



State Solutions. National Impact.

WINTER 2024



Hope in the States

SPN's Annual Meeting highlights the leaders, policies, and stories of how your support has improved lives in the states and beyond.

Tracie

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CONTACT US

1655 Fort Myer Drive
Suite 360
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: 703-243-1655
Fax: 703-740-0314
info@spn.org

SPN.org

 /StatePolicy
 @StatePolicy
 /company/state-policy-network

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 64 independent state think tank affiliates, over 66 state partners in key capacities, and more than 110 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.

LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT TEAMS

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DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

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DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATION RELATIONS

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DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATION ENGAGEMENT

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DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

Nitsa Ioannides
MANAGER OF ENGAGEMENT

Siobhan Lundt
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

Ladan Nowrasteh
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Christina Pajak
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Alexandra Prowant
DEVELOPMENT EVENTS COORDINATOR

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DIRECTOR OF GRANTS AND PHILANTHROPIC IMPACT

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For the full SPN staff list,
visit spn.org/staff.

Dear Friends,

I want to express my sincere gratitude for your support of State Policy Network. We are seeing momentum in the states for free markets like never before, and that is thanks to you. Over the last three years, there have been historic reforms in K-12 education, tax policy, and market-based healthcare—all while Washington keeps spinning its wheels.

Thanks to your support, our 50-state Network is ready to capitalize on this momentum. You've fueled critical efforts in the states to bring real solutions to the American people, and together, we're ready to make even greater strides in 2024. While the upcoming presidential election will undoubtedly attract significant attention this year, we know that lasting and meaningful change occurs closer to home.

In this issue of *SPN News*, we're recapping highlights from SPN's 31st Annual Meeting, where 1,600 leaders (our largest Annual Meeting to date!) representing over 500 organizations from all 50 states gathered to build meaningful connections, sharpen strategies, and share ideas to leverage state solutions that have national impact. At Annual Meeting, we were honored to host former governors Mitch Daniels and Scott Walker, who shared the importance of state leadership and the urgent need for state-led solutions. We celebrated the achievements of our Network partners who brought transformative change to citizens through policy reforms in education, healthcare, fiscal policy, housing, and so much more.

With the help of SPN, our partners in the states are working closely with real-world education entrepreneurs to ensure that education policy reforms meet the needs of their communities. In this issue, you'll read about Jeff Sandefer, who co-founded Acton Academy with his wife, Laura, and how he's encouraging entrepreneurial parents to create a personalized environment for their children.

SPN's mission is made possible by our generous supporters. As part of our donor spotlight series, we were honored to sit down with Betty Jane Strong, managing trustee of the William A. and Genevieve H. Strong Foundation Trust and founding chairman of Opportunity Arkansas. Betty Jane shared with us why she believes the states and the next generation of leaders are our best hope to preserve American values.

Thank you for your steadfast partnership with SPN. I look forward to sharing more good news with you this year.

Take care,



Tracie Sharp
President and CEO
State Policy Network





State Solutions. National Impact.

SPN's 31st Annual Meeting brought together leaders from across the country to strategize, collaborate, and celebrate the victories for freedom our generous supporters have made possible.

While Washington, DC, continues to come up short with solutions to America's challenges, the states tell a much different story. You may not hear these stories on the news, but they are felt deeply in states and communities all over the nation.

Because of you, there is a Network of organizations in all 50 states advocating for free-market policies that and push back on the growth of government.

At SPN's 31st Annual Meeting, we welcomed a record-breaking number of attendees who came together to make meaningful connections, sharpen their strategies, and exchange ideas so that what works in one state can spread to others. Annual Meeting is also an opportunity to evaluate the national landscape and chart a course forward, influencing the policy agenda and debates at the state level.

By the Numbers

1,648 total registrants

500+ organizations represented

All 50 states

Over \$1.2 million in sponsorships

State Leaders Join SPN for Annual Meeting

Our speakers brought a wealth of knowledge, insight, and inspiration to Annual Meeting attendees. We were honored to host **former Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels** as a keynote speaker, who emphasized the critical role of federalism in shaping our sense of community, shared purpose, and national unity. He highlighted how the gridlock, partisan conflicts, and one-size-fits-all mandates from the federal government have contributed to the American people's lack of trust in Washington's ability to resolve the everyday challenges they face. Governor Daniels shared the critical role of the states in holding elected officials responsible and the opportunity we have to chart a path toward greater self-governance. He said: **"When America regains its footing—it will be state leadership and state examples that bring us back."**

We were also grateful to have Governor Daniels join us for a private briefing with supporters to dive deeper into current issues like education (including his time as president of Purdue University), upcoming elections, and the role the states must play in reining in the federal government to maintain the proper checks and balances.

Former Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker joined us for a special VIP reception with supporters and shared his admiration for the growth in size and sophistication of the 50-state Network that you've made possible. He detailed how SPN affiliates in Wisconsin proved to be valuable partners offering sound policy solutions and legal arguments during his time as governor – just as many Network organizations are to the policymakers in their states.

Attendees also heard from **entrepreneur and bestselling author Liz Bohannon**, who shared how beginners possess innate qualities that can nurture creativity, foster innovation, and pave the way for success. Attendees left the session equipped with practical strategies to initiate the journey toward a life filled with purpose, passion, and lasting impact.

Annual Meeting offers attendees a wide array of panels and sessions addressing key issues that will drive the debate in 2024. Session topics ranged from K-12 education, tax reform, free speech, tech policy, housing, energy, workplace freedom, and healthcare.

Education Leaders and Philanthropists Meet at Annual Meeting

SPN hosted an in-person gathering of the **Education Council** where members met to discuss the opportunities in the wake of historic school choice reform. They heard stories from the states where our Network partners were heavily engaged in expanding education freedom and the big question of “what’s next” after historic reforms pass, as each Network partner has a unique lane to help ensure they are successfully implemented. Each state in 2023 that passed universal education freedom has a story and approach, proving that policy solutions from one state can be tailored and replicated in others.

SPN’s Education Council is an invitation-only group of philanthropists who are investing in reforming K-12 education so that families can make the best decisions for their children and so all children have access to a quality education that meets their needs.

Federalism in Action: SPN’s Center for Practical Federalism

Supporters at Annual Meeting also heard from leaders in our Network who are finding ways to push back on federal government overreach through the legislature and by challenging the administrative state. While the federal government is expansive and wields significant power, states have the authority to challenge federal action – but often, lawmakers don’t even realize the full extent of their authority. SPN’s Tony Woodlief shared progress from the Center for Practical Federalism in building tools to empower state leaders to say “no” to federal mandates that violate state autonomy. This includes a system to monitor onerous rules and guidance and partnerships with key leaders, including state attorneys general, who have the courage to confront federal overreach.

Center for Practical Federalism fellow Steve Johnson also shared stories from the road of his efforts to work with law-



TOP TO BOTTOM: • Governor Scott Walker and SPN President Tracie Sharp deliver remarks to supporters at SPN’s opening reception. • SPN’s Rebecca Painter and Tony Woodlief discuss the Center for Practical Federalism. • The 2023 Generation Liberty Fellows gather for workshops and networking. • Lawson Bader and Mary Beth Weiss attend the VIP Awards Night Reception.



TOP TO BOTTOM: SPN Supporters, friends, and staff engage in lively conversation at SPN receptions.

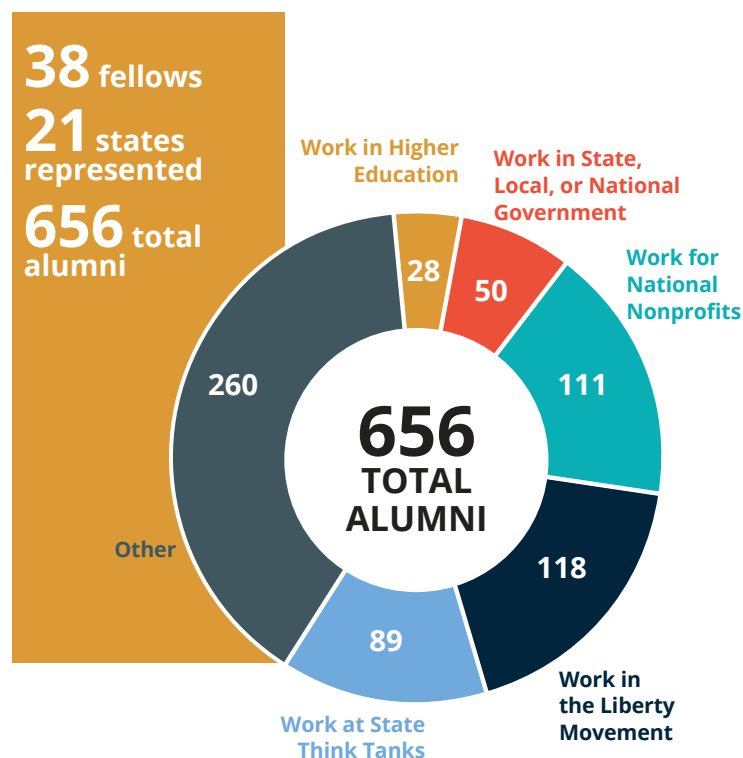


makers across the country on understanding and exercising their oversight authority. As the former Michigan House Oversight Committee chairman, Steve shared his personal experience challenging the Whitmer administration during the COVID-19 pandemic, exposing millions of dollars of fraud and abuse. Now, Steve is working with partners in the states, including the Institute for Reforming Government and their new Center for Investigative Oversight, to take their lessons learned to multiple states in 2024. Pelican Institute CEO Daniel Erspamer shared the organization's successful efforts to challenge federal rules in the courts and find quality plaintiffs through their leadership academy. In partnership with Network leaders, SPN's Center for Practical Federalism is reinforcing the critical role states play in creating policies that meet the needs of their citizens without top-down mandates from Washington, DC, getting in the way.

Shaping Tomorrow's Leaders

Every year, SPN welcomes a new cohort of **Generation Liberty Fellows** to Annual Meeting. In Chicago, 38 fellows from an array of backgrounds in government, public policy, and the corporate sector participated in sessions specially curated for emerging leaders. These sessions included focused training in leadership and professional development, as well as discussions centered around the art of effectively communicating policy solutions. Fellows heard from **David Bahnsen**, Managing

Generation Liberty Fellowship 2023 Snapshot



Partner of The Bahnsen Group, on how to harness your entrepreneurial spirit and embrace the ability to take positive risk and innovative approaches. SPN invests in these young professionals who later go on to thriving careers in public policy and champions for liberty.

SPN Acknowledges Exceptional Leadership with the 2023 Thomas Roe Awards

SPN's Thomas Roe Award stands as a distinguished honor recognizing the exceptional contributions of leaders in the states who have advanced free market policy solutions. Named in honor of SPN founder, Thomas Roe, a dedicated advocate for principled governance, the Thomas Roe Award celebrates those who have dedicated themselves to the betterment of their communities, their states, and the nation, inspiring others to carry the torch for individual freedom, opportunity, and prosperity for all.

SPN recognized the leadership of **Commonwealth Foundation president and CEO Charles Mitchell** and **Commonwealth Partners president and CEO Matt Brouillette** through our flagship Thomas Roe Award. Charles and Matt have built a powerful stronghold for freedom in Pennsylvania, comprised of partner organizations in key capacities like research, litigation, and advocacy. Together, this infrastructure for freedom is protecting the rights of citizens and standing up to the opposition in one of the bluest states in America.

Bob Williams Awards for Outstanding Policy Achievement

The Bob Williams Awards for Outstanding Policy Achievement stand as a testament to the remarkable contributions the Network has made to improving lives in their states.

2023 Network Award: Education reform swept the nation with seven states adopting universal education freedom programs. The Network Award recognized the **Libertas Institute, the Oklahoma Council for Public Affairs, The James Madison Institute, Opportunity Arkansas, The Buckeye Institute, the Sutherland Institute, Inspired Life, EdChoice, SchoolForward, ExcelinEd, yes. every kid., The Heritage Foundation, American Federation for Children, and Americans for Prosperity** for their collaborative efforts that secured universal education freedom for millions of American children.

2023 Biggest Win for Freedom: The Beacon Center of Tennessee received this award for their efforts to help enshrine right-to-work in the state's constitution. By doing so, they ensure that workers' First Amendment rights are protected for the long term.

2023 Biggest Home State Win Award: The **Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy** received the Biggest Home State Win Award after it helped secure the largest tax cut in West Virginia's history, saving taxpayers over \$700 million.

2023 Most Influential Research Award: The **Georgia Public Policy Foundation** received this award for its research, "Government Regulation in the Price of a New Home: Georgia." GPPF's research helped lawmakers understand the burden of regulatory costs on prospective home buyers and serves as a model for other states looking to examine rising home prices.



Winners of the 2023 Communications Excellence Awards.

2023 Best State-Based Litigation: After discovering paycheck protection program fraud by public sector unions, the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** deployed a tactful legal strategy to seek justice for Michigan taxpayers. As a result of MCPP's lawsuit, the Michigan Education Association had to pay back taxpayers for their abuse of funds.

2023 Best Issue Campaign: The **Texas Public Policy Foundation** won this award for its efforts to advance education reforms in Texas. TPPF conducted research, engaged with policymakers, hosted local events, and communicated through a variety of digital platforms to make a compelling case for education freedom.

Transforming Lives Through Powerful Storytelling

The Communications Excellence Awards recognize outstanding achievements in marketing, communications, and media across the state think tank Network. The 2023 winners were recognized for their innovative communications efforts that demonstrate the power of effective, influential messaging.

2023 Bold Brand Boost Award: Through its Center for Investigative Oversight, the Institute for Reforming Government's earned media, digital advertising, and marketing efforts have shifted Wisconsin's discourse into expecting more oversight of the executive branch coming from the state legislature.

2023 Expanding Your Audience Award: As a member of SPN's start-up program, Opportunity Arkansas achieved remarkable wins in its first year. The organization's (non)Debatable Newsletter focuses on providing quality, reliable content and saw an increase in subscriptions from key audience members, which include high-ranking state officials and legislators.

2023 Powerful Storytelling Award: This award was given to the Yankee Institute for its investigative journalism project, which exposed the failings of Connecticut's mental health system. Yankee's stories of citizens who suffered while in the care of the state spurred a conversation to address systemic failures and accelerate solutions for reform.



Investing in Education Innovation to Meet Demand

Since 2020, State Policy Network has invested in education entrepreneurs advancing innovative, forward-thinking ideas through **Ed-Prize**, a grant program that accelerates new solutions to improve education outcomes across the country. Thanks to the generous support of our past sponsors, The Challenge Foundation, the Arthur N. Rupe Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and Stand Together Trust, we've had the opportunity to elevate ambitious projects—ones that expand flexible learning models, drive accountability through transparency, and empower education entrepreneurs to create and innovate.

This year, we had a record number of applications with an over 139 percent increase from 2022. With the support of Stand Together Trust in 2023, we selected three recipients who have pioneered new learning models for Ed-Prize. These education



Winners of the 2023 Ed-Prize at SPN's 31st Annual Meeting.

entrepreneurs are changing the education landscape and bringing bold new ideas to the market that meet the diverse needs of students across demographics, learning styles, and socioeconomic backgrounds. We were honored to present the 2023 Ed-Prize Awards to the following recipients:

Let Grow is a project that encourages foundational building blocks to foster independence in learners while encouraging adults to take a step back to allow children to become more self-sufficient. With funding from Ed-Prize, executive director Andrea Keith plans to expand the Let Grow project through the Let Grow Experience, which will bring the curriculum to nontraditional schools, including charters, micro-schools, and even homeschoolers.

Canary Academy was founded by 15-year-old Virginia native Nasiyah Isra-UI, who designed a learning program for her brother after she watched him struggle with his homeschool lessons. In 2020, she built an online, one-stop shop where homeschoolers could get the best content, instructional materials, and customizable courses based on their learning needs. Through Ed-Prize funding, Canary Academy plans to partner with homeschool groups and media outlets through the Representation Matters in Home Education Initiative, a grassroots effort that shares stories of homeschooled youth to empower and support those in underrepresented and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.

Red Bridge is a school with a mission to develop a sense of agency in every child as the foundation for academic and life success. Orly Friedman, Red Bridge founder and head of school, was inspired to create this new learning model after she saw students thrive when taught skills that fostered independence as a teacher at Khan Lab School. Friedman has plans to apply the mission of Red Bridge to assessments and use the Ed-Prize grant to develop a competency-based evaluation system called "Learning Credits," which puts students in control of what they are assessed on and when. Students have a bank of credits to select from and sign up to be assessed when they feel they have mastered concepts.

“

THE WORK OF THE PEOPLE IN THIS ROOM AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT IT, I DON'T THINK COULD BE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT.”

— Governor Mitch Daniels

“

SPN'S ANNUAL MEETING IS A MUST-ATTEND EVENT FOR ME EVERY YEAR. IT IS A HIGH POINT ON THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT'S ANNUAL CALENDAR.”

—John Kramer, Institute for Justice

“

I WHOLEHEARTEDLY ENCOURAGE EVERY PERSON INVOLVED IN THE LIBERTY MOVEMENT TO ATTEND THE STATE POLICY NETWORK'S ANNUAL MEETING. IT IS THE BEST PLACE TO LEARN FROM EXPERTS AND PEERS AS WELL AS NETWORK WITH PEOPLE PASSIONATE ABOUT THE SAME ISSUES. I RETURN EVERY YEAR FEELING REFRESHED AND EXCITED TO JUMP INTO THE WORK WE HAVE AHEAD.”

—Sarah Montalbano, Alaska Policy Forum



“

LIVING IN CALIFORNIA, I OFTEN WONDER IF IT IS MY GENERATION THAT IS ONE STEP AWAY FROM THE EXTINCTION OF LIBERTY. COMING TO CHICAGO, AS PART OF THE GENERATION LIBERTY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, I REALIZED WE CAN BE A FORCE FOR GOOD IN AMERICA. WE CAN SUSTAIN LIBERTY FOR OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN. I FEEL SO PRIVILEGED TO HAVE MET KEY YOUNG LEADERS IN OUR MOVEMENT.”

—McKenzie Richards, Pacific Research Institute

“

THIS WAS THE BEST SPN ANNUAL MEETING THAT I HAVE ATTENDED. I LEFT COMPLETELY INSPIRED AND READY TO TACKLE THE CHALLENGES AHEAD.”

—Carrie Tynan, Adolph Coors Foundation

Redefining Education: Why Families are Embracing Acton Academy's Learner-Centric Model

In 2023, seven states passed universal education freedom programs, empowering families to use education dollars to choose an education that best meets their needs. Before then, only two states, Arizona and West Virginia, had similar programs in place. This tidal wave of education freedom has created a demand for innovative learning models.

The 2020 pandemic was the catalyst for a powerful grass-roots movement comprised of parents, educators, and Network leaders who tirelessly advocated for education reform long before mentions of COVID-19 and challenged the status quo of America's education system. And it's no wonder the demand for better education options has skyrocketed since 2020. According to a national study conducted by the Northwest Evaluation Association, nearly all grade levels showed increased achievement gaps in reading and math when compared to pre-pandemic levels, citing that students need an additional four months of school to close the gap. These lower achievement levels occurred despite the billions of federal dollars spent to attempt to reverse the impact of learning losses due to the pandemic. Parents have called on lawmakers to increase access to better learning options for their children, and models like charter schools, learning pods, microschools, and homeschool co-ops have cropped up across the states to meet demand.

While the pandemic may have spurred the expansion of new learning models, parents like Jeff and Laura Sandefer have been long-time advocates for an education experience that puts the learner, not the education system, first. At a conference with a teacher at a local traditional school in Austin, Texas, Jeff and Laura were trying to decide if they should make the transition from their Montessori school to a local public school for their young sons. When Jeff asked the teacher the timeline of how soon they should make the transition to public school from Montessori, which cultivated his sons' creativity and love of learning, the answer shocked him. "He said, 'As soon as possible. Once they've had that kind of freedom, they won't want to be chained to a desk and lectured to for eight



Jeff Sandefer speaks at SPN's 2016 Annual Meeting.

hours a day," he recalls. The thought of his two young boys losing their creativity and love of learning to conform to an education system was unacceptable. "I went home that day and told Laura: 'I don't know if we're going to home school. I don't know if we're going to start a school, but the very best teacher in the very best school in Austin, Texas, essentially told me not to put our children in traditional school, so we're not doing it.'" That conversation sparked the concept of what would become Acton Academy.

In 2009, Acton Academy began with seven students, including the Sandefers' young sons, in a rental house and a blank sheet of paper. While there were no grandiose plans for the initial concept of the school, Jeff and Laura knew that they had to provide something better than what traditional education offered their children. **"Every child is a genius who deserves to find a calling that will change the world,"** said Jeff. **"That belief guides everything that we do at Acton."** Acton's core mission is to cultivate critical thinking and entrepreneurial



THAT'S WHAT I SEE FROM SPN AND THE NETWORK AFFILIATES, WHO ARE ACCELERATING AND ADVOCATING FOR THE BEST SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS. SPN CHAMPIONS THE EVERYDAY CITIZEN TRYING TO BUILD SOMETHING. I THINK THAT'S HOW GREAT MOVEMENTS GET STARTED."

skills and foster a lifelong love of learning. Another key principle at Acton is an unwavering commitment to a learner-focused education. **"Children are amazing. They can do a lot more than we think they can do,"** said Jeff. "It's just incredible what children can do." The skills of self-management and self-governance are taught through hands-on project learning, along with the use of the latest adaptive technology to prepare to be the next generation of leaders in the 21st century.

Acton Academy has blossomed into a thriving global educational phenomenon with over 300 schools across 26 countries, including schools in 42 states in the US. Acton owners privately own and operate their model and can customize it based on the needs of the students while adhering to Acton's core principles of guiding learners and cultivating a lifelong love of learning. The Acton model is in such high demand, with over 18,000 applications from entrepreneurial parents who want to start their own Acton Academy to meet the needs of learners in their community.

Jeff shared one example of just how much Acton Academy students are capable of in an encounter with a student who welcomed him during a visit to an Acton school in North Carolina. "When I inquired, 'What's the most important thing about Acton Academy?' he promptly replied, 'Freedom.' And after a thoughtful pause, he continued, 'Freedom comes with responsibility.'" The student Jeff spoke with was only five and a half years old. **"This is a recurring theme we witness at Acton. By offering freedom along with responsibility and appropriate guidance, when adults step aside and allow the children to guide their learning, remarkable things happen."**

SPN, along with Network partners, are collaborating closely with education entrepreneurs, like Acton Academy owners, to spur the expansion of these kinds of innovative models that offer tailored, customized learning environments. SPN's Velinda Jonson Family Education fellow Kerry McDonald is working with parents who have founded their own Acton Academies to help navigate some of the regulatory challenges they face in certain states. In an article for *Forbes* in 2023, Kerry highlighted James Lomax, a retired United States naval pilot and engineer who was dissatisfied with the education options available to his children in Las Vegas, Nevada. However, due to Nevada's restrictive occupational licensing requirements, Lomax couldn't launch his program as a recognized private school. Network leaders are working in the states to help remove barriers to innovation and expand access to these models.

"I think anytime you bring entrepreneurs together that are solving problems in the real world, the best ideas will win out. These individuals bring a grittiness and a trial-and-error mentality instead of a top-down view," said Jeff. **"And that's what I see from SPN and the Network affiliates, who are accelerating and advocating for the best solutions to problems. SPN champions the everyday citizen trying to build something. I think that's how great movements get started."**

With more states poised for education reforms in 2024, we will likely see an increase in models like Acton as momentum for education change continues to spread. You can learn more about Acton Academy by visiting www.actonacademy.org.

Supporter Spotlight: The William H. and Genevieve A. Strong Foundation Trust

Betty Jane Strong's roots run deep in Arkansas. She fondly recalls a childhood full of freedom and adventure growing up in the small southern town of Pine Bluff with her parents, older sister, and brother. It's where she learned to become an accomplished equestrian and traveled with her father, a successful entrepreneur and businessman, to job sites. "My father was gone a lot because of his business, but he was so fun when he would come home," Betty Jane said. "He would always play with us and sometimes take us on the road to job sites. We had so much freedom as children, and I have many wonderful memories with my dad."

A civil engineer, Betty Jane's father, William Strong, founded The Strong Company, an Arkansas-based manufacturer specializing in lightweight concrete. After working construction in Little Rock, Arkansas, and wanting to start his own business, he realized the strategic location Pine Bluff provided, as it was centrally located in the state, combined with a bustling river port and proximity to major cities like Memphis and Little Rock. The move to Pine Bluff would prove profitable, and over the years, the company expanded and set up manufacturing plants in Arkansas, Illinois, South Carolina, and Texas.

When she was older, her father took Betty Jane on as his personal assistant to learn the ins and outs of the company. "My father wanted me to learn how to do finances and how the company ran," said Betty Jane. "It was his belief that you can learn how to do these things in school, but if you are not hands-on in the process, you won't have as much of an appreciation for it. Everything he did, I did with him, and it was so much fun." Betty Jane is a co-owner of the company, alongside her family, who still own and operate it. Today, over 60 years



Betty Jane Strong with former Governor Scott Walker and Nic Horton, CEO of Opportunity Arkansas.

since its founding, The Strong Company is an industry leader in lightweight insulating concretes, used for foundations and pools, and corrosion-resistant, high-strength repair mortars.

Mr. Strong also had a deep love for his country and the community of Pine Bluff. He firmly believed in the critical importance of preserving the values of individual freedom, limited government, and the free enterprise system for future generations, as well as teaching and instilling them. As a World War II veteran, he saw how quickly the promises of large, centralized governments could transpire into tyranny. "My dad knew that every decision has consequences—both good and bad," she said. "After his experience serving in the Second World War, he saw how ideas like fascism, communism, and socialism can come into your life, and your country, on a whim if you don't impart the principles we cherish to the next generation."

Betty Jane's father believed in the promise of the American Dream and served as living proof that it could be achieved through dedication and hard work. He started the William H. and Genevieve A. Strong Foundation Trust to invest in the community of Pine Bluff and organizations dedicated to educating the public, particularly young people, on the values that have made our nation a beacon of hope for millions. "My dad wanted to start the family trust as a way to help deserving young people in the community grow and flourish while also giving to organizations that preserve the American values that he fought to defend." To ensure that the family trust would always invest in organizations and people that upheld the principles of limited government, individual liberty, and the free market system, he appointed three trustees representing the Leadership Institute, Heritage Foundation, and Young America's Foundation. "My dad structured the family trust in such

IT IS MY HOPE SPN CONTINUES TO DO WHAT THEY'VE DONE FOR OVER 30 YEARS —THE SUCCESS OF OUR COUNTRY DEPENDS ON IT.

a way that its core principles would be upheld long after he was gone. The three trustees from The Leadership Institute, The Heritage Foundation, and Young America's Foundation safeguard the mission of the trust," she said. The current trustees include Morton Blackwell, president of the Leadership Institute; Bridgett Wagner, SPN board member and executive director of the Feulner Institute at the Heritage Foundation; and Scott Walker, former governor of Wisconsin and president of Young America's Foundation. The William H. and Genevieve A. Strong Foundation Trust is preparing to celebrate 20 years of investing in and cultivating the next generation of leaders.

Betty Jane learned of SPN through the family foundation and working with leading organizations in the liberty movement. But it wasn't until she accepted an invitation to attend SPN's 2014 Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado, that she saw the depth of the Network and began to understand the role SPN played in elevating state solutions to have national impact. "It was so eye-opening for me at Annual Meeting to see how many of the problems Americans faced could be solved at the state level. I was impressed with the number of sessions and topics covered and couldn't wait to attend the next Annual Meeting."

Betty Jane's commitment to SPN and the liberty movement goes beyond giving financial resources. She actively engages with the organizations she supports, personally investing her time, energy, and expertise. When she received an invitation to become the founding board chair of Opportunity Arkansas, an SPN affiliate launched by CEO Nic Horton in 2022, Betty Jane embraced the opportunity wholeheartedly. She joined SPN's board chair peer group, one of SPN's many resources offered to state think tank affiliates, where board chairs share ideas and best practices to build strong, durable organizations. "Everything that SPN has done for us has made Opportunity Arkansas more successful, from participating in the SPN board chair peer group to joining the strategy session to map out our priorities. I don't think any start-up group or organization can flourish without SPN." Opportunity Arkansas is a member of SPN's start-up program and has seen incredible success in its first year with impressive policy wins, including the signing of Arkansas LEARNS, the state's education freedom program, and occupational licensing reform.



Betty Jane with her father, William Strong.

While many people this year will focus on the presidential election, Betty Jane knows first-hand that the presidency is just one piece of the larger puzzle, and sustainable change often happens at the state level. **"Investing in the states is, to me, a guarantee that we can keep our republic and stop the encroachment of government overreach. If we invest in the state and the local levels, that's where you are going to see real change,"** said Betty Jane. "It is my hope SPN continues to do what they've done for over 30 years —the success of our country depends on it."

Supporters like Betty Jane are the driving force behind the success of the 50-state Network. Thank you, Betty Jane, for your partnership with SPN, and congratulations to the William H. and Genevieve A. Strong Foundation Trust for its steadfast commitment to the liberty movement.

STATE AFFILIATES

Our Network of 63 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.

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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

MARYLAND

Maryland Public Policy Institute
mdpolicy.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

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
beacontrn.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
virginia institute.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](https://www.spn.org).

ALABAMA

ALABAMA POLICY INSTITUTE • alabamapolicy.org

During the 2023 regular legislative session, **Alabama Policy Institute** championed tax relief for all citizens. API achieved victories on several fronts, leading an effort to reduce the state's 4-percent sales tax on grocery and food items. Working closely with Lieutenant Governor Will Ainsworth, API was able to have Alabama's grocery tax (passed in 1939) reduced to 3 percent on September 1, 2023. An additional 1-percent reduction could occur as soon as September 2024 if economic growth metrics are met. In total, the 2-percent grocery tax reduction is projected to save taxpayers \$318 million per year when fully implemented, representing the largest tax cut in Alabama history. API also partnered with Alabama House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels to encourage Alabamians to work and reduce the state's lagging labor participation rate. Act 2023-421 exempts overtime wages from Alabama's state income tax beginning January 1, 2024, through June 2025, allowing Alabama workers to keep more of what they earn. This is the first overtime tax elimination in the nation and should be replicated in other states. Not only will the tax elimination provide additional benefits to workers, but it will also alleviate the state's ongoing labor shortage. API is proud of the progress made and will continue the push to lower the tax burden on all Alabamians in 2024.



ALASKA

ALASKA POLICY FORUM • alaskapolicyforum.org

For the first time since **Alaska Policy Forum** began releasing its annual Responsible Alaska Budget (RAB), the state funds portion of the enacted budget is less than the RAB threshold. The RAB represents a strong fiscal rule that grows the budget no more than needed to adjust for population growth and inflation. An RAB was the right choice for Alaska, and APF hopes it will be a trend. In July, APF was pleased to host a Worker Freedom Policy Summit in partnership with Workers for Opportunity (WFO). The Summit educated more than 100 Alaskans through a policymaker educational event and two public events designed to inform public employees of their constitutional rights under the *Janus* US Supreme Court decision. Speakers from WFO, as well as Mark Janus himself, discussed the influence of post-*Janus* labor reforms and how the decision ensures employee choice. In 2022, APF launched the Alaska Leadership Academy (ALA), which in 2023 welcomed its second class with a record number of experienced and emerging leaders participating. The eight-month program, based on America's enduring freedom principles, educates, equips, and connects promising Alaskans. It is truly a highlight of APF's year to educate the next generation of leaders on the free-market and freedom-loving ideas that will grow Alaska's prosperity for years to come.





ARIZONA

GOLDWATER INSTITUTE • goldwaterinstitute.org

Nevada became the latest state to enact the **Goldwater Institute's** Right to Try for Individualized Treatments Act (Right to Try 2.0). This lifesaving legislation allows patients to safely access highly specialized treatments that are tailored for each individual based on their personal genetic information and otherwise blocked by the FDA's outdated regulatory system. The Right to Try for Individualized Treatments was designed to benefit patients with rare and ultra-rare diseases who do not have time to wait on the FDA to update its regulatory regime to reflect modern advances in individualized medicine. The reform is now law in Nevada and Arizona, and the Goldwater Institute will pursue this legislation in multiple states in 2024. To learn more about the Right to Try for Individualized Treatments Act, please contact Heather Curry (hcurry@goldwaterinstitute.org).

ARKANSAS



ARKANSAS POLICY FOUNDATION • arkansaspolicyfoundation.org

Arkansas' income tax rates have been reduced from 4.9 to 4.4 percent in 2023, the latest step in a long-term process advanced by the **Arkansas Policy Foundation**, Arkansas' oldest market-based think tank. Legislators cut the top individual income tax rate from 4.7 to 4.4 percent during a September special session called by freshman Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders. The action follows a reduction from 4.9 to 4.7 percent in 2023 in the Legislature's regular session. The corporate rate was cut from 5.1 to 4.8 percent. The Policy Foundation advanced the idea of income tax rate reductions in two 1998 studies by the Murphy Commission, a blue-ribbon panel established by then-Governor Mike Huckabee in his first executive order. The Commission was a Foundation project. In 2013, the first income tax reduction dropped the top rate from 7.0 to 6.9 percent. Between 2015 and 2022, additional reductions dropped the top rate to 4.9 percent using surplus revenues. The Policy Foundation argues surpluses occur in economic expansions and should be used to reduce the top rate so Arkansas can compete with low-tax states. Arkansas has recorded billion-dollar annual surpluses this decade.



OPPORTUNITY ARKANSAS • opportunityarkansas.org

Opportunity Arkansas launched in 2022 to bring bold, conservative solutions to the state in the areas of the workforce, education, public safety, and welfare reform. The biggest measure of success in the organization's first year is how different Arkansas looks now compared to before these commonsense reforms became a reality. Research, polling, and outreach by Opportunity Arkansas achieved 20 policy wins that will make life tangibly better for all Arkansans. The LEARNS Act enshrines universal school choice and empowers parents to choose the best educational fit for their kids. Workforce wins have removed barriers to work for new Arkansas residents, reoriented the unemployment program to re-employment, and protected taxpayers with tax reform. Arkansans can rest easier knowing that the state's parole board is now more transparent and that changes to the Emergency Powers Act will keep violent criminals off the streets. Opportunity Arkansas also made huge strides in protecting the safety net for the truly needy and breaking cycles of dependency by blocking multiple welfare expansions and helping create an innovative work requirement in Medicaid for able-bodied adults. Opportunity Arkansas is pursuing homegrown solutions for real change—and these commonsense reforms achieved within the first year are just the beginning.

CALIFORNIA

PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE • pacificresearch.org

Pacific Research Institute released the Free Cities Index (pacificresearch.org/new-free-cities-index-ranks-americas-best-and-worst-pro-growth-cities/), which ranks the nation's 50 most populous cities based on pro-growth policies, including whether they levy less burdensome taxes on businesses and individuals, impose a less costly regulatory environment, and efficiently provide core public services. Not surprisingly, the results showed that US cities that have pro-growth policies, encourage entrepreneurship, and efficiently provide core public services ranked at the top. The top five cities were Fort Worth, Austin, Colorado Springs, Raleigh, and Charlotte, while three of the bottom-five cities on the list were from California (Oakland ranked last.) Comparing the rankings to the population growth trends of the largest 50 cities illustrates a clear pattern: the cities with growing populations tend to maintain pro-growth policy environments, while the cities with declining populations maintain anti-growth policies. As the Index author, PRI senior fellow in business and economics Wayne Winegarden, noted: "The Free Cities Index rankings make clear—people, voting with their feet, are expressing their support for pro-growth policies by moving to those cities whose policies promote freedom." PRI received significant national media attention for the rollout of the Index, including a mention in Fort Worth Mayor Mattie Parker's recent State of the City address, when she touted the city's No. 1 national ranking for pro-growth policies.



COLORADO

INDEPENDENCE INSTITUTE • i2i.org

Independence Institute has focused on its digital engagement on various platforms. The Institute has always worked to be innovative with technology in the pursuit of freedom, and in 2023, that played out in many ways. Amid new digital media advances, Independence Institute expanded its social media efforts and email newsletter outreach, which generated a greater audience for long-form videos featured on its YouTube channel. As traction for long-form video grew, Institute content began to influence mainstream media in Denver. This enabled the Institute to produce short-form videos that expanded its reach even further, especially on YouTube and Instagram. Independence Institute's foundation of consistent and intentional media engagement has led to greater influence in Colorado, as there is now a stronger platform from which to fight future challenges. Independence Institute will continue to develop ways to find new audiences, reaching the next generation of young people and standing strong in the fight for freedom.





CONNECTICUT

YANKEE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • [Yankeeinstitute.org](https://yankeeinstitute.org)

Yankee Institute broadened its scope and impact across Connecticut, both inside and outside the Legislature, in 2023. YI launched the Connecticut Center for Educational Excellence, a project designed to advance educational opportunity and access policies by providing scholarships for low-income students to attend the school of their choice. *Connecticut Inside Investigator*, the Institute's journalism spin-off, won first place for "in-depth reporting" from the Connecticut Press Club for its piece on how the state's restrictive election laws have resulted in the lowest turnover of legislators in the country. And Yankee Institute's groundbreaking Labor & Management Strategies program continues to train elected leaders on how conduct collective bargaining negotiations more effectively on behalf of taxpayers—the program has spread to seven other states, plus Washington, DC. YI's influence at the Capitol also grew exponentially: constituent outreach to their legislators prompted by Yankee Institute increased by 300 percent. As a result, YI was instrumental in preventing a Green Amendment from being added to Connecticut's Constitution, and also played a role in stopping major tax increases and harmful regulatory expansions. Big Labor failed to get a single item on its wish list through the Legislature. A final high point was the Let Connecticut Work! conference, which featured the state's commissioner of revenue, two Democratic members of the state House, a Republican member of the state Senate, and leaders of small and medium-sized businesses across Connecticut—aimed at turbocharging reforms to state tax, regulatory, and energy policies.

FLORIDA



FOUNDATION FOR GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY • thefga.org

In 2023, **Foundation for Government Accountability's** biggest successes arguably took place in the courthouse instead of the statehouse. When the Biden administration decided to take the side of health insurers and drug manufacturers, FGA decided to take the side of patients and their families. Because of two major court victories, millions of Americans will have transparent access to the information they need to make informed health care decisions and hospitals can be held accountable. Back in 2022, before the Transparency in Coverage rule could take effect, the Biden administration used an FAQ guidance document to block enforcement of the rule. In response, FGA filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, for prohibiting the enforcement of that rule. Due to pressure from FGA's lawsuit, the Departments issued updated FAQ guidance reversing their previous position of non-enforcement. Additionally, FGA's filed a lawsuit against the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) for failing to respond to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests regarding a 2020 rule requiring hospitals to make standard charges public. In December, a federal judge ordered that CMS must hand over all documents and comply with FGA's requests, a decision marking another huge court victory for FGA. In both cases, FGA stood up to the federal behemoth in court, and won.

THE JAMES MADISON INSTITUTE • jamesmadison.org

The **James Madison Institute** has transported its Blueprint: Florida initiative to other states. This work has taken the Institute from the east coast to west, and from the north to the south, meeting with governors, legislators, Congressional members, staff, and constituencies invested in advancing policies rooted in free enterprise—and taking pages from Florida’s successful playbook. JMI met with Gov. Mike Dunleavy, Attorney General Treg Taylor, and other state and local officials interested in passing labor reforms in Alaska. The Institute participated in the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025 task force on readiness for the next federal administration. Together with allies in Oakland, California, JMI developed strategies that can save the state from its disastrous progressive policies. There have been many meaningful conversations about workforce reforms with the Tennessee House speaker and Senate majority leader at a freedom summit in Nashville, Tennessee. In addition, Jesper Møller Sørensen, the ambassador of Denmark to the United States, sought out the JMI perspective on Danish opportunities in the Sunshine State. JMI looks forward to expanding efforts across the country to any state looking to Florida’s successes.



GEORGIA

GEORGIA CENTER FOR OPPORTUNITY • georgiaopportunity.org

The **Georgia Center for Opportunity**, worked at a policy and community level to address poverty in our state and to set the model for transforming impoverished communities into thriving communities across the country. Often community-level work informs the policies that must be addressed at state and local levels. This was especially clear as GCO worked to move communities into work. Too often, the opportunity to get ahead or find a job evaded communities due to a lack of public safety. That is why, in 2023 GCO convened state policymakers and city leaders in Atlanta and Columbus to look at the causes of increased violence, and provided a proven set of practical solutions for reducing crime—especially in low-income neighborhoods. These solutions were rooted in policy AND community, bringing together key stakeholders in both areas to address the issue. By removing this barrier to opportunity in these communities and empowering individuals to thrive, GCO is expecting a revitalization over the coming months and years. This is just one example of the work GCO is doing to address poverty and address known issues that rob communities of opportunity and lock segments of that population in poverty.



GEORGIA PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION • georgiapolicy.org

As the cost of housing continues to rise in Georgia, and housing affordability remains a major issue, **Georgia Public Policy Foundation** continues to serve as the driving force for reforms in the Peach State. In 2023 alone, the Foundation released three new reports on how government fees and regulations affect the price of housing. From these reports—and past work—came multiple bills in the General Assembly that attempted, for the first time, to rein in excessive regulations. The Foundation also hosted the 2023 Georgia Housing Summit. More than 100 elected officials and stakeholders attended the half-day summit that explored how innovation and entrepreneurship can ensure housing is attainable for all Georgians. For this work, the Foundation received the Bob Williams Award for Outstanding Policy Achievement from peers in the State Policy Network. Heading into 2024, the Foundation will continue working on this issue at the state level as well as with local governments, where most of the regulations originate.



HAWAII

GRASSROOT INSTITUTE OF HAWAII • grassrootinstitute.org

The **Grassroot Institute of Hawaii** succeeded on many fronts in 2023, including internally by exceeding its growth metrics and externally by achieving policy gains. Whether measured by publications, media hits, testimonies submitted, social media engagement, or successful campaigns, the Institute's 2023 output has eclipsed all previous years. Grassroot scored several victories at the Legislature, including passage of a law that allows Hawaii to join a licensure compact that will make it easier for doctors from member states to practice in Hawaii. It also helped push through a law that will save taxpayers millions of dollars a year by authorizing "pass-through entities" such as partnerships and S corporations to deduct their state income taxes from their federal income taxes. At the county level, Grassroot helped provide property tax relief in three of the state's four counties. On Oahu, Grassroot staff worked to increase the county's homeowner exemption by \$20,000, offer all homeowners a one-time \$350 tax credit, and increase eligibility for the low-income homeowner tax cap—for a combined savings of almost \$70 million. On Kauai and Hawaii islands, Grassroot helped obtain higher homeowner exemptions and lower tax rates worth millions of dollars. Kauai County also adopted wide-ranging property tax reform that lowered tax burdens for homeowners and repealed outdated and unused exemptions. Throughout this campaign, the Grassroot Institute gained credibility and the political relationships necessary to further other policy goals, especially permitting and zoning reform.

ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE • illinoispolicy.org

The **Illinois Policy Institute** launched a daily news round-up email in 2023, and it has grown from 50,000 to more than 200,000 average daily opens. With more than 600,000 daily subscribers, The Morning Briefing email receives as high as a 50-percent open rate—which far exceeds industry standards. This gives the Institute the largest megaphone in the state. In comparison, daily emails from Illinois newspapers or competitors only reach up to 100,000 daily readers. Not only is the Institute able to reach and educate more Illinoisans than anyone else, but its email platform actively engages readers and deploys them to act. The Morning Briefing serves as vehicle to solicit donations, motivate people to contact their lawmakers, and recruit candidates. It's an important resource that the Institute will use for years.

IOWA

IOWANS FOR TAX RELIEF FOUNDATION • taxrelief.org

ITR Foundation released an updated version of ITR Local.org. This project empowers Iowans to be more involved in their local government. ITR Local provides city, county, and school district property tax data; local government budget and spending information; and explanations of Iowa's complicated property tax system. Visitors to ITR Local can see not only how their community's property taxes have increased in comparison to population and inflation, but also how their local governments are spending their tax dollars. The goal of ITR Local is to help taxpayers have a conversation with their elected local government officials. The updated version of ITR Local comes after ITR Foundation helped lead the way for a comprehensive property tax reform measure passed by the Iowa Legislature. ITR Foundation is a leader in the property tax reform discussion in Iowa and many of our ideas were implemented by the legislature. Further, ITR Local is creating greater awareness and civic participation for taxpayers to demand more accountability and property tax relief from their local governments.



KANSAS

KANSAS POLICY INSTITUTE • kansaspolicy.org

The Kansas public education system is designed to preserve the status quo, which, if left unchallenged, ensures a bleak future for students. After recent school board elections, **Kansas Policy Institute** discovered that many newly elected school board members were frustrated at being unable to access needed information. In some instances, school board members weren't even permitted to raise critical issues at school board meetings. KPI addressed the problem by launching a new subsidiary, the Kansas School Board Resource Center (KSBRC). School board members need an independent, student-focused source of information and guidance, and KPI is meeting that need. KSBRC offers local school board members finance and governance information and training. Under the guidance of an executive director with an extensive background in Kansas education, KSBRC has conducted multiple training sessions around the state. To close out KSBRC's inaugural year, its first annual conference will bring school board members from around the state together for an all-day training session on unlocking the potential of Kansas students and identifying barriers to student achievement. The KSBRC is one of the first private-sector-led school board associations in the country, and all its resources are free. The state's education crisis won't be resolved without school board members leading a transformation that puts students' academic needs ahead of the system's institutional interests, and KPI is proud to help pave the way.



LOUISIANA

PELICAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • pelicaninstitute.org

The **Pelican Institute for Public Policy** achieved several notable successes over the past year. Pelican successfully advocated for the passage of a bill regarding school financial transparency. In collaboration with fellow Network affiliates, including the Texas Public Policy Foundation and the Georgia Center for Opportunity, Pelican facilitated the introduction of a bill aimed at conducting a comprehensive audit of workforce and social services. Lastly, Pelican's Louisiana Comeback Agenda played a pivotal role in informing voters throughout the election season and providing guidance to the new administration and lawmakers, shaping the vision for the 2024 legislative session.





MAINE

MAINE POLICY INSTITUTE • mainepolicy.org

Maine Policy's biggest win in 2023 was achieving reforms to the state's transportation funding process without raising fees or taxes on hardworking Mainers. While progressive politicians called for gas tax hikes and other fee increases to cover the state's persistent \$200+ million transportation funding shortfall, Maine Policy wrote, and Rep. John Andrews sponsored a bill that would reallocate a portion of automobile-related sales taxes from the state's General Fund to the Highway Fund. This reform both reduced the amount of money lawmakers could appropriate in the state's next two-year budget while also covering the transportation funding shortfall without new tax or fee increases. The bill passed unanimously in the Tax Committee before being rolled into the Highway Fund Budget by an affirmative vote of the Transportation Committee. While Maine Policy hoped to achieve other big victories in 2023, this reform accomplished three major goals. It reduced the amount of money in the General Fund, thus shrinking the size of the state's next biennial budget; covered the transportation funding shortfall without tax or fee hikes on working Mainers; and prevents the need for future borrowing, which Maine has been doing for many years now to cover the funding shortfall. This small but significant reform will save taxpayers millions in future debt payments.

MASSACHUSETTS

PIONEER INSTITUTE • pioneerinstitute.org

On October 25, **Pioneer Institute** released *Restoring the City on a Hill: US History and Civics in America's Schools*, a book which details declines in history and civics knowledge and addresses how states can foster understanding of and curiosity about America's history. "The importance of a strong US history and civics curriculum cannot be overstated. Yet states have abandoned their teaching of these crucial issues in favor of other subjects over the years," said co-editor Chris Sinicola, Pioneer's director of communications and media relations. *Restoring the City on a Hill* recommends requiring students to pass the US citizenship test to graduate from high school; developing a curriculum that incorporates a reading of US history—with a focus on primary documents such as the Declaration of Independence, US Constitution, and *Federalist Papers*—in every grade; increasing investment in professional development programs for educators; and establishing an open, inclusive process for parent and community curriculum input through panels, surveys, and regional meetings. Pioneer marked the book launch with an episode of The Learning Curve podcast in which Sinicola discussed the book's approach, including grades that Pioneer assigned to several of the most popular history and civics curricula on the market, plus a webinar with Jamie Gass, director of Pioneer's Center for School Reform, exploring how to reinvigorate history and civics instruction. A two-month media campaign to promote the book and the reform of civics instruction is underway.



PIONEER INSTITUTE
PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH

MICHIGAN

MACKINAC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY • mackinac.org

The **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** remained steadfast in its fight for limited government and free-market principles as Michigan experienced its first Democratic trifecta in 40 years. Through a novel litigation strategy, the Center held the Michigan Education Association accountable after the union and its health insurance affiliate fraudulently took \$12.5 million in COVID-19 funds. A lawsuit brought by the Center challenging Michigan State University's misinterpretation of FOIA brought another legal victory for transparency. The decision in that case set a new bar for interpreting public records laws that will keep government officials accountable to the people they're meant to serve. The Center also sued the state on behalf of business groups, lawmakers, and taxpayers to stop a blatant misreading of Michigan's income tax law. The Mackinac Center's national Workers for Opportunity project worked with other state-based think tanks to make monumental strides in labor reform in two critical states this year - Florida and Tennessee. Alongside the James Madison Institute in Florida, new reforms were enacted that give teachers more clarity and control over their paychecks, as well as the ability to opt out of paying union dues at any time. With help from the Beacon Center in Tennessee, lawmakers voted to remove the state government from the dues collection process. Additionally, certain union members now have the right to a private ballot when deciding on representation.



MINNESOTA

FREEDOM FOUNDATION OF MINNESOTA • freedomfoundationofminnesota.com

The shocking results of the 2023 legislative session served as a wake-up call to many Minnesotans who believe that election results don't matter in their daily lives. After winning control of the state Senate by a one-vote majority, the liberal trifecta went to work in January, passing significant changes to state law: they spent the nearly \$18 billion dollar budget surplus and still found time to raise more than \$10 billion in new taxes. It became obvious to the **Freedom Foundation of Minnesota** that going forward, conservatives need to not only communicate good ideas but also develop strong, principled, and articulate leaders. The Freedom Foundation has focused all year on developing better ways to market its solutions to some of the most difficult issues facing the state. The next—and most important—step is effective communication. Starting next month, the Foundation will be sharing these solutions with policymakers. The Freedom Foundation is partnering with other national educational organizations who bring a host of experience in educating and training future leaders—leaders that will change the trajectory of the state next year.





MISSISSIPPI

EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI • empowerms.org

Empower Mississippi hosted its annual policy summit in September. Hundreds gathered for Unleash Mississippi, which brought together policy experts, lawmakers, and everyday citizens for a solution-centered discussion of the state's biggest challenges. In the education discussion, attendees heard from EdChoice President and CEO Robert Enlow and state Sen. Breanne Davis about the power of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). Education freedom gives parents more control over their children's education and continues to gain momentum across the country. The panelists had the opportunity to sit down privately following the event with lawmakers to discuss the opportunities that lie ahead for Mississippi. Is Mississippi next to give students more education freedom? A growing number say it is likely. Mississippi has many great public schools, and recent accountability measures indicate that public schools are improving. However, even the best public schools are not equipped to meet the unique needs of every student. Providing parents with more quality options and empowering them to access those options through programs like ESAs ensures that every child has the opportunity to thrive. The 2024 legislative session could change the path for thousands of Mississippi kids.

MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY • mspolicy.org

The **Mississippi Center for Public Policy** has had three big successes in 2023. The Center's Responsible Budget for Mississippi proposed keeping spending under control and not squandering the surplus. The budget passed by the Legislature was in line with the Center's recommendations. Concerned about what young people are being taught in college, the Center launched the Mississippi Leadership Academy to teach young Mississippians about the morality of the free market and the US Constitution, as well as how to defend liberty on campus. The Academy is now in its second year with a stellar line-up of contributors. Each Saturday, almost 12,000 individuals across Mississippi open and read—i.e., not just receive—the Center's weekly newsletter. This is perhaps the highest per-capita read rate of any newsletter of any state level think tank.

MISSOURI

SHOW-ME INSTITUTE • showmeinstitute.org

Show-Me Institute's biggest success in 2023 was the addition of financial data to its MoSchoolRankings.org website. MoSchoolRankings already had two years of data with report cards and letter grades for schools and districts. Now, the website also has financial data so that users can see how every single dollar was spent in 551 public school districts and charter school local education agencies. Transparency in education spending is critical. Every dollar a school spends is public money. It's often too easy for bureaucrats to twist spending numbers to advance a certain agenda or hide the truth about what's happening. So the Institute took a straightforward approach to reporting spending data. If a district reported something to the state as a source of revenue or expense, it's included in the rankings. Transparency alone is a worthy goal, but this project also jumpstarted a conversation about education spending. Lawmakers began asking harder questions about how the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is spending money. More scrutiny was placed on education spending during the budget process. DESE is an enormously powerful organization, and its decisions have a huge impact on the lives of Missouri children and families. People ought to be asking tough questions about whether DESE is maximizing taxpayer dollars.

MONTANA

FRONTIER INSTITUTE • frontierinstitute.org

Frontier Institute's legislative wins garnered national attention in 2023. From property rights to education freedom to tech and innovation, Frontier led the way on reforms aimed at breaking down barriers preventing Montanans from succeeding. By producing extensive research to demonstrate the problems Montanans are facing, crystalizing the solutions into viral talking points, and assembling a bipartisan coalition of groups from the left and right to support these reforms, Frontier has lived up to its reputation of having a "small footprint, but big impact."



NEBRASKA

PLATTE INSTITUTE • platteinstitute.org

In 2023, the **Platte Institute** celebrated a series of legislative victories that stand as a testament to its commitment to economic freedom in Nebraska. Most notable was the groundbreaking passage of both income and property tax relief. By reducing the top income tax rate to 3.9 percent and entirely removing certain property taxes from bills, Nebraska's competitiveness regionally has increased, promising prosperity for future generations. This \$2 billion package was the largest in the country in 2023. 2023 also marked the establishment of Nebraska's first regulatory sandbox law. In partnership with the Libertas Institute, the Platte Institute was able to take a forward step in fueling innovation in the insurance industry. Platte's efforts have also resulted in greater legislative transparency via a mandatory video archive for each legislative session. Last, passing tax credit scholarships into law and safeguarding property rights from home equity theft in partnership with the Pacific Legal Foundation underscores Platte's unwavering dedication to the people of Nebraska. Here's to a brighter and prosperous future for the Cornhusker State.



NEVADA

NEVADA POLICY • npri.org

Nevada Policy enjoyed tremendous success in 2023 with its new Action Center. The Nevada Policy Action Center was created at the start of the state's 2023 legislative session to allow individuals to direct already-created letters on a handful of important bills to lawmakers. In all, more than 3,500 letters were sent to lawmakers. The letters touched on a dozen different topics, including election integrity, occupational licensing, rent control, and government spending. Hundreds of Nevada voters participated in the push, which stressed the importance of free-market solutions, protecting individual liberties, and eliminating unnecessary government restrictions on citizens and businesses. Nevada Policy believes its efforts in this and other areas played a key role in Republican Governor Joe Lombardo's decision to issue 75 vetoes during the session, a state record for gubernatorial vetoes.





NEW JERSEY

GARDEN STATE INITIATIVE • gardenstateinitiative.org

The **Garden State Initiative**, co-founded in 2017 by Carl Helstrom and Larry Mone, is determined to transform New Jersey into a state with a commitment to economic growth and prosperity for all families by advancing free-market public policies. This fiscal year, GSI formed business partnerships and drove an education campaign targeting legislators and opinion leaders to sunset New Jersey's highest-in-the-nation corporate business tax surcharge. Leveraging research co-authored with Art Laffer and events co-hosted with Fox Business Host Larry Kudlow, GSI garnered accolades for its efforts in media coverage throughout the region and nationally in the *Wall Street Journal*, including an op-ed authored by Laffer and GSI President Regina Egea. This October, GSI challenged NJ Transit's third consecutive toll hike without justification—ultimately leading to Governor Phil Murphy's veto of the budget.

NEW MEXICO

RIO GRANDE FOUNDATION • riograndefoundation.org

Even before the pandemic lockdowns, the New Mexico education system underperformed. New Mexico is now ranked 51st—last place in the nation—for education. New Mexico's children are more vulnerable than ever to learning loss. The **Rio Grande Foundation's** new program, Opportunity for All Kids NM (OAK NM), is dedicated to improving New Mexico's faltering education system. On September 22, Rio Grande Foundation hosted the program's first Opportunity for All Kids Conference, which welcomed 100 policymakers, teachers, administrators, legislators, parents, and concerned citizens. The conference examined navigating the existing system and non-public alternatives, including charter schools, private schools, parochial schools, homeschools, and microschools.

NEW YORK

EMPIRE CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY • empirecenter.org

When New York Governor Kathy Hochul defied political gravity and got state lawmakers to allow more charter schools to open, it marked a major win both for students stuck in underperforming schools and for the Albany-based **Empire Center for Public Policy**. Hochul's proposal to adjust New York's arbitrary limit on charter schools came under instant attack by teachers' unions, who planned to use attacks on charters from union-backed Republicans to make Hochul look out of step with her fellow Democrats. The Empire Center had been the lead critic of New York's highest-in-the-nation per-pupil spending, weak performance, and lack of school choice, and its team was ready. They swatted down the Republicans' deceptive and dishonest anti-charter rhetoric and, instead of flanking Hochul, the anti-charter members came under fire from their own supporters. Against expectations, Hochul triumphed, and the first round of new charter schools in several years is set to begin opening next fall. The schools, spread across New York City, will eventually serve more than 2,300 children.



NORTH CAROLINA

JOHN LOCKE FOUNDATION • johnlocke.org

In 2023, **John Locke Foundation** celebrated the biggest education victory in North Carolina history. For years, Locke has fought to expand opportunities for every family in the state, and North Carolina proudly became the tenth state to pass universal school choice. The state budget included the massive expansion of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, which will provide access to education vouchers to all K-12 families who desire to apply. There has also been movement on Locke's goal of expanding access to reliable, affordable energy. Duke Energy, the state's largest energy provider, announced plans to replace a retiring coal facility with nuclear power, which reflected a Locke policy recommendation to ensure a smooth, clean energy transition across the state.



OHIO

THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE • buckeyeinstitute.org

The **Buckeye Institute** racked up major wins throughout 2023. Ohio passed universal school choice, helping all families afford the best education setting for their children. The state's first Education Savings Account program, the Afterschool Child Enrichment (ACE) program, expanded. Ohio returned some of the state's record surplus to taxpayers and moved closer to a single flat tax. Based on Buckeye's recommendations, Ohio adopted universal occupational licensing and eliminated or reformed 35 licenses. Buckeye premiered *Everyone Is Welcome*, an award-winning documentary featuring the David-versus-Goliath legal battle it fought to reopen The Big Board, a neighborhood grill and bar in Washington, DC. Buckeye secured victories in *Darling v. AFSCME* and *Krizon v. OAPSE*, as well as in *Latta v. US Department of Education*, in which the US Supreme Court ruled that President Biden's student loan debt cancellation plan was unconstitutional. In *Doe v. Columbus*, an Ohio judge recognized that Buckeye was likely to succeed in challenging Columbus' unconstitutional gun law and halted enforcement of the law until the case was resolved. Buckeye was also featured in *National Review* ("The Buckeye Institute's Tax Revolution") and *The Columbus Dispatch* ("Supreme Impact: How an Ohio Think Tank Is Shaping the US Supreme Court's Agenda").



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

OREGON

CASCADE POLICY INSTITUTE • cascadepolicy.org

On August 1, 2023, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, a Democrat, signed into law **Cascade Policy Institute's** bill to ease restrictions on taking the GED exams (HB 3068). With bipartisan sponsorship and support, Cascade's bill will make a difference to students looking to move forward more quickly toward college or a career. General Educational Development tests measure proficiency in science, mathematics, social studies, and language arts. The GED provides certification that successful test-takers meet high school graduate-level academic skills. Oregon previously required that a person be 18 years old to take the GED. People as young as 16 could sit for the GED only in limited circumstances—if they had dropped out of high school, were married or emancipated minors, or were in juvenile detention. HB 3068 removes these restrictions. With parents' permission, 11th and 12th graders now may graduate early by passing the GED, without having to drop out of high school first. Earning a GED while still enrolled in school provides students with a low-risk option to demonstrate academic proficiency and move on to higher education or employment. Cascade's GED bill is an example of a common-sense policy solution that can be enacted into law with near-unanimous support.





PENNSYLVANIA

COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION • commonwealthfoundation.org

In 2023, the **Commonwealth Foundation's** (CF) top policy issues—more clearly than at any point in CF's 35-year history—dominated Harrisburg's legislative agenda. The result: the largest school choice increase in Pennsylvania (PA) history! In December 2023, lawmakers passed, and the governor signed, a new education code bill that raises the caps on PA's tax credit scholarship programs (ETC/OSTC) by a record \$150 million! That means CF was able to secure three consecutive years of record ETC/OSTC increases—\$315 million in all. Our work to advance educational opportunity also led to (1) the Lifeline Scholarships/PASS program for 250,000 vulnerable students in PA's worst schools dominating the entire 2024 budget negotiations; (2) Governor Shapiro becoming the highest profile Democrat in America to publicly endorse education opportunity accounts (i.e., Lifeline Scholarships/PASS); and (3) the PA Senate passing the Lifeline Scholarships/PASS program with bipartisan support an unprecedented three times.

SOUTH CAROLINA

PALMETTO PROMISE INSTITUTE • palmettopromise.org

2023 was the most significant year for **Palmetto Promise Institute** since its founding ten years ago. PPI has a new CEO, a beautiful new office suite, and two landmark legislative victories. With the election of Ellen Weaver as state superintendent of education, the PPI board of directors selected one of their own for president, Charleston area CPA Wendy Damron. Soon after, two pieces of legislation—on which PPI had been the lead policy research and communications organization—passed into law. Due to the work of teams of allies both in South Carolina and nationally, both Education Scholarship Accounts (ESAs) and certificate-of-need (CON) repeal crossed the finish line before the end of the 2023–24 session. Palmetto Promise Institute staff were on hand as each bill was signed into law by Governor Henry McMaster. As reported in *Forbes* by SPN healthcare analyst Josh Archambault, the South Carolina CON repeal was the most significant in America in nearly 30 years. Taken together, the end of CON and the rise of ESAs prompted another policy analyst, Patrick Gleason, to write that “the Palmetto State is no longer simply a red state where Republicans easily win elections, but also one where conservative reforms are being enacted.” Palmetto Promise Institute is honored to have been in the arena since Day 1 on behalf of these transformative free-market policies. The best is yet to come for the Palmetto State.



SOUTH CAROLINA POLICY COUNCIL • scpolycouncil.org

In 2023, the **South Carolina Policy Council** led a victorious effort to put more parents in charge of their children's education. The change comes via a historic Education Scholarship Account program, signed by Governor Henry McMaster in May, which will help thousands of families pay for K–12 expenses of their choice and enhance student learning. The scholarships can be used to pay for private school tuition, textbooks, tutoring, computers, therapies for special-needs students, exam fees, and more. The Council has been at this fight for decades, but this time went on the offensive. In January, a poll of South Carolina voters found broad bipartisan support for the program. The results were cited in multiple news stories, bringing positive coverage to the issue and helping shape public discussion. Simultaneously, Council research and bill analysis were critical resources for lawmakers during debate, which saw heavy resistance from school choice critics. After months of hard work, the measure was passed. South Carolina families can look forward to these life-changing education scholarships starting in the 2024–25 school year.



TENNESSEE

BEACON CENTER OF TENNESSEE • beacontn.org

Beacon Center of Tennessee released the first and second editions of its Beacon Poll, the first statewide quarterly survey asking Tennessee voters how they feel about a variety of issues—from politics and policy to sports and culture. Despite being new on the scene, the Beacon Poll has already cemented itself as a reliable, transparent, and useful source to the media, people involved in the public policy process, and most importantly, the citizens of Tennessee. Between the July and October polls, the poll has garnered more than 275 media hits and \$3.75 million in earned media value. Among the most notable results, Beacon found that 69 percent of Tennesseans want statewide Education Savings Accounts and 77 percent agree that more private and public education options are needed. Additionally, 45 percent of voters agree that certificate-of-need laws need to be reformed or repealed, while only 13 percent oppose removing the restrictions. The Beacon Poll is proving to be a massive brand boost for the organization and a powerful tool to show elected officials where voters stand on policy issues. Until now, there has been no consistent statewide survey that accurately assesses where Tennesseans stand on matters affecting their lives on an ongoing basis. Tennesseans deserve transparent polling about issues that matter to them, which is why Beacon plans to conduct at least four more quarterly polls throughout 2024—and hopefully beyond.



TEXAS

TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION • texaspolicy.com

In 2023, the **Texas Public Policy Foundation** secured historic tax relief for Texans during the 88th Texas Legislature. To champion this reform, TPPF launched a campaign that included research, public outreach efforts, legislator engagement, and a communications blitz aimed at educating voters and legislators about property tax reform and galvanizing them to take action. TPPF's most vocal champion was Governor Greg Abbott, who has touted TPPF's property tax plan as his own and called two special sessions to ensure that Texans received property tax relief. The Texas Legislature passed an \$18 billion property tax relief package that reduces school tax rates, increases the homestead exemption, initiates a circuit breaker pilot project, and provides franchise tax relief. For tax year 2023, it is anticipated that this package will save the average Texas homestead owner more than \$1,200. In August 2023, Governor Abbott signed this relief package into law. Because of TPPF's efforts, Texas has secured historic property tax reform and is on the path to eliminating property taxes and unleashing prosperity for every Texan.





UTAH

LIBERTAS INSTITUTE • libertasutah.org

In 2017, **Libertas Institute** got a law passed—the first of its kind in the country—to ban local governments from requiring permits or licenses for youth entrepreneurs. That same year Libertas launched the Children’s Entrepreneur Market program, which is designed to give kids entrepreneurial experiences. In a traditional “lemonade stand” setting, kids spend 95 percent of their time flagging cars down and 5 percent selling. Children’s entrepreneur markets remedy this problem by providing young people with tons of foot traffic, so they can spend their time interacting with and selling to customers—to practice salesmanship, customer service, negotiation, counting money, and more. In 2023, Libertas expanded these markets into 6 new states and 65 new cities, as well as awarded 12 scholarships to young entrepreneurs who have demonstrated financial and operational competence, and who wish to grow their business. Next year the markets are set to expand into 10 new states. Libertas will also finish developing a market-centric entrepreneurship curriculum that enables kids to guide themselves through activities and lessons that can help them make their entrepreneurship experience a huge success.

VIRGINIA

THOMAS JEFFERSON INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • thomasjeffersoninst.org



The Commonwealth of Virginia, as predicted by the **Thomas Jefferson Institute**, was faced with massive and historic surpluses throughout its unique biennial budget cycle, climbing from \$3.6 billion last year to \$5.1 billion in early 2023. The surplus was built through stronger-than-expected revenue growth (a portion of which was due to the impact of inflation when Virginia does not index its tax deductions), sizable spending cuts, and not spending reserves unnecessarily. Because of these factors, the Thomas Jefferson Institute called for structural tax reform to return money to taxpayers (or reduce collections) to limit surpluses. Failing that, the Institute called for surpluses to be returned directly to taxpayers. In the end, Governor Glenn Youngkin pushed for, and got, \$1 billion in one-time tax rebates for the people of the Commonwealth. Upon signing the budget amendments, the governor sent out the Thomas Jefferson Institute’s analysis of the final budget agreement. The analysis showed that over his first two years in office, Youngkin had cut \$5 billion in taxes. This is more than the previous two governors cut over eight years. As surpluses continue to mount, the Institute is again pressing for structural reform.

VIRGINIA INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • virginiainstitute.org

Virginia Institute for Public Policy's Election Integrity Network (EIN) led the adoption of the "stop ranked-choice voting" model legislation by the American Legislative Council at its August annual meeting. The Safeguard American Votes (SAVE) Act is now available to all legislators and policymakers throughout the country. The SAVE Act is needed, as ranked-choice voting is being pushed in nearly every state. The EIN expanded from 11 statewide coalitions at the end of 2022 to 23 coalitions by October 2023, with six more states currently in the on-boarding process. This expansion will provide election integrity coverage to more than half the country in less than two years. These coalitions bring together serious election integrity advocates in their states, and are purpose driven to bring transparency and accuracy to their states' election processes. The EIN provides mentorship, resources, and unprecedented access to state and national election integrity experts. During 2023, EIN developed seven widely attended national working groups in election integrity. These include Citizens Research Project, Vote-by-Mail & USPS, Stop Ranking Choice Voting, Legislative, Voting Technology & Election Systems, Vulnerable Voters, and Voter Rolls. In addition, the Institute's special workshops in Media Training and Introduction to Election Integrity Infrastructure provide election integrity advocates with all the tools they need to make a significant impact in their local election offices, and nationwide.



WASHINGTON

FREEDOM FOUNDATION • freedomfoundation.com

Freedom Foundation set a number of firsts in 2023 that will help fulfill its mission of helping government employees leave their unions for years to come. During the legislative session, Freedom Foundation helped enact new laws in Arkansas and Florida that freed more than 100,000 people from their government unions and finally forced unions to collect their own dues, rather than expecting the government employer to do their jobs for them. In July, the Freedom Foundation held its inaugural Teacher Freedom Summit, bringing together 200+ teachers from across the country. Since the summit, attending teachers have hosted a number of roundtables with their peers for discussions about workplace rights, alternative organizations, and dropping teacher union membership. In a rare but important victory at the Washington State Supreme Court, the justices sided with the Freedom Foundation and found that approximately 50 unions wrongfully denied contact information about public employees based on bogus concerns about doxing domestic abuse victims. During the third quarter, Freedom Foundation broke monthly records, and set daily and weekly records for union membership opt-outs, culminating in more than 13,000 former government union members keeping more than \$13 million of their own money in their paychecks. The Freedom Foundation will build on this success in 2024.





WEST VIRGINIA

CARDINAL INSTITUTE FOR WEST VIRGINIA POLICY • cardinalinstitute.com

The last time West Virginia made any significant income tax change was in the 1980s. That is, until 2023. The **Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy** helped usher in what was dubbed the “largest tax cut in West Virginia history,” saving taxpayers more than \$700 million in the first year alone. For several years, Cardinal has emphasized the need for sound tax reform and encouraged lawmakers to build on prior transformational reforms. Throughout the 2023 legislative session, Cardinal stressed the urgency of the moment through op-eds, its first Tax Reform Week full of informational interviews with experts, and participation in a roundtable hosted by Governor Jim Justice. Cardinal’s thought leadership culminated in a 21.25 percent across-the-board reduction in personal income tax rates, as well as rebates on some personal property and small business taxes. The reform also included revenue triggers for further reductions, putting West Virginia on a path to eliminating the personal income tax entirely.

WISCONSIN

BADGER INSTITUTE • badgerinstitute.org



What was an active possibility last spring has borne fruit: Wisconsin’s leap in per-child funding for school choice not only secures the fiscal stability of the 474 participating independent schools and ensures ongoing choice for about 54,000 students, but is also a triumph for **Badger Institute** storytelling and advocacy on an issue the Institute has prioritized for 35 years. Badger’s work with two intersecting coalitions; a series of videos centering the diverse voices of educators, parents, and children; research and quick-response policy explanations; op-eds and media appearances; and in-the-Capitol staff that includes the state’s foremost expert on school finance—all these led to the bargain in which a governor who ran on a promise to kill off school choice instead agreed with a choice-supporting Legislature to increase per-pupil funding by up to a third, bringing funding to a level that schools say makes choice fiscally sustainable. Weeks afterward, a philanthropist spent \$34 million to buy and refit a recently closed college campus as a 1,500-student expansion of a choice school to a new part of Milwaukee—telling media the expansion could not have taken place without the funding deal. The expansion validates the magnitude of this win for Wisconsin families.

INSTITUTE FOR REFORMING GOVERNMENT • reforminggovernment.org

The **Institute for Reforming Government** helped pass historic phonics-based reading reforms in Wisconsin, following leaders like Florida and Mississippi. Wisconsin, despite its reputation, has had declining schools for decades. Far too many children are not able to read well and Milwaukee's black students have the worst reading scores in the country. After two years of IRG building support among communities and lawmakers and refuting the objections of unions, the Legislature passed a bipartisan bill to the governor. Despite being a Democrat whose policies as state superintendent led to Wisconsin's reading crisis and who vetoed a smaller bill in the previous session, the governor signed the bill into law. This reform only happened because of the tenacious focus of IRG and IRG Action, proving that good results can occur in divided government. If implemented correctly, the law will help more than 200,000 students learn to read the right way, while working to close the largest racial achievement gap in the country. IRG is conducting oversight of the reform's implementation. That has included recommending members of the reform's leadership council and connecting high-performing schools to lower-performing ones on proper execution.



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

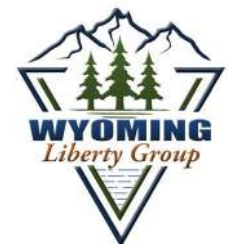
In June, **Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty's** litigation team scored a unanimous victory for taxpayers before the Wisconsin Supreme Court. Local road costs, funded primarily through property taxes, are subject to levy limits and uniformity requirements. The Town of Buchanan attempted to circumvent these limits by imposing a transportation utility fee on taxpayers which amounted to an illegal tax. The Court agreed with WILL's attorneys, repealing the transportation utility fee and creating a strong precedent to protect taxpayers across the state. That same month, WILL's policy team achieved a victory for tens of thousands of families across the Badger State by leading a coalition of stakeholders to achieve a historic bipartisan increase in funding for Wisconsin's parental choice programs in the state budget. The positive momentum generated by this win is already paying dividends. St. Augustine Preparatory Academy, a high-performing choice school in the heart of Milwaukee announced plans to invest \$35 million to open a second campus, citing the funding victory as the impetus behind the decision. Now, WILL and its coalition partners are fighting to ensure this policy victory isn't short lived. Anti-choice special interests filed suit with the state's new liberal Supreme Court majority to dismantle the state's parental choice programs, which would potentially eliminate educational options for upwards of 60,000 students statewide. WILL announced that it intends to intervene in the case and will fight to save school choice in Wisconsin.



WYOMING

WYOMING LIBERTY GROUP • wyliberty.org

Wyoming Liberty Group has remained vigilant in safeguarding Wyoming's core principles this legislative session, closely monitoring and testifying on proposed changes to campaign finance provisions within the Wyoming Election Code. Wyoming Liberty continued to push back against Wyoming's 100-yard election buffer zone, so citizens' voices are heard loud and clear, unencumbered by unnecessary restrictions. The Group remains unwavering in opposition to marijuana legalization in Wyoming and continues to provide the most comprehensive source of marijuana information. Stay informed and engaged by subscribing to WyLiberty's weekly interview series, "Eye on the Issues." This program features in-depth interviews with experts and thought leaders on a wide range of the state's most pressing concerns.



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	Energy & Environment Legal Foundation	National Review Institute
1889 Institute	ExcelinEd	National Right to Work Legal
Acton Institute	Federalist Society	Defense & Education Foundation Inc.
American Conservative Union	First Liberty Institute	National School Choice Awareness Foundation
American Council of Trustees and Alumni	Forge Leadership Network	National Tax Limitation Committee
American Enterprise Institute	Foundation for Economic Education	National Taxpayers Union Foundation
America's Future	Fraser Institute	New Civil Liberties Alliance
American Juris Link	Free State Foundation	Next Generation Freedom Fund
American Legislative Exchange Council	Free To Choose Network	Pacific Legal Foundation
Americans for Fair Treatment	Free the People	People United for Privacy Foundation
Americans for Prosperity	Freedom Center of Missouri	Philanthropy Roundtable
Americans for Tax Reform	FreedomWorks	Principles That Matter
Archbridge Institute	Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge	Prison Fellowship
Ashbrook Center	Galen Institute	Property & Environment Research Center
Association of American Educators Foundation	Heartland Institute	R Street Institute
Atlas Network	Heritage Foundation	Reason Foundation
Beacon Hill Institute for Public Policy Research	Independent Institute	School Choice Wisconsin
Becket	Independent Women's Forum	Speech First
Benjamin Rush Institute	Institute for Family Studies	Stand Together Trust
Bill of Rights Institute	Institute for Free Speech	Steamboat Institute
Capital Research Center	Institute for Humane Studies	Students For Liberty
Cato Institute	Institute for Justice	Tax Foundation
Centennial Institute	Institute of Economic Affairs	The Center Square
Center for Education Reform	Institute for Policy Innovation	The College Fix
Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University	Intercollegiate Studies Institute	The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity
Center for Independent Employees	Jesse Helms Center	The Fund for American Studies
Center for Independent Thought	Judicial Watch Inc.	The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal
Charles Koch Foundation	Leadership Institute	The Policy Circle
Citizens Against Government Waste	Leadership Program of the Rockies	Think Freely Media
Citizens' Council for Health Freedom	Liberty Justice Center	Truth in Accounting
Competitive Enterprise Institute	Lincoln Network	Young America's Foundation
DonorsTrust	Lone Star Policy Institute	Young Voices
EFoundation	Louisiana Family Forum	
EdChoice	Lucy Burns Institute	
	Manhattan Institute for Policy Research	
	Mercatus Center at George Mason University	
	Mountain States Legal Foundation	

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As a member, you will be recognized on a plaque at SPN's headquarters and will receive special event invitations, a token of our appreciation, and the peace of mind that comes with knowing you are making an extraordinary impact on the future of our country.



1655 Fort Myer Drive, Suite 360 • Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: 703-243-1655 • Fax: 703-740-0314 • info@spn.org

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