators regarding our "BluePrint for Alabama." The agenda outlines 30 conservative policy reforms; 12 of those issues have been successfully addressed thus far, with Universal School Choice leading the way.



ALASKA

ALASKA POLICY FORUM • alaskapolicyforum.org

Alaska Policy Forum's successful translation of research into action has forced a hard look at education this session. To stall passage of a bill that would have increased education funding with no accountability for outcomes, APF produced "10 Facts About Alaska's Education Landscape" and distributed the report to key legislators that same night. Governor Mike Dunleavy has advocated for several policy proposals, such as multiple charter authorizers and increasing the per-student funding for correspondence students, that originated in APF invited testimony in 2023. Op-eds from APF's senior education fellow and board member Bob Griffin in the *Anchorage Daily News*, *Must Read Alaska*, and others generated fierce debate. While no compromise bill has been passed as of this writing, APF's research has shone a spotlight on Alaska's dismal education outcomes and the need to support more education choice. APF has also been a central piece of support for Alaska's unique correspondence school allotment program, which gives more than 22,000 students a customized and flexible education. While the Alaska superior court struck down the allotment program in April 2024, APF remains hopeful that a Supreme Court challenge will vindicate the program.

ARIZONA

GOLDWATER INSTITUTE • goldwaterinstitute.org

The **Goldwater Institute's** multi-year effort to combat Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives continued in 2024, resulting in win after state win in the fight to free academia from the chokehold of progressive identity politics. Working closely with numerous law-makers and state policy groups, the Institute engaged on dozens of state bills designed to defeat diversity statements in university hiring practices, expressly eliminate public funding for DEI offices and discriminatory trainings, and ensure that students and faculty alike are freed from mandatory, DEI-centric training or curriculum requirements. These reforms, including Goldwater's Freedom from Indoctrination Act and Abolish DEI Bureaucracies Act, work hand in hand to ensure academic freedom at universities nationwide. Alongside Goldwater's university-level efforts, the Institute continued to introduce and advance state measures to empower parents with full visibility into K-12 classrooms. Goldwater's Academic Transparency Act protects the right of parents to see all materials used in the classroom, including supplemental materials that might not otherwise be disclosed.



ARKANSAS

ARKANSAS POLICY FOUNDATION • arkansaspolicyfoundation.org

The **Arkansas Policy Foundation** continues to inform Arkansas state policymakers that further reductions in the state income tax rate are possible as a result of ongoing revenue surpluses. Since 2013, the Arkansas income tax rate has been reduced from 7.0 percent to 4.4 percent, a recommendation first made by the Policy Foundation in a 1998 study. Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders; her predecessor, former Governor Asa Hutchinson; and state legislators have used surpluses to reduce the rate multiple times and return funds to taxpayers. The Policy Foundation has briefed policymakers that surpluses are not one-time events and will continue as the economy grows. Foundation research has noted national economic expansions tend to produce state revenue surpluses. In the past decade, cumulative Arkansas surpluses have exceeded several billion dollars. Instead of spending the funds on new programs, policymakers have moved to make Arkansas' income tax rate more competitive with low-tax states in the region.





OPPORTUNITY ARKANSAS • opportunityarkansas.org

While Arkansas did not have a regular legislative session this year, the fight for freedom continued just the same: In a special session in June, Arkansas lawmakers passed yet another income tax cut, bringing Arkansas' top personal rate down to 3.9 percent, now one of the lowest in the region. This is the third round of income tax cuts in 18 months and **Opportunity Arkansas** has played and will continue to play a key role in helping shape this debate as Arkansas continues its march to no state income tax. OA also achieved a major win by protecting education freedom. In partnership with other in-state allies, OA launched the For AR Families initiative which worked to educate Arkansans on the dangers of the union-backed, misleading "Education Rights Amendment" that would have created multiple welfare programs and ended education freedom. OA's educational video about the dangers of this amendment drew tens of thousands of views; dozens of media hits on local TV, national outlets, local print outlets, and state and regional talk radio reached Arkansans across the state. OA also broke the news that Leftist organizers were planning to gather signatures in a major county jail, likely a violation of state law. Once the news broke, the plans were scrapped by county officials. OA also crafted the first and only cost estimate of the proposal, and it became a core component of the debate. The amendment fell significantly short of reaching the ballot, despite having more time to gather signatures than other initiative campaigns. OA will remain vigilant and engaged to protect education freedom from any future attacks, but it's clear the people of Arkansas education freedom.

CALIFORNIA



PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE • pacificresearch.org

Pacific Research Institute has made it a priority to educate state lawmakers about market-based reforms to help the state solve long-term challenges like healthcare reform. In February, PRI's annual California Ideas in Action conference drew a sell-out crowd right across the street from the Capitol in Sacramento and featured PRI scholars, policymakers, and experts discussing realistic and actionable free-market reforms on homelessness, crime, the public school achievement gap, and green mandates. PRI also released a series of "Spending Watch" analyses providing lawmakers, staff, and advocates with powerful insight on the impact of key legislation on the state budget, taxes, the economy, unemployment, and outmigration. PRI's Dr. Wayne Winegarden released analyses showing the negative impact reparations, single-payer health care, a wealth tax, expanding unemployment benefits, and Governor Gavin Newsom's state budget proposal would have on Californians. Another issue where PRI has engaged this session is the push by states for Medicare expansion. President, CEO, and Thomas W. Smith Fellow in Health Care Policy Sally Pipes offered her thoughts on healthcare reform with members of the US House Budget Committee, which has established a Healthcare Task Force. The Budget Committee shared Pipes' recent Forbes op-ed urging governors to reject Medicaid expansion in a press release connecting her thoughts with the committee's work on healthcare reform. PRI also held well-attended events statewide educating Californians about the need for free-market reform, featuring speakers Deroy Murdock, Steve Moore, Batya Ungar-Sargon, Gordon Chang, and featuring Victor Davis Hanson.

COLORADO

INDEPENDENCE INSTITUTE • i2i.org

The 2024 legislative session saw Colorado lawmakers take steps to implement **Independence Institute's** preferred policy for income tax reform. SB 228, passed with bipartisan support, would initiate automatic income tax rate reductions in years when the state is required to refund surplus revenue to taxpayers under the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) in Colorado's Constitution. The size of the tax cuts would vary based on the state's TABOR surplus totals from year to year, but it is projected to effectively cut Colorado's flat income tax rate from 4.4 percent to 4.25 percent when the surplus is greater than \$1.5 billion, as it is currently. That translates into a tax cut of more than \$480 million in the 2025 tax year. While it would not create a permanent tax cut of the kind Independence Institute has successfully achieved at the ballot twice in the past four years, its basic mechanism of using the TABOR surplus to buy down the income tax rate is one the Institute has championed for years. It is a good step in the right direction on the state's eventual path to zero income tax.



**INDEPENDENCE
INSTITUTE.ORG**

CONNECTICUT

YANKEE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • yankeeinstitute.org

Yankee Institute was pleased to bring an electric vehicle mandate on Connecticut's residents and businesses to a screeching stop. YI not only stopped the mandates from being imposed through regulatory action late last year, but also nixed calls for a special session in January to pass EV legislation, and then managed to stymie a related bill that was introduced during this year's regular session. YI also composted a massive environmental bill full of pernicious regulations, framing it as "The Green Monster." The unflattering nomenclature came to define the debate and the term was used by popular media and opponents and proponents of the bill alike. YI's push for a tax-credit scholarship program advanced via three Day at the Capitol events alongside the Connecticut Center for Educational Excellence and YI's network of supporters. This reform will be a top priority during next year's session. YI was also gratified to be able to advance policies to lower occupational licensing barriers, which will receive bipartisan support going forward.



DELAWARE

CAESAR RODNEY INSTITUTE • caesarrodney.org

The **Caesar Rodney Institute** advanced its initiative to recycle used nuclear fuel rods and develop a specialized reactor. The US House of Representatives incorporated Caesar Rodney's amendment into the Atomic Energy Advancement Act, which passed with overwhelming support, tallying 365–36. This success builds upon a similar achievement in the Senate 18 months earlier. The Caesar Rodney team collaborated primarily with Rep. Byron Donalds, vice chairman of the Energy & Natural Resources Committee. Following a publication in *The Wall Street Journal*, the Institute connected with the chairman of the committee, Rep. Jeff Duncan, along with his staff and the committee's staff. They all expressed enthusiasm for enhancing the amendment by allocating funding from the "Nuclear Waste Fund," establishing a dedicated agency for this endeavor, and setting a target of achieving commercial-ready technical success by 2030. The Institute is pursuing a comparable strategy in the US Senate by working closely with Sen. Tom Carper's office.





FLORIDA

FREEDOM FOUNDATION • freedomfoundation.com

Since the passage of SB 256 in 2023, over 63,000 public employees in Florida have decertified their unions. The **Freedom Foundation** has been running active campaigns all over the state to assist public employees in efforts to eliminate their unions entirely or replace them with local associations that truly represent workers values and not a political agenda.



GEORGIA

GEORGIA CENTER FOR OPPORTUNITY • georgiaopportunity.org

Georgia took a step forward this legislative session on an ESA bill that would expand educational options to students in underperforming schools in the state. The **Georgia Center for Opportunity**, along with multiple partners in the state, has helped message about the value school choice can bring to underserved kids and communities. This helped inform legislators on a bill that will have the biggest impact on those in need. It is a crucial first step to opening up options to all kids in the state.



GEORGIA PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION • georgiapolicy.org

This year, the Georgia legislature adopted the state's first Education Savings Account program, an issue the **Georgia Public Policy Foundation** has pursued for nearly a decade. The Foundation worked with a coalition of local and national partners to educate lawmakers about the benefits of expanding educational options through the Promise Scholarship Act. From 2023 to 2024, Foundation staff met with more than 50 lawmakers from both parties, including both Democrats who voted for the bill, as well as staff from the governor's office. The Foundation worked particularly closely with House Republican leadership on changes to the bill that would attract more support from their caucus members, and to push back on changes that would weaken the bill. The Foundation's digital media efforts reached more than 900,000 people more than 3.5 million times on this issue in key districts throughout the state over the past year, helping to triple the Foundation's email list. The Foundation has begun educating the public about the program and options many parents in Georgia will now have.



HAWAII

GRASSROOT INSTITUTE OF HAWAII • grassrootinstitute.org

Years of advocating tax cuts to lower Hawaii's cost of living and help revive its economy finally paid off this year for the **Grassroot Institute of Hawaii** as the state legislature unanimously approved a historic proposal by Governor Josh Green to significantly reform the state income tax. The changes—extremely uncommon in blue-state Hawaii—included increasing the standard and personal deductions and incrementally increasing the sizes of the tax brackets to offset inflation. Hawaii's income tax burden will now drop from second highest in the nation to one of the lowest. Economists estimate that a median-income family of four in Hawaii will see a 69 percent decrease in its annual state income tax bill by 2031, while state taxpayers in general will save upward of \$5 billion. In conversations with Grassroot staff, the governor and state tax officials have credited Grassroot with being integral to passage of the cut, and even to convincing them to pursue the idea in the first place. Another tax-reduction bill approved unanimously that Grassroot promoted heavily will remove Hawaii as the only state left to tax Medicare, Medicaid, or TRICARE payments for medical or dental services. This is expected to save taxpayers up to \$50 million a year.

At the same time, Grassroot saved Hawaii taxpayers additional millions of dollars by helping kill a raft of tax increases, such as a carbon tax, various conveyance tax increases, a “surcharge” on county property taxes, new taxes on tourists, and a tax to help stabilize the local insurance market.

IDAHO

IDAHO FREEDOM FOUNDATION • idahofreedom.org

After years of prodding by the **Idaho Freedom Foundation**, legislative budget writers agreed to take historic steps to revise the process for voting on agency budgets. This will reduce Idaho’s out-of-control spending and afford lawmakers more opportunities to question—and vote down—proposals for bigger government. Still, Idaho lawmakers proved again that they’re generally not as conservative as they let on. IFF did manage to convince lawmakers to defeat a school entitlement program. And lawmakers completed efforts, which started in 2023, to eliminate a government-run needle exchange program. However, there is more work to do, as lawmakers voted to expand Medicaid again and rejected a modest school choice proposal, among other disappointments.

This is why IFF is working diligently to get the Idaho Freedom Index—the most comprehensive analysis of bills and legislative voting in the country—in the hands of as many Idahoans as possible. The goal is to distribute 50,000 copies of the Index so Idahoans will better understand what is really going on in Boise. Further, in an effort to educate Idahoans on out-of-control spending and mismanaged priorities, new IFF President Ron Nate has released an updated report on government waste in the state. When IFF started in 2009, the Pork Report was its first research project. It not only exposed inappropriate spending and useless programs, but it woke Idahoans up to the reality that their state and local governments are not as thoughtful about waste, cronyism, and corruption as they believed they were. IFF’s original Pork Report led to a number of policy changes that remain in effect today. The updated Pork Report will be released by the end of 2024.



ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE • illinoispolicy.org

The **Illinois Policy Institute** ran a comprehensive campaign this spring urging Chicago voters to reject a real estate transfer tax increase referendum on the March 19 primary ballot. The ballot measure was put forward by the mayor’s office as a so-called solution to homelessness and was backed by the Chicago Teachers Union, but Institute research showed there was no reliable plan for the revenue and new taxpayer money would likely become a slush fund for the mayor. In a Blue city, the measure was widely expected to pass. Thanks to the Institute’s efforts, voters rejected the measure (53.2 percent to 46.8 percent). This has now completely shifted the conversation around affordable housing in Chicago and more free-market reforms are being presented and considered. The mayor’s office recently released a “Cut the Tape” report with a number of pro-taxpayer recommendations focused on streamlining the approval process for construction projects. If implemented, these measures will result in greater housing availability and reduced cost—and ultimately a better environment for those who live and work in it.





IOWA

IOWANS FOR TAX RELIEF FOUNDATION • taxrelief.org

Iowa's 2024 legislative session concluded with several crucial victories for taxpayers and limited government. Going into the session, **Iowans For Tax Relief Foundation** placed a priority on income tax reform. At the beginning of the session, the Foundation published *Accelerate, Lower, and Eliminate: A Pro-Growth Blueprint to Make Iowa's Tax Code More Competitive*, which outlined a pathway to not only further lower income tax rates but also place the income tax on a path toward elimination. The ideas contained within this report helped define the debate over tax policy. The legislature would pass a pro-growth tax measure that accelerates further rate reductions and fully phases in a 3.8 percent flat tax starting in 2025.

ITR Foundation also helped to advance two important taxpayer protections, which will appear as state constitutional amendments. The first would require a two-thirds majority vote of the legislature to increase the income tax and the second would constitutionally protect the flat tax. Both taxpayer protections have the potential to appear on the ballot in 2026.

Finally, ITR Foundation helped to advance further regulatory and state government reform. The legislature passed another regulatory reform measure which requires a cost benefit analysis on new regulations, and it improves legislative oversight on new and existing regulations. Building upon the previous state government reforms, ITR Foundation also helped consolidate state boards and commissions and creates and strengthens legislative oversight.

KANSAS

KANSAS POLICY INSTITUTE • kansaspolicy.org

This year, A huge personal liberty victory was achieved through much-needed legislative reform on asset forfeiture. Kansas' civil asset forfeiture process was unjustly skewed in the government's favor and against property owners for far too long. Between 2019 and 2021, Kansas had \$21.3 million in property seized by law enforcement and only 8 percent was recouped by property owners. **Kansas Policy Institute's** goals have been to prevent innocent Kansans from being caught on the wrong side of this process, ensure due process, and put the focus on those truly committing crimes.

KPI has accomplished pathbreaking victories for property owners through its litigation outfit, Kansas Justice Institute (KJI). KJI helped the innocent owner of a classic car in the 2022 session and also helped a woman get her car back that was taken from her for more than eight months even though she was not charged with a crime. While KJI assists Kansans who have had their property rights wrongly violated through litigation, the fight was also taken to the statehouse this year. After years of work, a bill was passed this year that provides more accountability and raises the burden of proof, limits federal adoptions, and requires the government to pay reasonable attorney fees to successful property owners—among other reforms. While there is still more work to do, this is a solid victory for liberty in Kansas.



KENTUCKY

BLUEGRASS INSTITUTE

While the **Bluegrass Institute** has helped create and advance education freedom bills in recent years, unfortunate legal challenges have necessitated amending the state constitution. Amendment 2 on November's ballot does not create specific policy but removes legal barriers to expanding education-freedom opportunities like those available in most other states, including all seven neighboring ones. Bluegrass' commitment to delivering the unvarnished data-driven truth about what's happening with K-12 education within school-choice-less Kentucky compared to the strides being made in states like school-choice-rich Florida resulted in gaining the support during the 2024 General Assembly of 92 (of 138) lawmakers to include Amendment 2 on this year's ballot. The state constitution limits consideration of ballot amendments to even-numbered years. The legislation was HB 2, indicating that 20 years of the Bluegrass Institute's researching, educating, and persuading has resulted in education freedom becoming the highest legislative priority outside of the state budget. Along this journey, which began in the education wilderness, Bluegrass has been joined by a coalition of state and national partners—including the State Policy Network.



LOUISIANA

PELICAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • pelicaninstitute.org

The **Pelican Institute for Public Policy** has spearheaded several legislative victories in Louisiana this session, marking crucial steps toward writing the state's comeback story. Louisiana ranks among the nation's most regulated states. Two bills passed by the legislature will begin to upend that by requiring universal licensing recognition and ending the state's distinction as the only state requiring licensure for florists. The new law streamlines the process for professionals moving to Louisiana.

Lawmakers also passed K-12 education reforms to empower families to access a school or educational program that fits the individual needs of their child. They established a universal Education Savings Account program, amended charter school law to streamline the authorization process for charter operators that partner with corporate or nonprofit entities, and strengthened the role of parents in the state's longstanding Course Choice program that allows students to take courses not offered at their home school. The Louisiana Legislature also enacted several meaningful insurance reforms, including a regulatory sandbox program that signals an openness to innovation and removal of regulatory barriers that hurt businesses and consumers. These initiatives mark the beginning of bold, transformative reforms paving the way for Louisiana's full comeback story.





MAINE

MAINE POLICY INSTITUTE • mainepolicy.org

Maine Policy's biggest win this legislative session was stopping the adoption of electric vehicle (EV) mandates and changing the rule standard for these regulations to major substantive rules, which require legislative approval moving forward. Maine has an arcane law that allows citizens to submit 150 signatures to force an executive branch department to consider a regulation. A coalition of environmental groups submitted enough signatures to require the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to consider adoption of California-style Advanced Clean Cars rules. Maine Policy mobilized thousands of Mainers to submit public comment in opposition to the regulations. In March, the DEP rejected those rules by a 4-2 vote. Following the vote, Maine Policy worked with lawmakers to pass a bi-partisan measure that requires legislative approval of any new EV mandates in the future. Now, Mainers cannot be forced by unelected bureaucrats to purchase electric vehicles, and if Maine is to ever move in this direction, voters will be able to directly hold their lawmakers accountable.

MICHIGAN

MACKINAC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY • mackinac.org

Making Michigan a more transparent state has been a persistent goal of the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy**. The state has consistently ranked among the least transparent nationwide, largely due to the fact that Michigan's Freedom of Information Act does not apply to the governor or the legislature. This year, however, marks a turning point with the passage of Senate bills 669 and 670, which aim to extend FOIA to these important areas of government.

While there are improvements that can be made, these bills represent a substantial step in the right direction by granting citizens significantly greater access to public records and have garnered bipartisan support. The Mackinac Center is part of a broad coalition of transparency advocates and has been sought as a leading expert on these bills. The Center has been vocal about its support, testifying on behalf of the bills and appearing in news stories across the state. Michigan is now on the verge of a significant legislative victory; the bills passed through the Senate and are likely to pass the House with the governor's support.

Another victory from this legislative session came as part of Michigan's 2025 budget, which included a provision credited to a Mackinac Center study. The study revealed that prison education programs significantly reduce recidivism and increase employment for ex-offenders. This led to a \$3.9 million investment to convert a state correctional facility into an educational center, highlighting the positive impact of these programs on public safety and taxpayer savings.

MINNESOTA

CENTER OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT • americanexperiment.org

Governor Tim Walz never misses an opportunity to borrow bad policy ideas from California. This session, Walz and his allies in the legislature proposed a new stealth gas tax that will be worse than California's crazy fuel standards. The "Clean Transportation Standard," or CTS, would make Minnesota's mandates the most extreme and most expensive in the country, surpassing California, Oregon, and Washington.

Center of the American Experiment fought the proposal with an advocacy campaign, legislative testimony, and two separate reports. The first report told legislators how much the CTS would impact the price of a gallon of gas while the second report broke down that cost by county, showing how drivers in rural counties would experience much higher cost increases due to the amount of miles driven. The Center also launched a campaign against the proposal called No Gas Station Inflation that sent thousands of emails to legislators. Because of these efforts, the bill was reduced to a study in 2024. American Experiment will be ready when this bad policy idea returns in future legislative sessions.

FREEDOM FOUNDATION OF MINNESOTA • freedomfoundationofminnesota.com

Minnesotans have just witnessed the end of an exhausting and highly partisan biannual legislative session that if left unchallenged, will result in a radical transformation of this great state. During these past eighteen months, the newly elected liberal trifecta government increased state spending by nearly 40 percent, depleted a \$17.5 billion budget surplus, and passed legislation that will dramatically change the culture of a deeply and nearly evenly divided state. The **Freedom Foundation of Minnesota** doesn't believe that most Minnesotans want to live in a "cold California" and has developed a plan to equip like-minded Minnesotans to join in making a difference. On November 5, 2024, all 134 seats in the Minnesota House of Representatives are on the ballot. And thankfully, Minnesotans, from all corners of the state have stepped forward, volunteering as candidates, eager to make a difference at the Capitol. Earlier this year, the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota, in conjunction with other market-based organizations, began hosting leadership training seminars to better prepare candidates to run, win, and lead. These policy, messaging, and speaker training seminars will offer candidates an agenda for economic growth, sustainable government spending and most importantly, hope for the future.



MISSISSIPPI

MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY • mspolicy.org

The **Mississippi Center for Public Policy** achieved two major wins, which together move Mississippi closer to universal school choice than ever before. HB 4130 establishes a new "weighted" education funding formula. Instead of funding a system, Mississippi will now fund students based on their individual needs. MCPP had worked on this proposal since August 2022, when The Center hosted a roundtable conference that brought together a diverse local coalition. In the months that followed, MCPP engaged an outside contractor to crunch the numbers and directly worked with key policy makers in the legislature. The second success story makes it far more likely that the money will in future be able to follow each student. The Center's litigation division, the Mississippi Justice Institute, filed an amicus brief in the State Supreme Court in a case concerning the extent to which public money could be allocated to private schools under the state constitution. In May 2024, the State Supreme Court ruled in favor of school choice and in doing so removed a key obstacle to a fully fledged system of school choice.



MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR
PUBLIC POLICY



MISSOURI

SHOW-ME INSTITUTE • showmeinstitute.org

The biggest win for the **Show-Me Institute** this legislative session was the passage of a comprehensive education reform bill, SB 727. For the first time, Missouri's Education Savings Account (ESA) program has been expanded to include middle-income Missourians; that means that most Missouri families can now apply for a scholarship from the state's major school choice funding program. The bill provides a new pathway to creating a charter school outside of the Kansas City and St. Louis metropolitan areas for the first time, into Boone County (Columbia) in central Missouri. There is still much more work to do. Though ESAs are now available to most Missouri families, funding is still provided through private donations and has an overall cap, so there will be a long waiting list. Finding additional money to support the program will be more difficult because in order to pass the bill, it was necessary to include more funding for teacher pay. Moreover, there is no reason not to allow charter schools everywhere that families need them. Missouri still lags behind many of its neighboring states when it comes to educational freedom. The Show-Me Institute looks forward to finishing the job with a new governor in 2025.

NEBRASKA

PLATTE INSTITUTE • platteinstitute.org

The **Platte Institute** celebrated several wins this legislative session which removed barriers to opportunity. The first example of this is LB 16, Nebraska's universal recognition law which helps address Nebraska's workers shortage and offers second chances for previously incarcerated individuals returning to the workforce. This legislation was the culmination of over half a decade of work and advocacy and positions Nebraska as a leader in occupational licensing. In addition to LB 16, Platte Institute also celebrated the passage of LB 1402, a bill to protect tax credit opportunity scholarships in the state. This important legislation will give low-income families the opportunity to pursue the education that is best for their child and escape the one-size-fits-all educational monopoly that previously plagued Nebraska. Finally, this legislative session the Platte Institute successfully helped prevent a massive \$730 million tax shift proposal that would have raised taxes on hardworking Nebraskans. This legislation included a one cent sales tax rate hike and imposed further taxes on pop, candy, tobacco, and digital advertisements.

NEW MEXICO

RIO GRANDE FOUNDATION • riograndefoundation.org

Throughout New Mexico's 2024 legislative session, the **Rio Grande Foundation** reviewed and rated bills and politicians alike. The Foundation's "Freedom Index" vote tracking tool has been finalized and released. This tool enables New Mexicans to easily find out how their elected representatives voted on critical issues of individual freedom. Important issues for the Foundation included the massive \$3.5 billion oil and gas surplus (and how to use it), the "Clean Fuels Standard" HB 41, and paid family leave: SB 3/HB 6. The Rio Grande Foundation was proud to coalition with many other organizations in direct opposition to the paid family leave tax increase, which was defeated in a 34-36 vote.



NEW YORK

EMPIRE CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY • empirecenter.org

Two weeks after the **Empire Center** published a damning report highlighting the \$600 billion—that’s \$30,000 per resident—net cost of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, the state’s energy agency posted a \$500,000 proposal for a public relations firm to help “maintain a positive narrative” and “provide rapid response communications services.” The Empire Center’s report, *Green Guardrails*, not only uncovered the cost of the Climate Act, it also highlighted what would amount to essentially nothing in terms of impact on climate change, and laid challenge to the entire implementation process and unnecessary secrecy around it. Moreover, throughout the legislative session, the Empire Center pushed back against increases to public sector pensions; highlighted New York’s highest in the nation public school costs, at over \$29,000 per pupil; and made public, through its transparency website *SeeThroughNY.net*, that Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) employees took home \$1.4 billion in overtime in 2023. It appears the MTA is imposing a moratorium on unbudgeted overtime pay.



NORTH CAROLINA

JOHN LOCKE FOUNDATION • johnlocke.org

The **John Locke Foundation’s** Civitas Center for Public Integrity took center stage this legislative session as it made a compelling case for why North Carolina needs a citizen-only voting amendment included in the state constitution, ensuring it will be on the ballot this November. Nationwide, there is a growing movement to undermine the democratic integrity of the republic by allowing noncitizens to vote. Who has the right to vote is a fundamental question that seeks to answer who a member of the American polity is and who possesses the right to influence policy through voting. The North Carolina State Constitution currently states, “Every person born in the United States and every person who has been naturalized” can vote. The problem is that while the current language affirms the voting rights of most adult citizens, it is silent on whether noncitizens can vote. The current language also excludes voting protections for a small, but important, class of American citizens: those born overseas to American parents. Because of the threats North Carolinians face from temporary legislative or judicial majorities that seek to reshape local politics, a constitutional amendment stating unequivocally that “only a citizen of the United States” may vote would protect that understanding. Locke is proud that its Center for Public Integrity, spearheaded by Dr. Andy Jackson, played a pivotal role in ensuring North Carolina voters have the opportunity to let their voices be heard on this critical topic at the ballot box this November and counts this as a top victory for voters this legislative session.





OHIO

THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE • buckeyeinstitute.org

The Buckeye Institute won a significant victory for its client Dr. Manal Morsy in *Morsy v. Gentile* (previously *Morsy v. Dumas*). The City of Cleveland abandoned its appeal in the case and agreed to 1) fully refund the taxes that were illegally taken from Dr. Morsy, 2) pay the interest owed to her according to Cleveland City Ordinance, and 3) reimburse her court costs. Cleveland had no legal authority to tax income Dr. Morsy earned working at her home in Pennsylvania during the pandemic. By dropping its appeal and agreeing to issue a full refund to Dr. Morsy, with interest, and reimburse her court costs, the City of Cleveland has finally made it right, albeit nearly four years and numerous court filings later. This is The Buckeye Institute's second victory in the case. Dr. Manal Morsy lives in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia—more than 400 miles southeast of Cleveland. Prior to the pandemic, she commuted to her workplace in Cleveland, spent the week there, and returned to Pennsylvania on weekends. During the shutdown, she worked exclusively from her home, as ordered, and accordingly paid local income tax to her own municipality in Pennsylvania. Nonetheless, Cleveland continued to unlawfully tax Dr. Morsy even though she never set foot in Cleveland and was prohibited from working there during Ohio's pandemic-era shutdown.

OKLAHOMA

OKLAHOMA COUNCIL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS • ocpathink.org

In Oklahoma's 2024 legislative session, **Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs** achieved a significant victory by defeating SB 1737, a bill that threatened free speech. The bill, championed by trial lawyers and lobbyists from a multibillion-dollar Oklahoma-based company, purported to empower victims of stalking and harassment. However, SB 1737 would have allowed businesses to sue Oklahomans for speech activity alleged to be harassing—even if the citizen had not been charged with crime. When OCPA learned that SB 1737 had passed both chambers, it immediately launched a veto campaign. Through education efforts targeting both the public and lawmakers, OCPA highlighted the bill's threat to free speech in Oklahoma. Using social media and a network of advocates, OCPA mobilized a widespread email campaign urging Governor Kevin Stitt to veto the bill. Thanks to these efforts, Governor Stitt vetoed SB 1737, and no override efforts have been initiated. It's worth noting that the multibillion-dollar company behind this bill has a history of similar legislative efforts.

OREGON

CASCADE POLICY INSTITUTE • cascadepolicy.org

Last year, the US Supreme Court ruled in favor of Geraldine Tyler, who lost her Minneapolis condo when she failed to pay the property taxes. Ms. Tyler argued that Hennepin County violated the Constitution when it kept the \$25,000 left over after the property was foreclosed on and sold. The key requirement of the Court's ruling in *Tyler v. Hennepin County* is that governments create a system for property owners to claim surplus equity after property taxes, fees, and interest are paid. **Cascade Policy Institute** worked with Pacific Legal Foundation, which represented Ms. Tyler, to implement the ruling in Oregon. HB 4056 was introduced in the 2024 legislative session to create a process to ensure that counties could retain what they are owed, and no more, while relying on existing Oregon law to fill in details of how that system would operate. The Oregon Legislature passed a version of the bill that requires counties to establish processes to comply with *Tyler*, but puts them on hold until December 31, 2025, while some legal questions are resolved. Cascade and its allies will work through the Interim on a 2025 bill that more fully implements *Tyler*.



PENNSYLVANIA

COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION • commonwealthfoundation.org

Throughout the first half of Pennsylvania's yearlong legislative session, the **Commonwealth Foundation** has prioritized expanding school choice options as part of state budget negotiations. Commonwealth's ongoing efforts kept the Lifeline Scholarships program on the table and ensured that it passed out of the Senate Education Committee in May with a bipartisan vote, garnering coverage in state outlets as well as *The Wall Street Journal*. Secretary of Education Khalid Mumin confirmed publicly that "conversations are happening at the governor level with our legislators." Lifeline Scholarships are Education Opportunity Accounts that would rescue kids trapped in failing schools, with funds for tutoring, private school tuition, or other educational tools that best meet a child's individual needs. Governor Josh Shapiro remains the highest profile Democrat in America to publicly endorse this type of school choice option, saying in his budget address that Lifeline is "something I support and consider to be unfinished business;" recent Commonwealth Foundation polling shows that 77 percent of registered voters in Pennsylvania support the proposal. Commonwealth's efforts this year have held Shapiro to his word, kept up the pressure on lawmakers to do the right thing, and educated parents on the benefits of Lifeline Scholarships.



SOUTH CAROLINA

PALMETTO PROMISE INSTITUTE • palmettopromise.org

On May 9, the South Carolina General Assembly adjourned. Over the two-year session, a number of issues in the **Palmetto Promise Institute** "Palmetto Freedom Agenda 2023-24" were signed into law. Among significant wins for freedom were concepts that Palmetto Promise introduced or reintroduced to South Carolina. These included the passage of Education Scholarship Accounts (introduced 2015) and the repeal of certificate of need (reintroduced 2016). The fights were long and hard but were successful due to solid research and strong relationships. Other Palmetto Freedom Agenda priorities seeing the finish line were expansion of telehealth, opening up scope of practice, and rolling back unnecessary occupational licensing regulations. Unsolicited accolades for Palmetto Promise rolled in all session long. On judicial selection reform, the chair of the House Judiciary Committee said in a hearing: "I appreciate Palmetto Promise for identifying those top 10 recommendations, because if you look at [their] list and compare to what we did...virtually everything there we did and touched on in the House bill." On restructuring of healthcare agencies, a key leader of the effort said: "What Palmetto Promise did really helped, because it gave us an objective analysis that we could rely on." Top priorities of Palmetto Promise still in play as of the writing (due to the ongoing work of Conference Committees) are a deeper cut in the highest-in-the-South individual income tax rate, a K-12 curriculum transparency bill, and regulations defining what materials will be allowed in public school libraries. On to 2025!





TENNESSEE

BEACON CENTER OF TENNESSEE • beacontn.org

One of the most influential new assets that **Beacon Center of Tennessee** has added to its organizational capabilities this year is the quarterly *Beacon Poll*. Each quarter, Beacon polls around 1200 voters, asking questions about its state and local policy, elections, and culture. Results have over 1.1 billion impressions, totaling more than \$17 million in earned media coverage.

The January poll was released several days prior to the 2024 legislative session beginning, and the results quickly became part of the discussion at the capitol. While some results show that Tennesseans don't always agree with Beacon's positions, the January *Beacon Poll* results showed that 68 percent of Tennessee voters would support a statewide Education Savings Account program, and 67 percent of voters support a cap on property taxes if they had to be approved by voters in a referendum. These poll results gave Beacon Impact's government relations team crucial intellectual ammunition in their conversations with lawmakers.

As the 2025 legislative session approaches, the *Beacon Poll* continues to make headlines. In July, Beacon released another installment, which found that 50 percent of Tennessee voters are dissatisfied with the way things are going in K-12 public education in Tennessee, while only 40 percent are satisfied. As the fight continues for government accountability and transparency, statewide educational choice, and lower taxes, the *Beacon Poll* can be a crucial tool.

TEXAS

TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION • texaspolicy.com

The **Texas Public Policy Foundation** has been hard at work between legislative sessions. TPPF's healthcare initiative has championed recommendations on a budget rider on HB 1 that provides five million dollars in funding for a Health and Human Services study of charity care performance in Texas. In short, TPPF research evaluates if hospitals receiving taxpayer funds to provide charity care for the indigent are actually providing that care. TPPF has successfully moved charity care from a tertiary issue to an issue with high engagement from every healthcare-related committee in the Texas Legislature and a robust coalition of Texas organizations. In addition, the House Insurance Committee Clerk and Health and Human Service Committee Clerk contacted TPPF on interim charges. All TPPF recommendations have been taken up and are being considered in the drafting process. These relationships will position TPPF to help prime legislators tackle healthcare issues in the 89th legislative session.



UTAH

LIBERTAS INSTITUTE • libertasutah.org

The **Libertas Institute** celebrated significant triumphs in education reform during this legislative session, showcasing the legislature's dedication to empowering families and supporting educational diversity. The Utah Education Fits All Scholarship, a universal education choice program established last year, underwent a large expansion. Originally funded to serve 5,000 students, the program faced overwhelming demand, prompting the need for an increase. Thanks to state lawmakers' approval of \$82 million, double its initial funding, the scholarship can now cater to over 10,000 students. More than 27,000 students applied for this scholarship, highlighting its popularity and necessity among families.

Another significant achievement was the passage of SB 13, aimed at fostering educational innovation by simplifying the barriers for starting and running microschools. This bill removes regulatory hurdles, allowing for easier creation of microschools in all zones. By making building occupancy requirements more reasonable, entrepreneurs now have greater freedom to initiate microschools, enabling teachers and parents to tailor educational experiences to meet their children's needs without excessive regulation.

SUTHERLAND INSTITUTE • sutherlandinstitute.org

Sutherland Institute convened a working group of policymakers and leveraged research, commentary, and multimedia content in a coordinated months-long campaign to elevate the "success sequence" in Utah. As a result, the legislature passed SJR 3—Joint Resolution Concerning the Success Sequence. The resolution articulates strong support for the importance of education, work, and marriage before parenthood as key pillars of personal success and economic stability, and commits the state to advancing policy reforms in each of those areas. In addition, the resolution encourages the State Board of Education to review curriculum to determine where the success sequence may be incorporated into academic standards for grades 6-12. Sutherland will build on this crucial success to further champion the principles of the success sequence as a proven approach to widespread upward mobility for Utah families.





VIRGINIA

THOMAS JEFFERSON INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • thomasjeffersoninst.org

With a newly elected, more extreme-left General Assembly, the **Thomas Jefferson Institute's** legislative priorities (like Education Savings Accounts, removal of deadlines on eliminating carbon-based vehicles, and an indexed tax code) were quickly dispelled and never made it out of Committee. The Institute then faced with an unprecedented number of big government proposals, including dozens of anti-landlord bills, multiple environmental bills, and many new tax proposals. While most of these were defeated before they made it out of Committee, the Institute targeted eight very troubling bills that made it to the governor's desk, including an expanded and increased minimum wage, a new paid family and medical leave entitlement, class action lawsuits, a massive new tax on digital goods (that would also be applied to business to business transactions), and a return to the carbon tax scheme known as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, to name a few. Through opinion articles in key newspapers, mailings, weekly coalition meetings, testimony, and discussions with key members and staff, the Institute was able to help defeat every bill it targeted. The biggest win, by far, was the defeat of a new business-to-business digital sales tax. This tax would have cost taxpayers close to \$2 billion per year, driven up prices as business taxes were pyramided on each other, and made Virginia far less competitive with surrounding states. While the business community remained almost silent, the Thomas Jefferson Institute stepped into the battle, and the governor was able to remove this provision from the budget.

VIRGINIA INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • virginiainstitute.org

This year, the **Virginia Institute for Public Policy** emerged as a key leader during Virginia's legislative session. Leading strategic alliances and advocacy, the Institute brought together diverse conservative groups from across the state into one formidable Virginia Conservative Leaders Coalition.

Despite facing setbacks during the legislative session, this coalition turned potential losses into substantial victories during the veto session. The Virginia Institute took the initiative to create a platform for diverse groups to come together. It facilitated regular meetings to foster fellowship and dialogue, and to strategize on common goals. This atmosphere allowed each group to contribute to a comprehensive Veto Package, expertly prepared with one-page overviews on why each proposed bill should be vetoed or amended. The collaborative approach culminated in a direct meeting with the governor's policy director, who commended the coalition for presenting such a well-thought-out package—a testament to the unified effort—and pointed out he had never seen such a coalition come together in Virginia. Governor Glenn Youngkin then demonstrated decisive action by vetoing a record 153 bills! Lynn Taylor of the Virginia Institute perfectly captured the essence of the coalition's impact: "Our coalition's unity and strategic collaboration were pivotal in fostering this outcome."

The Virginia Institute is dedicated to advancing enduring values of individual freedom, economic opportunity, and traditional family values that define its beloved Commonwealth. This year's successes underscore the Institute's leadership as a catalyst for change and demonstrate the strength of purposeful collaboration in achieving legislative goals.



WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON POLICY CENTER • [washingtonpolicy.org](https://www.washingtonpolicy.org)

Washington Policy Center saw big policy wins in two different areas during the legislative session. Citizens filed six initiatives that were sent to the legislature, five of which were related to WPC work. The legislature passed an initiative to ban state and local income taxes and another granting parents a “bill of rights” to be informed about the educational materials used to teach their children. Voters will decide the fate of the remaining initiatives in the fall, including whether to repeal the new capital gains “excise” tax. (Washington’s state Supreme Court ruled that, despite the IRS and every other state in the union identifying capital gains taxes as income taxes, Washington’s capital gains tax was an excise tax, thus allowing advocates to skirt the state’s constitutional prohibition against graduated property taxes.) Voters will also decide whether to keep Washington’s cap and trade tax, which WPC exposed as dramatically hiking fuel prices, and whether or not workers should have the right to opt out of Washington’s new long-term care payroll tax and social program. It’s a twofold victory for WPC, in that some recommendations were made law and that citizens would be inspired and informed by WPC’s work and act on these issues.



WEST VIRGINIA

CARDINAL INSTITUTE FOR WEST VIRGINIA POLICY • [cardinalinstitute.com](https://www.cardinalinstitute.com)

In the eyes of the **Cardinal Institute** team, the biggest win during the legislative session was seeing a bill to fully repeal certificate-of-need (CON) in West Virginia pass out of the House Committee on Health and Human Resources. In years past, narrowly focused CON repeal bills have made it further along in the process, including one repealing CON for birthing centers be passed into law last year. However, an effort as bold and expansive as this has rarely ever been heard in committee, let alone passed out of committee. This is evidence that the work Cardinal has been doing to educate West Virginians about the harms of CON laws and the benefits of repealing those laws are taking root. Based on the progress this year, CON repeal remains a top priority for 2025 in the Mountain State.



WISCONSIN

BADGER INSTITUTE • [badgerinstitute.org](https://www.badgerinstitute.org)

Wisconsin’s session was not the budget year, so the **Badger Institute’s** wins mostly consisted of defense. The biggest: Lawmakers proposed piling regulations onto “cottage food producers,” setting extraordinarily low income thresholds before requiring them to use commercial kitchens. Badger exposed it; the bill died. The Institute also exposed to fatal attention a bill that would have the state paying the salaries of newspaper reporters and subsidizing subscriptions. A just-released Badger report is the first to quantify the extra costs of heating a home in a cold climate if natural gas is banned: \$19,900 more per new home, on statewide average. On offense, the legislature approved a constitutional amendment to add legislative oversight of federal funding decisions now wholly in the governor’s hands. Badger has years detailing the waste of federal COVID money. The measure goes to voters in August, and Badger plans pieces laying out its importance.





WISCONSIN INSTITUTE FOR LAW AND LIBERTY • will-law.org

In February, attorneys from the **Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty** successfully blocked an unlawful policy imposed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The DPI had implemented an unlawful “perfection” rule for the state’s parental choice program, requiring schools to collect specific residency documents and mandating that parental names and addresses on applications exactly match those documents. Even minor discrepancies, such as abbreviating “South Milwaukee” as “S. Milwaukee,” could result in students being denied eligibility in the choice program. A judge ruled that DPI’s actions violated statutory rulemaking requirements, effectively ending the practice, garnering a major victory for school choice and the rule of law in Wisconsin.



INSTITUTE FOR REFORMING GOVERNMENT • reforminggovernment.org

The **Institute for Reforming Government’s** Center for Investigative Oversight uncovered illegal race-based hiring practices at the University of Wisconsin-Madison last year. The Target of Opportunity the Program, or the TOP Program, permitted the university to hire and fund applicants to the faculty on the basis of race, inconsistent with the US Supreme Court ruling striking down affirmative action. After identifying the issue through open records requests, IRG raised the issue locally and nationally through a *Wall Street Journal* editorial. Late last year, and finalized earlier this year, the legislature brokered a policy deal with the University of Wisconsin System to end related practices, including many DEI initiatives and the termination of the TOP Program that IRG uncovered in exchange for general faculty pay raises and to release funding for a new engineering building. Without IRG exposing the issue, it would not have been included in the negotiations. Now, lawmakers that helm the Joint Audit Committee have ordered an audit of all DEI efforts at state agencies and at the University of Wisconsin System. With this audit, which will take months to complete by the nonpartisan state auditors, lawmakers and taxpayers will know whether or not the System held up its part of the negotiated deal with lawmakers to end DEI and the TOP Program.

WYOMING



WYOMING LIBERTY GROUP • wyliberty.org

The second quarter in Wyoming began as the 2024 legislative session ended. The consistent failure in previous years and the absence of attempts to expand Medicaid in 2024 testify to **Wyoming Liberty Group’s** steadfast work against such initiatives. However, vigilance is necessary as discussions are currently unfolding regarding establishing a healthcare policy advisory group. Currently, this group is proposed to include mainly healthcare industry advocates, which leaves Wyoming Liberty concerned that their objective will be to achieve expansion to falsely aid rural hospitals in Wyoming. In this session, Wyoming Liberty’s work extended to shaping marijuana legislation. A bill that overlooked crucial factors such as potency and form when determining misdemeanor possession of marijuana was defeated. Additionally, Wyoming Liberty support for legislation closing the Delta-8 product loophole brought on by the Farm Bill was successful. Other efforts included monitoring and contributing to bills addressing synthetic media, repealing gun-free zones, campaign finance issues, and Wyoming’s first Education Savings Account bill.

NATIONAL PARTNERS

Thank you to our national partners who work with us to advance freedom across the country in key areas including education, law, free speech, energy and the environment, and tax reform.

1851 Center for Constitutional Law	ExcelinEd	Foundation
50CAN	Federalist Society	National Taxpayers Union
Acton Institute	FIRE	Foundation
America's Future	Fiscal Alliance Foundation	New Civil Liberties Alliance
America First Policy Institute	Forge Leadership Network	Pacific Legal Foundation
American Conservative Union	Foundation for Economic Education	People United for Privacy
American Consumer Institute	Franklin News Foundation	Foundation
American Council of Trustees and Alumni	FreedomWorks	PERC
American Enterprise Institute	Free the People	Philanthropy Roundtable
American Institute for Economic Research	Free to Choose Network	Prison Fellowship
American Juris Link	Heartland Institute	Project 42
American Legislative Exchange Council	Independent Institute	Reason Foundation
Americans for Fair Treatment	Independent Women's Forum	R Street Institute
Americans for Prosperity	Inspired Life	Add Save Our States
Americans for Tax Reform	Institute for Family Studies	Southeastern Legal Foundation
Archbridge Institute	Institute for Free Speech	Speech First
Arizona Free Enterprise Club	Institute for Humane Studies	Stand Together Trust
Arizona Liberty Network	Institute for Justice	Steamboat Institute
Association of American Educators Foundation	Institute for Policy Innovation	Students for Liberty
Atlas Network	Institute of Economic Affairs	Tax Foundation
Bill of Rights Institute	Instituto de Libertad Economica	The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty
Capital Research Center	Jersey 1st	The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University
Cato Institute	Judicial Watch	The College Fix
Centennial Institute	Leadership Institute	The Foundation for American Innovation
Center for Education Reform	Libertarian Policy Foundation	The Free State Foundation
Center for Independent Employees	Liberty Justice Center	The Fund for American Studies
Center for Independent Thought	Louisiana Family Forum	The Heritage Foundation
Center for Individual Rights	Lucy Burns Institute	The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal
Center for Latino Leadership	Manhattan Institute for Policy Research	The Jesse Helms Center
Children's Scholarship Fund	Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance	The Policy Circle
Cicero Institute	Media Research Center	True Charity
Citizens Against Government Waste	Mercatus Center	Truth in Accounting
Citizens Council for Health Freedom	Middle Resolution Policy	Upper Midwest Law Center
Common Sense Institute	Mountain States Legal Foundation	Young America's Foundation
Competitive Enterprise Institute	Napa Legal Institute	Young Voices
DonorsTrust	National Review Institute	
EdChoice	National Right to Work Legal Defense & Education Foundation Inc.	
	National School Choice Awareness	

NATIONAL PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: CICERO INSTITUTE

Marcus Tullius Cicero was known for courageously voicing the truth, even when it was unpopular. The **Cicero Institute**, named after the Roman philosopher and scholar, aims to follow in his footsteps. Working with courageous lawmakers, the Cicero Institute researches a wide variety of policies, promoting sustainable solutions over temporary fixes.

Joe Lonsdale, a California entrepreneur whose life's work revolves around building companies that solve key problems, founded the Cicero Institute in 2019. As a business owner, Joe knows that sometimes the solutions with the best outcomes aren't always the simplest. They come about with bold innovation, persistence, and hard work.

The Cicero Institute went straight to work researching areas—such as healthcare, bureaucratic overreach, and homelessness—in which resources are being invested but with little to no positive outcome. Over the next couple of years, the Institute's work would stretch across the country and into 20 different states tackling issues from homelessness to public safety to regulatory reform.



The Cicero team provides polling, messaging, and research to legislators committed to addressing problems at their root source, and works to be a “convener of thought leaders” when pursuing good policy. This partnership with lawmakers leads to bold solutions that improve the American way of life.

What works in one state is not guaranteed to work in another, and partnering with a state-based think tank is the best way to ensure success. Cicero Institute works with SPN's state affiliates to gather intel, pool resources, and achieve mutual goals.

“SPN has opened us up to a Network of state-based experts for us to partner with as we look to pass reforms,” said Stefani Buhajla, the Cicero Institute's director of communications. “These organizations know what will and won't work in their respective states. For us, it's not about taking as much credit as possible, but getting good policy across the finish line.”

In the last year, the Cicero Institute has taken a larger role in healthcare policy, partnering with groups like the Palmetto Promise Institute and Stand Together to expand telehealth, promote patient-centered environments, and provide resources to organizations looking to do the same. Cicero works with the Independent Institute on homelessness and the American Enterprise Institute on education, while also serving an active role on SPN working groups on government regulation. Most recently, Cicero supported Network efforts in the monumental *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* Supreme Court decision that effectively ended the Chevron deference doctrine.

It's always easier to tackle challenges together rather than alone. The Cicero Institute's commitment to partnership, both with SPN's Network and legislators, has opened doors for policy discussions that had previously been closed. This dedication to sustainable policy solutions with lasting impact is making waves across the country, and we look forward to seeing what will come next.



Expand Freedom in the States, Now and for Future Generations



Building and sustaining an enduring freedom movement in every state is an ongoing endeavor, but SPN exists so that there will be champions in your state and others for decades to come, expanding on past victories and guarding against efforts to erode the liberties we secure. If this fight matters to you, please consider including SPN in your will or long-term financial plans. With your partnership, we can preserve the power of state solutions and the profound impact they have on the lives of Americans now and into the future.

There has never been a better time to join. If SPN is included in your legacy plans, please tell us! For a limited time, SPN will earn \$1,000 in matching funds thanks to a generous grant from the Roe Foundation, the family of our founder, Thomas Roe.



Become a Member of SPN's Thomas Roe Legacy Society

- Include SPN in your will or living trust
- Make us a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k), or other retirement account
- Provide for SPN through a charitable trust

And more



To join the Thomas Roe Legacy Society and take advantage of this limited-time matching opportunity, or to learn more, please contact Nitsa Ioannides at (619) 244-4580 or legacy@spn.org

Learn More: [SPN.org/Legacy](https://spn.org/Legacy)

As a member of the Thomas Roe Legacy Society, you are entitled to special benefits, including recognition on a plaque at SPN headquarters, exclusive invitations to events, and one-on-one meetings with SPN leadership, and more.



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