



State Solutions. National Impact.

SUMMER 2023



# Transforming the Education Landscape

Because of you, education innovators are expanding new learning models that give students a pathway to success.

*Tracie*

A MESSAGE  
FROM THE  
PRESIDENT

1



NETWORK  
HIGHLIGHTS

2



AFFILIATE  
UPDATES

12



NATIONAL  
PARTNER  
SPOTLIGHT

36






## 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 90 associate 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 solutions that yield national impact; and,
- Defending the 50-state think tank network by disseminating best practices, critical resources when members are attacked, and fighting assaults on free speech and citizen privacy.

### LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT TEAMS

**Tracie Sharp**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO

**Tony Woodlief**  
SENIOR EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

**Carrie Conko**  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

**Todd Davidson**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF PROGRAMS

**Lynn Harsh**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGY

**Emily McCallister**  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

**Rebecca Painter**  
VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

**Crystal Baker**  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

**Victoria Bartolomeo**  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS AND DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONS

**Danielle Bonnesen**  
DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATE

**Kristiana Bolzman**  
DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATIONS AND GRANT SERVICES

**Yana Chernyak**  
DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATION RELATIONS

**Rebecca Hodson**  
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

**Dawn Kellogg**  
DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

**Nitsa Ioannides**  
MANAGER OF ENGAGEMENT

**Siobhan Lundt**  
STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER

**Ladan Nowrasteh**  
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS

**Christina Pajak**  
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

**Michael Tokarchick**  
DIRECTOR OF GRANTS AND PHILANTHROPIC IMPACT

**JoBeth Wood**  
DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATOR

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Thomas A. Roe**  
FOUNDING CHAIRMAN (1927-2000)

**Gaylord K. Swim**  
(1948-2005)

**Whitney L. Ball**  
(1962-2015)

**Theodore D. Abram**  
AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR FULL EMPLOYMENT

**Lawson Bader**  
DONORTRUST

**George Coates**  
COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION

**Carl Helstrom** (*Chairman*)  
THE JM FOUNDATION

**John Hood**  
JOHN WILLIAM POPE FOUNDATION

**Adam Meyerson**  
STAND TOGETHER

**Tracie Sharp**  
(*President*)  
STATE POLICY NETWORK

**Stanford D. Swim**  
(*Secretary*)  
BILL OF RIGHTS INSTITUTE

**Carrie Tynan**  
COORS FOUNDATION

**Bridgett G. Wagner**  
THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**Elise Westhoff**  
PHILANTHROPY ROUNDTABLE

**Thomas Willcox**  
(*Treasurer*)  
THOMAS ROE FOUNDATION

For the full SPN staff list, visit [spn.org/staff](http://spn.org/staff).

# Dear Friends,

Over the past few months, we have seen partisan infighting and very few solutions coming from Washington, DC. But, thanks to loyal supporters like you, we achieved significant advancements in the states. This year, more states than ever before passed school choice reforms that empower families to make the best educational decisions for their children. This includes six states passing universal Education Savings Accounts and similar programs. As more states welcome new education choice programs, parents are seeking new and innovative learning models that fit their needs.

In this issue of *SPN News*, you'll read how education entrepreneurs are answering the demand for new learning models, despite facing regulatory barriers. SPN's LaunchPad program brought together microschool owners who are transforming the education landscape to better meet the individual needs of students.

As communities grapple with energy costs and reliability, SPN has built a coalition of Network leaders committed to effective energy solutions through our Energy Policy Working Group. Amy Oliver Cooke, our new visiting energy policy fellow, is leading these efforts and shares her vision to increase access to affordable, reliable energy for all Americans.

We relentlessly beat the drum on the need to restore the balance of power between Washington and the states through SPN's newly launched Center for Practical Federalism. We spoke with former Michigan state legislator and now Center for Practical Federalism fellow Steve Johnson, who shares how his experience in the Michigan statehouse helped him understand the power of state solutions in holding both state and federal governments accountable through legislative oversight.

While we know there is more work to be done, our Network remains a beacon of hope for millions of everyday Americans.

Thank you for all that you do to support state solutions with national impact.

Take care,

*Tracie Sharp*

President and CEO  
State Policy Network







# Microschools: Innovating America's Education System

What started as a grassroots campaign by parents and families has become a revolution. After challenging the educational status quo, the states have advanced opportunities that give students greater access to a quality education and offer them a path to reach their full potential.

Thanks to SPN supporters, our 50-state Network has been at the helm of the education freedom movement. Last year, Arizona and West Virginia passed universal Education Savings Account programs (ESAs). This year, six more states—Iowa, Utah, Arkansas, Florida, Ohio, and Oklahoma—followed suit with their governors signing similar legislation. These reforms consist of state-appropriated funds that provide every K-12 student the opportunity to attend the school of their choosing, without financially burdening families. Education entrepreneurs have forged ahead and filled the need for new learning models, even in states that do not have school choice programs in place.

One model gaining momentum across the country is microschooling. Often resembling one-room schoolhouses of the past, microschools are small, multi-family learning environments designed to deliver highly personalized instruction. While public, charter, and private schools are more traditionally structured models that include a specific curriculum, staffing

requirements, and other regulations, microschools take a different approach, allowing space for experimentation and innovation.

## SPN's LaunchPad Program Fosters Education Entrepreneurship

SPN has been a staunch advocate of education freedom for more than three decades and has long supported state and local leaders in advancing innovative policies that empower families, rather than systems, to choose the best learning option for their children. SPN's LaunchPad program helps entrepreneurs taking on pressing issues in the states to hone their ideas and elevate projects to have greater reach and impact.

SPN's first 2023 LaunchPad event was held in Las Vegas, Nevada, in partnership with National Microschooling Center founders

Don and Ashley Soifer. The Soifers, who were winners of the 2021 Ed-Prize (an SPN grant program generously supported by The Challenge Foundation that year), have built a robust community of microschool founders across the country. “Microschooling leaders are really the great local leaders that America needs more of. State Policy Network’s Ed-Prize helped us with a platform that let us reach people all across the country to help them realize their potential and what the educational needs of those in the community are,” said Don Soifer. “Because of State Policy Network’s Ed-Prize, we’re able to work with microschooling leaders and families across the country in ways that really matter and that are going to be a sustainable force in education for a long time to come.”

At the LaunchPad event, the 2022 Ed-Prize finalists presented their projects to a group of nonprofit and private-sector experts, who offered strategic support to help the finalists strengthen and refine their ideas. Andrea Keith, executive director of Let Grow, presented “Kid Freedom Days,” a project to encourage independence and resilience in children. Jenny Clark, founder and executive director of Love Your School,



**BECAUSE OF STATE POLICY NETWORK’S ED-PRIZE, WE’RE ABLE TO WORK WITH MICROSCHOOLING LEADERS AND FAMILIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN WAYS THAT REALLY MATTER AND THAT ARE GOING TO BE A SUSTAINABLE FORCE IN EDUCATION FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.”**

pitched a plan to ensure parents and providers are taking advantage of the ESA program in Arizona. And Las Vegas microschool owner and founder Felicia Wright of The Learning Outpost presented a project to build out a high school option. SPN’s Velinda Jonson Family Education Fellow and *Forbes* con-



TOP LEFT, ABOVE: Education entrepreneurs present their projects to LaunchPad’s panel of experts.

tributor Kerry McDonald joined the conversation in a panel discussion with the Soifers to discuss the barriers that education entrepreneurs face and how states can increase the supply of these innovative learning opportunities through regulatory reform.

The event also included tours of several microschools in the Las Vegas area, which gave a front-row seat to the innovation of microschooling. Nevada currently ranks 46th in the nation for education; however, Nevada-based microschools provide a much different narrative. At the Nevada School of Inquiry, which serves primarily middle-school-aged students, artwork lines the hallway bulletin boards with statements from students. “I feel like I’m in charge of my learning,” said one student’s statement. Another read, “I’m not bullied here like I was at my old school.” Students also run the school’s social media page, a role that provides them with hands-on experience in marketing and technology that can one day translate into



potential jobs. At Mission Possible Montessori, preschoolers learn about Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh and identify characteristics of impressionist art. Each of these schools has a common theme: Learning is tailored to the individual student. Where traditional schools' structures often fall short for some students, the flexibility of microschools allows the individual to chart a course for educational success.

Nevada's microschool community is just one example of entrepreneurs developing learning models that put students and their needs first. LaunchPad's summer event welcomed three new projects focused on providing educational alternatives to students of color. In partnership with Black Minds Matter (a 2021 LaunchPad project), these education entrepreneurs presented their ideas to fill the need for more school choice options in the wake of expanding education freedom reforms.

Dr. LeDonna Griffin, founder of Leaders to Legends, presented "Let's Create Leaders to Legends Across Nebraska," a project committed to building and developing healthy, self-sustaining homeschool communities in Nebraska. Arianne Craig Jolla, founder of HYPE Academy, presented "Ca\$h Academy: The More You Learn, The More You Earn," a mobile app to increase student financial literacy. Iman Alleyne, founder of Kind Academy, presented "Launch Your Own Microschools," which capitalizes on Florida's expansion of its Family Empowerment Scholarship program.

These innovations are part of a long-term strategy to fix America's broken education system, shifting from a one-size-fits-all approach to a tailored, student-centric model.

## How the Network Is Breaking Down Barriers to Innovation

While microschools have experienced recent success, they have also met their fair share of challenges. Regulatory barriers, such as zoning and building requirements, threaten the expansion and continued development of these new learning models. Mission Possible Montessori was almost shut down after a health inspector from the Nevada Board of Health demanded that students' lunchboxes needed to be labeled for the school to remain operational. The Learning Outpost has struggled to secure a new campus due to local zoning regulations. These challenges are not unique to Nevada but apply to education entrepreneurs everywhere.

The beauty of SPN's LaunchPad and Ed-Prize programs is that relationships are forged between implementing programs and Network partners who are advancing policies in statehouse across the country. The SPN Network remains best positioned to support education entrepreneurs and accelerate the expansion of new learning models, as state and local leaders have a unique understanding of the needs of their communities.

Kerry McDonald is working with education entrepreneurs and Network leaders to create policy solutions that address these challenges and equip innovators with the tools and resources to expand new learning models. "Microschool founders, and education entrepreneurs more generally, confront many obstacles, but perhaps their biggest challenge is operating in a space that challenges the schooling status quo," said Kerry. "SPN partners, such as the Libertas Institute in Utah, are trying to remove barriers to entry and scale by tackling onerous zoning and occupancy regulations. Others, such as Empower Mississippi, are launching initiatives to incubate new microschools. By working to lessen regulatory barriers and supporting founders, SPN partners are playing a crucial role in catalyzing the supply of low-cost, learner-focused, decentralized education solutions that help each child to thrive."



**MICROSCHOOL FOUNDERS, AND EDUCATION ENTREPRENEURS MORE GENERALLY, CONFRONT MANY OBSTACLES, BUT PERHAPS THEIR BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS OPERATING IN A SPACE THAT CHALLENGES THE SCHOOLING STATUS QUO.**

SPN's Ed-Prize grant program has also invested in these innovative learning models. In 2022, thanks to the Walton Family Foundation's sponsorship, SPN's Ed-Prize winner, ASU Prep, used the award to collaborate with local entrepreneurs, parents, and education leaders to launch microschools through its toolkit, "Microschool in a Box." ASU Prep hopes to offer students a personalized education that caters to their unique needs. In 2023, SPN's Ed-Prize Program, generously sponsored by Stand Together Trust, has seen applications grow by 139 percent, with many applicants coming from outside the Network.

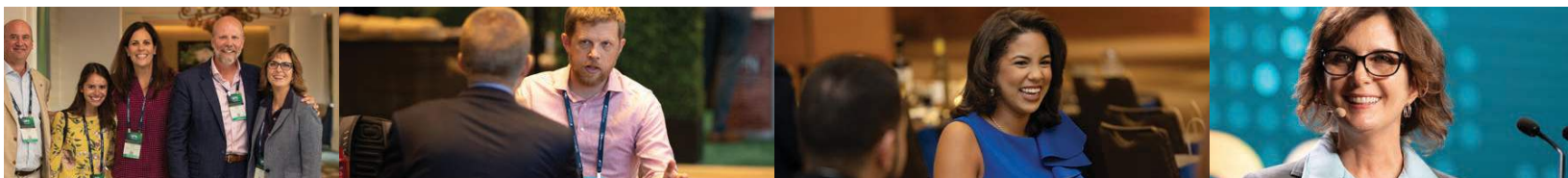
Education remains a top issue for communities across the states, and pioneering approaches are in high demand. Because of your support, SPN is working to ensure that there is a robust supply of education options for children.

FURTHER. FASTER. TOGETHER.

SAVE THE DATE

# STATE POLICY NETWORK'S 31<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL MEETING

AUGUST 28-31



STATE POLICY NETWORK 31<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL MEETING • AUGUST 28-31, 2023  
CHICAGO MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN MAGNIFICENT MILE • CHICAGO, IL

[SPNAM.ORG](https://spnam.org)



Annual Meeting

NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS



Center  
for Practical  
Federalism

## Protecting the People's Voice

SPN and our partners in the states serve as a critical firewall to federal government overreach. To ensure that the states remain the laboratories of democracy, SPN launched the Center for Practical Federalism, an initiative dedicated to reinvigorating the federalist system of checks and balances created by the American Founders. One of the Center's key focuses is legislative oversight, a crucial responsibility of state-level elected officials.

Steve Johnson, a fellow at the Center for Practical Federalism, joined SPN after serving as a state legislator in Michigan, where he was the chairman of the House Oversight Committee. Steve conducted hearings to hold Michigan's Governor Gretchen Whitmer and other state agencies accountable during his time as chairman.

His journey to the statehouse began as a service member in the US Air Force during the Obama administration. While there were many foreign policy issues that Steve closely watched on the news, he also noticed the rapid growth of government domestically. "I served in the US Air Force during the Obama years, which was a very tumultuous time in government between the conflicts in Benghazi, Iraq, and Afghanistan," said Steve. "And at that time, you also saw the federal government grow tremendously. You'd hear politicians talk all the time about restoring the 10th Amendment and shrinking the size of the federal government, but they never actually did that. It was all talk."



The empty promises of career politicians and his own distrust of political bureaucrats inspired Steve to run for an open Michigan statehouse seat. Once elected, Steve served on the House Oversight Committee, which for Steve's first two terms predominately involved holding bureaucrats accountable. During Steve's third term, he was appointed chair of the committee during a time when Governor Whitmer overextended her authority. "When I took over as chair, it was right after 2020 and there was so much going on with Governor Whitmer. The COVID shutdown catapulted an incredible growth of the administrative state in Michigan," he recalled. "And I saw that as an opportunity to not just pass legislation, but for us to be active in holding the governor accountable for her actions. And that's where we went to work."

One of the first hearings Steve oversaw did not deal with political bureaucrats, surprisingly, but with high school athletes. Governor Whitmer had put a hold on all high school sporting events under the guise of COVID-19 social distancing rules, yet professional and college athletes were still permitted to play. The committee heard from high school athletes, parents, coaches, and principals about how this ruling was not only unfair but also made no sense. "To say to high school athletes, 'You can't play. You can't compete. You can't be athletic,' while college and professional events were permitted to convene was contradictory. We highlighted the voices of these young people who were affected by these decisions and elevated them in the statehouse."

Within a few weeks, the governor rescinded her ruling on high school events. "And from there," said Steve, "we just kept going."





## THE LONG-TERM VISION OF THE CENTER FOR PRACTICAL FEDERALISM IS STRONGER STATES AND A SMALLER FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. AND I THINK THIS CAN BE DONE IF WE GIVE THE RIGHT TOOLS AND THE RIGHT TRAINING TO STATE LEGISLATORS.”

Steve and the members of the Oversight Committee also took on MIOSHA, Michigan’s version of the Department of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and uncovered unemployment fraud claims of more than \$8 billion. A deposition revealed that a MIOSHA inspector had burned notes from an investigation and interviews after the agency had fined the City of Port Huron \$6,300 due to violations of COVID-19 rules.

Although it’s unclear why these documents were destroyed, they likely contained evidence of the agency’s oversteps. Through these hearings, the Oversight Committee was able to expose the power grabs of political bureaucrats.

The Center for Practical Federalism seeks to embolden state legislatures to reassert themselves by pushing back when the federal government and bureaucrats overstep their authority. “There are a lot of people talking about doing something to restore federalism and decrease the size of the federal government, but they’re not putting it into tangible steps of what can realistically be accomplished,” said Steve. “And I think that’s where the Center is a little bit different in trying to put federalism into practice.”

Steve is taking those tangible steps as he spearheads the Center’s legislative oversight efforts, which will educate lawmakers on how to increase oversight, cultivate effective oversight practices, investigate agencies, and hold unelected bureaucrats accountable. These efforts are an investment not only at the state level but also for future elected officials in Congress, as over half of the congressional members at any given time are former state legislators. “I think if we’re successful in this, you will have states looking at the federal government in a much

different manner. We’re already seeing some states talk about not accepting federal funding. That’s huge,” said Steve. “The long-term vision of the Center for Practical Federalism is stronger states and a smaller federal government. And I think this can be done if we give the right tools and the right training to state legislators.”

State think tanks also have a critical role to play in oversight efforts and the SPN Network is well positioned to engage with elected officials on this issue. Often, lawmakers are unaware of the resources available to them to push back against the federal government. SPN is working alongside state think tanks in a coordinated effort to provide training and strategic counsel to lawmakers to cultivate oversight in the state legislature.

Through the Center for Practical Federalism, Steve sees the opportunity to remind elected officials that their position extends beyond passing legislation: they also must assert their legislative authority to ensure that the people’s voice is represented and heard in statehouses.

Thanks to our supporters and early investors, the Center for Practical Federalism is now a reality. SPN is excited to continue this important work, and we look forward to keeping our supporters updated on our progress.

# Taking on America's Energy Crisis

*SPN brings on Amy Oliver Cooke to lead our energy policy working group and accelerate state policy solutions that ensure Americans can access reliable, affordable energy.*

**T**he Biden administration has continued to overstep its authority, this time through green energy mandates that would regulate everyday appliances, force Americans to solely use specific types of energy sources, and put the reliability of already overloaded energy grids at risk. Everyday Americans, already burdened by price increases, are seeing a sharp increase in utility bills, while rolling blackouts are leaving thousands without power.

For years, our Network has sounded the alarm on the costs and unreliability of these forms of energy by working with state legislators to stop harmful policies in their tracks, while offering tangible solutions for communities to access clean, affordable, and reliable energy.

SPN recently brought on Amy Oliver Cooke as our visiting energy policy fellow. Amy has an incredible track record of building strong coalitions and collaborating with Network leaders to accelerate transformational policies in the states. As a former Network CEO and advocate for affordable, reliable energy, Amy has been working in energy policy in the states for over 15 years and served on President Trump's EPA transition team. Amy worked with Network leaders to stop proposals in North Carolina that would have increased the cost of energy for residents and weakened the state's power grid.

The following is an interview with Amy Oliver Cooke about her work with SPN to expand access to affordable, reliable energy, while pushing back against state and federal regulations that inhibit domestic production and increase energy costs for Americans.



## Why is there a push to adopt green energy proposals?

Advocates who support these policies are often well-intentioned, but they don't account for the high cost of turning "free" wind and solar into electricity and the burden it causes on the most vulnerable Americans.

That's why we need our state-based groups. Several have done economic modeling for their states, and the numbers aren't pretty. If you think utility bills are high now, what's coming is worse. If things continue, working Americans might not be able to afford to heat their homes, and rolling blackouts will increase.

Also in this category are ideological advocates who fervently believe that there is only one way to fix the country's energy and environmental issues, and that's to go all in on a single type of energy source and eliminate the others. For some, it is an excuse to remake the entire economy, as we've recently seen in Colorado. Senator Chris Hansen said of his climate change bill, "It will touch every part of the economy." Governor Jared Polis recently signed that bill into law. The Biden administration would like to do the same with the entire country.



## THERE ARE SPN ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE DOING INCREDIBLE WORK SURROUNDING ENERGY IN THE STATES, AND WE NEED TO ELEVATE THOSE SOLUTIONS ON A NATIONAL LEVEL.

There are significant special interest groups, or what I call the “green industrial complex,” that benefit from the alarmism created around these policies. For example, regulated utilities make money from building out wind and solar because it increases their asset base on which they earn a rate. Also, they receive massive taxpayer-funded subsidies on production. It’s a giant redistribution scheme from ratepayers and taxpayers to these special interests.

Further, there is little evidence that the proposed solutions will improve the environment. The United States leads the world in reducing emissions, while countries like China and India continue to increase theirs. Yet, special interests continue to push states and the federal government to adopt wildly expensive green energy policies that harm average Americans.

We need to be concerned about the push to electrify everything, particularly transportation, housing, and power generation. The green industrial complex invests a lot of money lobbying at state capitals for the premature retirement of fossil fuel-fired power plants and replacement with a massive build-out of intermittent sources and bans on the internal combustion engine. Some states are trying to ban gasoline power equipment.

A number of states have a net zero emissions goal, usually by 2050. Some, like Colorado, pledge 100 percent “renewables” (think wind, solar, and batteries) by 2040.

Quietly, some insiders have said we are unlikely to reach 100 percent wind and solar. Our state groups will say the quiet part out loud. The Independence Institute just released a paper that shows how much will have to be built, how much it will cost, and when the state is likely to suffer capacity shortfalls.

### What’s an example of a good energy policy that has been recently passed?

In our current political environment, energy policy is about tradeoffs. A good example of this was the “Energy Solutions for North Carolina” bill. Republican lawmakers conceded the demand for zero carbon emissions from the generation sector by 2050. But in the same vein, instead of mandating specific resources to achieve carbon neutrality, they crafted guardrails to protect North Carolinians from excessive costs and protect the grid’s reliability. Those guardrails stated that any utility plan to reduce emissions must prioritize reliability, cost, and flexibility with timeline and technology. It passed with bipartisan support in a GOP-controlled legislature and was signed by a Democratic governor.

Specifically, what does a bill like this mean? It means the utility doesn’t have to retire coal and natural gas prematurely, because it can look at sequestration (a new emerging technology in the energy sector) to capture emissions. This saves ratepayers money because they aren’t paying for premature retirement and there’s not an immediate need to build new transmission lines to accommodate resources like wind and solar that are often located far from the end users.

When assets do need to be retired, they can be replaced with nuclear power, fulfilling the reliability and least cost requirements. Several of our state groups have done economic modeling comparing the cost and reliability of nuclear to industrial wind and solar. Their research shows nuclear is the best option, especially when partnered with sequestration technology for fossil fuel-fired power plants.



## Under your leadership, SPN is re-energizing our Energy Policy Working Group to address emerging energy issues. But this is not the first time we've brought state leaders together around energy. Can you talk about your experience in SPN's Energy Working Group from a few years back?

In 2014 and 2015, Network leaders leveraged our collective influence and helped to stop the Clean Power Plan under the Obama administration, which, if passed, would have created a new DC-centric regulatory regime allowing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the authority to dictate emissions standards to the states. The EPA overstepped its authority, which the Supreme Court ultimately decided in a 6–3 in 2022.

The working group is also a fellowship. There's some comfort to knowing you're not in a fight alone. We share ideas and best practices, which is crucial in a policy space as vast as energy. We'll need that comradery and collaborative approach again to disrupt the forced march away from reliable power.

## What are you hoping you can accomplish by bringing the Network together around this issue?

America doesn't have an energy problem. America doesn't have a grid problem. America and many of its states have policy problems. Much of the problematic policy is built on faulty research rooted in a well-funded political agenda with a predetermined outcome rather than consensus policy goals. The consequences of misguided, uncompromising policies are significant, including higher costs, an unreliable grid, and a growing dependence on hostile foreign regimes that undermines America's energy security.

Washington, DC, is so broken. It's where good policy goes to die. But as we have seen so many times, the states are the solution to advancing tailored policies that benefit the American people. There are SPN organizations that are doing incredible work surrounding energy in the states, and we need to elevate those solutions on a national level. Through SPN's Energy Policy Working Group, we hope to do three things:

**Shift the narrative on energy.** Reliable, affordable energy and a clean environment aren't mutually exclusive. We can develop resources responsibly and enjoy clean air and water. If we only hear from the green industrial complex, Americans

will never know that reliable power and environmental stewardship do not have to be at odds with each other.

**Advance realistic energy policy.** The emperor has no clothes when it comes to the push for 100 percent reliance on intermittent sources that rely on ancient technology. The Network has championed innovative technology like small-scale nuclear. This provides an opportunity to form coalitions across all demographics because nuclear energy is enjoying a renaissance right now.

**Develop opportunities** for our Network to have access to credible, high-level energy economic analysis to counter the flood of misinformation and reporting propping up the false narrative about intermittent sources, reliable energy, and impacts on the environment.

SPN's Energy Policy Working Group will have our first meeting this summer. We need to hear what different organizations are doing on this issue in their states and how we can leverage our efforts to have maximum impact not just in one state, but in many. Everyone I have reached out to on this issue is excited about getting together because they know the need is great. The Green New Deal was just conceptual a few short years ago, and now it's happening in real time. Everybody knows there's an urgent need to act now, whether it's taking on electric vehicle mandates or offshore wind projects, or additional EPA regulations putting their thumbs on businesses in states.

## Why is our Network best positioned to do this work?

SPN organizations are, in many states, the driving force and biggest influencers on public policy. We're everywhere—in the statehouse, courthouse, newsrooms, classrooms, and community rooms. We have a proven track record. When we engage, things happen, and Americans thrive. Educational choice is a perfect example. Once again, we're called on to use our power for good—to stop the forced march toward harmful policies and advance alternatives that harness the American entrepreneurial spirit to develop our own abundant, reliable energy.

## 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](https://spn.org).*

### ALABAMA

Alabama Policy Institute  
[alabamapolicy.org](https://alabamapolicy.org)

### ALASKA

Alaska Policy Forum  
[alaskapolicyforum.org](https://alaskapolicyforum.org)

### ARIZONA

Goldwater Institute  
[goldwaterinstitute.org](https://goldwaterinstitute.org)

### ARKANSAS

Arkansas Policy Foundation  
[arkansaspolicyfoundation.org](https://arkansaspolicyfoundation.org)

Opportunity Arkansas  
[OpportunityArkansas.org](https://OpportunityArkansas.org)

### CALIFORNIA

California Policy Center  
[californiapolicycenter.org](https://californiapolicycenter.org)

Pacific Research Institute  
[pacificresearch.org](https://pacificresearch.org)

### COLORADO

Independence Institute  
[i2i.org](https://i2i.org)

### CONNECTICUT

Yankee Institute for Public Policy  
[yankeeinstitute.org](https://yankeeinstitute.org)

### DELAWARE

Caesar Rodney Institute  
[caesarrodney.org](https://caesarrodney.org)

### FLORIDA

Foundation for Government Accountability  
[thefga.org](https://thefga.org)

The James Madison Institute  
[jamesmadison.org](https://jamesmadison.org)

### GEORGIA

Georgia Center for Opportunity  
[georgiaopportunity.org](https://georgiaopportunity.org)

Georgia Public Policy Foundation  
[georgiapolicy.org](https://georgiapolicy.org)

### HAWAII

Grassroot Institute of Hawaii  
[grassrootinstitute.org](https://grassrootinstitute.org)

### IDAHO

Idaho Freedom Foundation  
[idahofreedom.org](https://idahofreedom.org)

Mountain States Policy Center  
[mountainstatespolicy.org](https://mountainstatespolicy.org)

### ILLINOIS

Illinois Policy Institute  
[illinoispolicy.org](https://illinoispolicy.org)

### INDIANA

Indiana Policy Review Foundation  
[inpolicy.org](https://inpolicy.org)

### IOWA

Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation  
[taxrelief.org](https://taxrelief.org)

### KANSAS

Kansas Policy Institute  
[kansaspolicy.org](https://kansaspolicy.org)

### KENTUCKY

Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions  
[bipps.org](https://bipps.org)

### LOUISIANA

Pelican Institute for Public Policy  
[pelicaninstitute.org](https://pelicaninstitute.org)

### MAINE

Maine Policy Institute  
[mainepolicy.org](https://mainepolicy.org)

### MARYLAND

Maryland Public Policy Institute  
[mdpolicy.org](https://mdpolicy.org)

### MASSACHUSETTS

Pioneer Institute  
[pioneerinstitute.org](https://pioneerinstitute.org)

### MICHIGAN

Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
[mackinac.org](https://mackinac.org)

### MINNESOTA

Center of the American Experiment  
[americanexperiment.org](https://americanexperiment.org)

Freedom Foundation of Minnesota  
[freedomfoundationofminnesota.com](https://freedomfoundationofminnesota.com)

### MISSISSIPPI

Empower Mississippi Foundation  
[empowerms.org](https://empowerms.org)

Mississippi Center for Public Policy  
[mspolicy.org](https://mspolicy.org)

### MISSOURI

Show-Me Institute  
[showmeinstitute.org](https://showmeinstitute.org)

### MONTANA

Frontier Institute  
[frontierinstitute.org](https://frontierinstitute.org)

### NEBRASKA

Platte Institute for Economic Research  
[platteinstitute.org](https://platteinstitute.org)

### NEVADA

Nevada Policy Research Institute  
[npri.org](https://npri.org)

### NEW HAMPSHIRE

Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy  
[jbartlett.org](https://jbartlett.org)

### NEW JERSEY

Garden State Initiative  
[gardenstateinitiative.org](https://gardenstateinitiative.org)

### NEW MEXICO

Rio Grande Foundation  
[riograndefoundation.org](https://riograndefoundation.org)

### NEW YORK

Empire Center  
[empirecenter.org](https://empirecenter.org)

### NORTH CAROLINA

John Locke Foundation  
[johnlocke.org](https://johnlocke.org)

### OHIO

The Buckeye Institute  
[buckeyeinstitute.org](https://buckeyeinstitute.org)

### OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs  
[ocpathink.org](https://ocpathink.org)

### OREGON

Cascade Policy Institute  
[cascadepolicy.org](https://cascadepolicy.org)

### PENNSYLVANIA

Commonwealth Foundation  
[commonwealthfoundation.org](https://commonwealthfoundation.org)

### RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island Center for Freedom & Prosperity  
[rifreedom.org](https://rifreedom.org)

### SOUTH CAROLINA

Palmetto Promise Institute  
[palmettopromise.org](https://palmettopromise.org)

South Carolina Policy Council  
[scpolicycouncil.org](https://scpolicycouncil.org)

### SOUTH DAKOTA

Great Plains Public Policy Institute  
[greatplainsppi.org](https://greatplainsppi.org)

### TENNESSEE

Beacon Center of Tennessee  
[beacontn.org](https://beacontn.org)

### TEXAS

Texas Public Policy Foundation  
[texaspolicy.com](https://texaspolicy.com)

### UTAH

Libertas Institute  
[libertasutah.org](https://libertasutah.org)

Sutherland Institute  
[sutherlandinstitute.org](https://sutherlandinstitute.org)

### VERMONT

Ethan Allen Institute  
[ethanallen.org](https://ethanallen.org)

### VIRGINIA

Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy  
[thomasjeffersoninst.org](https://thomasjeffersoninst.org)

Virginia Institute for Public Policy  
[virginiainstitute.org](https://virginiainstitute.org)

### WASHINGTON

Freedom Foundation  
[freedomfoundation.com](https://freedomfoundation.com)

Washington Policy Center  
[washingtonpolicy.org](https://washingtonpolicy.org)

### WEST VIRGINIA

Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy  
[cardinalinstitute.com](https://cardinalinstitute.com)

### WISCONSIN

Badger Institute  
[badgerinstitute.org](https://badgerinstitute.org)

Institute for Reforming Government  
[reforminggovernment.org](https://reforminggovernment.org)

MacIver Institute for Public Policy  
[maciverinstitute.com](https://maciverinstitute.com)

Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty  
[will-law.org](https://will-law.org)

### WYOMING

Wyoming Liberty Group  
[wyliberty.org](https://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://SPN.org).*

---

### ALABAMA

#### ALABAMA POLICY INSTITUTE • [alabamapolicy.org](https://alabamapolicy.org)

Over the past three years, the **Alabama Policy Institute** has been the sole organization in Alabama pushing for tax reductions for average Alabamians. API has advocated using both federal relief funding and record state revenue surpluses, currently \$3 billion, for that purpose. Most southeastern states have already given their citizens relief, yet Alabama has failed to do so. This legislative session, API's tax cut proposals are being employed to cut the tax burden on both citizens and corporations. The elimination of the state's 4-percent sales tax on groceries has been an API priority for a decade. Several top lawmakers, including Lieutenant Governor Will Ainsworth are coming alongside API to support the elimination of this regressive tax. Depending on the final language adopted, eliminating that tax could save Alabamians \$250 million to \$500 million annually. API has also advocated for income tax relief. Multiple bills have been filed to eliminate the state's 2-percent tax bracket as well as reduce the state's top individual tax rate from 5 to 4.95 percent over five years. Senate Bills 47 and 48 by Sen. Arthur Orr have passed the Senate and are poised for consideration in the Alabama House of Representatives. Combined, the two proposals would save taxpayers approximately \$78 million per year.



---

### ALASKA

#### ALASKA POLICY FORUM • [alaskapolicyforum.org](https://alaskapolicyforum.org)

**Alaska Policy Forum** has been engaging policymakers and the public throughout this legislative session regarding issues that affect the state, including education and state fiscal policies. With more than one-third of legislators serving their first term of office in 2023, APF has been a sought-after source of data and research. APF was invited to provide expert testimony to several committees, including a two-hour presentation on multiple elements of education policy to a joint hearing. APF was also invited to present to a House committee about what constitutes an effective and meaningful state spending cap. To expand public participation in these important discussions, APF has hosted two webinars this quarter, "Does School Choice Help Rural Areas?" and "Economic Implications of New Income and Sales Taxes in Alaska," featuring policy experts from The Heritage Foundation's Center for Public Policy and the Tax Foundation. Both webinars were well attended by policymakers and the public. Lastly, APF has launched the "Legislative Update," a weekly email to inform the public about bills making their way through the legislative process and provide information and tips for giving public testimony. The "Legislative Update" has been well-received, with outstanding engagement and feedback from recipients.





---

## ARIZONA

**GOLDWATER INSTITUTE** • [goldwaterinstitute.org](https://goldwaterinstitute.org)

This session, the Goldwater Institute continued to fight for liberty, working with state colleagues across the country to rack up state-level wins to reform regulations, advance academic transparency, ease licensing burdens, and protect property rights. Goldwater's latest innovative reform, the Right to Try for Individualized Treatments (Right to Try 2.0), was enacted in Arizona and was recently passed in Nevada. Right to Try 2.0 is under consideration in Texas and Iowa. This essential expansion of Goldwater's original Right to Try allows patients with rare diseases to access cutting-edge personalized treatments. To work with Goldwater on this reform in your state, please contact Heather Curry ([hcurry@goldwaterinstitute.org](mailto:hcurry@goldwaterinstitute.org)). In addition to legislative work, Goldwater has also been litigating for liberty. From standing up for parental rights against public school bureaucrats in Maine, to exposing local government collusion with public sector unions across Arizona and protecting property rights in a Phoenix neighborhood overrun with the negative consequences of a failed homelessness policy, Goldwater's team continues to represent everyday Americans in the fight for freedom.



---

## ARKANSAS

**ARKANSAS POLICY FOUNDATION** • [arkansaspolicyfoundation.org](https://arkansaspolicyfoundation.org)

Since 1995, the **Arkansas Policy Foundation** has advanced broad school choice as a reform. In March, Arkansas became the fifth state to enact universal school choice, joining Arizona, West Virginia, Utah, and Iowa. Later that month, Florida became the sixth state to enact the policy. "Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders and state legislators have developed an ambitious reform package to empower students and families, incentivize teachers, and provide an adequate, equitable, and efficient education system, as required by legal decisions and the Arkansas Constitution," Policy Foundation Executive Director Greg Kaza noted in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. The "plan emphasizes literacy, empowerment, accountability, readiness, networking, and safety." Arkansas' plan relies on an Education Savings Account (ESA) approach. Students in public schools designated by the state Department of Education as failing ("F" grade) would become ESA-eligible in the 2023–24 school year. Others would include students in kindergarten and foster care, those with a disability, or those with an active-duty military parent. In the 2024–25 school year, students in "D"-rated schools would receive priority, along with the children of military veterans and first responders. In the 2025–26 school year, all students will be eligible for the program. Policy Foundation research shows the school choice market has nearly doubled in the last decade and includes nearly 110,000 students in the 2022–23 school year. The market includes charter, private, and homeschool students, and those enrolled in a public school-choice program. Kaza said the Policy Foundation will study student performance under the reform. Arkansas' letter-grade system emerged from a Foundation study.



---

## CALIFORNIA

### **PACIFIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE • [pacificresearch.org](https://pacificresearch.org)**

Local school boards play a critical role in the nation's education system. Yet, as part-time citizen-policymakers, school board members must battle powerful and wealthy special interests, such as the teachers' unions and entrenched education bureaucracies. After the November elections, **Pacific Research Institute** relaunched its School Board Training Program to provide new school board members with the tools to provide their students with a high-quality education, encourage parental engagement, and stop classroom indoctrination. PRI hosted 50 current and newly elected California school board members at its inaugural School Board Training Program conference in San Diego. School board members heard presentations from education experts and school board leaders and had the opportunity to connect and build coalitions with likeminded board members. After attending the conference, Joseph Komrosky, a newly elected trustee serving on the Temecula Valley Unified School District Governing Board, introduced a resolution prohibiting the teaching of critical race theory. The resolution passed in a 3-2 vote on December 14. Komrosky said afterward, "Thank you and God bless you for all your efforts you've put forward to help us. The passage of the anti-CRT resolution was a victory and sent a strong message to parents, the district, and the community." In the months following, PRI has hosted multiple online webinars, including one on why it is important to have good district counsel. The next in-person California conference is in November, and PRI will expand trainings to Texas, Arizona, and Washington this fall.



### **CALIFORNIA POLICY CENTER • [californiapolicycenter.org](https://californiapolicycenter.org)**

**California Policy Center** has had significant wins this legislative session. CPC's vice president of education policy and government affairs, Lance Christensen, brings decades of experience in the Capitol. CPC's successes include the sponsorship of Senate Bill 292, the California Education Savings Account Act of 2024. CPC is also the top proponent of Senate Bill 293, which requires more disclosure of statewide student assessment data and is advancing through the Democrat-dominated Senate. In addition, CPC helped kill a bill that would remove an independent, nonpartisan constitutional officer, the superintendent of public instruction, as an elected position. After Democrats sidelined Assembly Bill 1314, a bill mandating school officials notify parents of a child's gender transition at school, CPC is directing a policy strategy to affirm such parental rights in individual school districts. Christensen's efforts have delayed the implementation of a fundamentally flawed statewide mathematics curriculum framework. CPC is also standing with school boards to retain their autonomy from the state, and supporting charter schools that are constantly attacked by the teachers' unions in the legislative process.

---

## COLORADO

**INDEPENDENCE INSTITUTE • i2i.org**

The legislative session in Colorado this year has been historical, in all the worst ways. With Democrats holding a supermajority in the State House and only one vote away in the State Senate, **Independence Institute** chose specific and strategic ways to engage and make a difference. In late March, Complete Colorado, the journalism arm of Independence Institute, reported on an urban Democrat lawmaker's amendment intended to siphon highway dollars away from rural areas of the state. In the report's aftermath, one state senator pulled his support of the amendment, leading to its demise during a conference committee. Without Independence's state-based journalism effort, the amendment would have quietly passed and shortchanged rural Colorado on transportation infrastructure for years to come. Independence Institute launched a new video series from its Fiscal Policy Center on the impending spike in Colorado property taxes, sounding the alarm on the harsh reality that property owners and renters in Colorado will soon experience in their upcoming tax bills. The informational video series lays out how Democratic legislators thwarted citizen efforts to keep property taxes in check and the severe repercussions Coloradans are about to face. The video series is catching the attention of elected officials and will hopefully spurn legislative action. In the midst of political setbacks for the liberty movement in Colorado, Independence Institute continues to stand firm for freedom.



---

## CONNECTICUT

**YANKEE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • yankeeinstitute.org**

During the 2023 legislative session **Yankee Institute for Public Policy** has played a pivotal role in stopping legislation that would have increased state-level tax burdens, expanded eminent domain powers, installed restrictive rent caps, reduced performance standards for fire fighters over so-called equity concerns, expanded overly burdensome and ineffective environmental regulations, increased inefficient film and movie tax credits, and implemented ranked-choice voting. Yankee also engaged in bipartisan efforts to expand market-based health insurance reform, reduce occupational licensing burdens, improve regulatory review of state-level regulations, and increase school choice opportunities. YI has had a regular presence at the Capitol in Hartford, providing testimony before numerous committees in the General Assembly and participating in policy-relevant press conferences. Yankee also launched a scholarship granting organization, Connecticut Center for Educational Excellence (ctcee.org), to help low-income households enroll in their school of choice.





---

## DELAWARE



### CAESAR RODNEY INSTITUTE • [caesarrodney.org](https://caesarrodney.org)

After six years of research on the impacts of offshore wind on beach communities, ratepayers, marine life, and climate change, the **Caesar Rodney Institute** has gained a reputation as the go-to expert on this issue. In December 2022, US Rep. Jeff Van Drew's (R) staff contacted CRI and requested factual analyses and background information on offshore wind. Van Drew represents the lower half of the New Jersey coast (Atlantic City to Cape May) and has been a leading voice opposing offshore wind development. On March 16, 2023, as the vice chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Rep. Van Drew, along with three other members of Congress—Rep. Chris Smith (R, NJ), Rep. Andy Harris (R, MD), and Rep. Scott Perry (R, PA)—held a Committee hearing in Wildwood, NJ. CRI's energy expert, David Stevenson, was invited to testify on the costs associated with offshore wind projects. On March 30, 2023, the US House passed the Lower Energy Costs Act (HR1) and called the US Senate to prioritize advancing this legislation. On April 2, Rep. Chris Smith (R, NJ) swiftly submitted an amendment to the HR1 bill requiring the Government Accountability Office to investigate and report to Congress on the impacts of offshore wind projects. The amendment was approved (244–189 vote). Adding this amendment to HR1 is not only a huge win for CRI but also for all beach communities, ratepayers, and marine life along the Atlantic coast.

---

## FLORIDA



### FOUNDATION FOR GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY • [thefga.org](https://thefga.org)

In 2023, **Foundation for Government Accountability** achieved five ranked-choice voting (RCV) wins. This demonstrates the attentiveness of lawmakers on this issue, as well as FGA's engagement to protect states from the pitfalls of RCV. In Idaho, an RCV ban passed by an overwhelming margin in both chambers and was signed into law at the end of March. Simultaneously, South Dakota took the same action to preemptively kill RCV. On the defensive side, a left-leaning lawmaker in Kentucky tried to implement RCV for most offices—but the bill was killed in committee thanks to FGA's efforts. A similar bill in Virginia would have permitted RCV for primary elections and local elections, but was also killed at the committee level. Finally, a committee bill to allow nonpartisan RCV for municipalities died in Wyoming.



### THE JAMES MADISON INSTITUTE • [jamesmadison.org](https://jamesmadison.org)

Since 1987, **The James Madison Institute** championed efforts to expand education scholarships to all students in Florida. During the 2023 Florida legislative session, the most expansive school choice package landed on Governor Ron DeSantis' desk offering Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) to all students in the Sunshine State. Parents are now back in charge of their children's education and any child—no matter their zip code or parents' jobs—will have access to every educational option Florida offers. With the level of popularity Florida's present scholarships have garnered, this growth will only bring more success.

---

## GEORGIA

### GEORGIA CENTER FOR OPPORTUNITY • [georgiaopportunity.org](https://georgiaopportunity.org)

Georgia and neighboring states like Kentucky saw big policy reforms that will continue to expand opportunities, especially for lower-income residents who are often most affected by bad policy. In Georgia, lawmakers passed a **Georgia Center for Opportunity**-recommended bill that makes it easier for military families moving into the state to transfer the professional license required to do their job. In the area of education, Georgia legislators passed two transformative literacy bills that will improve reading and writing skills among Georgia's kids. For the first time, an Education Savings Account bill passed through one house. The Promise Scholarship bill drew support from Governor Brian Kemp, Republican leadership, and one Democratic legislator, but, sadly, it did not receive enough House votes to pass on the last day of session. The hopeful news for Georgia families is that Promise Scholarships are still alive and can be voted on again in the House next year. Leaders turned to GCO's criminal justice expert, Josh Crawford, who worked with Kentucky legislators to help address juvenile violence in the state. A bill that improves accountability for juvenile offenders and provides more behavioral health and drug treatment resources passed with bipartisan support. This will help address violence and gang activity among youth.



### GEORGIA PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION • [georgiapolicy.org](https://georgiapolicy.org)

As the Georgia Legislature began new terms following last fall's elections, the **Georgia Public Policy Foundation** celebrated the passage of legislation that will make it easier to work in the Peach State. This includes universal licensing that recognizes most out-of-state occupational licenses and legislation requiring state departments to assess job requirements in an effort to reduce the number of state jobs that require four-year degrees. The Foundation also focused on education, healthcare, and housing. Legislation advanced out of the Senate that would have created Education Savings Accounts and reformed the state's certificate-of-need laws. Meanwhile, both chambers adopted their own versions of legislation that would have limited local build moratoriums on new housing. While these bills didn't make it across the finish line this year, they received more attention than ever before and are well positioned for the 2024 session.



---

## HAWAII

### GRASSROOT INSTITUTE OF HAWAII • [grassrootinstitute.org](https://grassrootinstitute.org)

In terms of testimonies submitted, model legislation introduced, and relationships built with legislative leaders and the governor, the 2023 session has been productive for the **Grassroots Institute of Hawaii**. As of late March, the Grassroot Institute had submitted more than 115 testimonies on various bills, compared to 40 last year. Working with committee chairs and the House Speaker, it also introduced 15 model bills, compared to just two last year. The Institute also has been working with the governor and his policy team on a tax package that aims to put \$300 million back into taxpayers' pockets, making it one of the biggest tax reductions in Hawaii history. On the research front, the Institute produced two policy briefs regarding legislation still under consideration—one about exempting medical services from the state general excise tax, the other about adopting interstate licensure compacts to help Hawaii attract medical professionals from other states. Meanwhile, concerned citizens have used the Institute website to send almost 2,000 prewritten and customized messages to their legislators regarding various bills—almost double last year's engagement.





---

## IDAHO

### IDAHO FREEDOM FOUNDATION • [idahofreedom.org](https://idahofreedom.org)

Thanks to donors, the **Idaho Freedom Foundation** was able to make a difference this year on a wide range of issues, including reducing property taxes, requiring more fiscal accountability, and protecting Idaho's children. A bill banning hormone-suppressing drugs and sex-reassignment surgeries for children was passed and signed in the last week of the session, while several new taxes, fees, and regulations were held in committee after testimony from IFF's policy experts. The biggest wins for the citizens of Idaho came in the battle over the budget. The Department of Health and Welfare was perhaps the most profligate of state agencies, funding gay pride events, public school sex-ed courses written by Planned Parenthood, and free needles for drug addicts. On top of this, they asked the Legislature for about \$4.6 billion for Medicaid alone, despite their own projections showing 150,000 people were due to drop from the rolls. IFF policy experts worked with conservative legislators to closely scrutinize these budget requests and, in the end, saved more than \$150 million on Medicaid as well as stripped funding for things like pride events that taxpayers shouldn't be paying for in the first place.

---

## ILLINOIS

### ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE • [illinoispolicy.org](https://illinoispolicy.org)

An Echelon Insights poll, taken on behalf of the **Illinois Policy Institute**, found most Chicago voters agreed with the Illinois Policy Institute's commonsense message on crime, taxes, and school choice—the important task was to figure out a way to engage voters and get them out to vote in the mayoral primary and runoff. Illinois Policy advocacy arm accomplished this by targeting free-market voters through direct mail, peer-to-peer texting, and social media as part of a vote-by-mail and early voting effort. This initiative turned out more than 53,000 Chicagoans who could be specifically tied to the Institute's work in the primary. That effort accounted for almost 10 percent of the total votes cast. In the runoff, more than 42,000 free-market voters requested a pre-election ballot. The Institute also informed voters about the Chicago Teachers Union's tight grip on the city's government, especially as it funded and ran its own employee, Brandon Johnson, for mayor. The Institute released a feature-length documentary exposing the teachers' union's radicalism and how it had hurt public school children. Before the film's release, the Chicago Teachers Union had a positive rating (+17), but that all changed after it launched: The union's positive rating declined to just +2. This quarter, the Illinois Policy Institute got more Chicagoans to participate in the democratic process and reminded voters there's still hope for Chicago and for Illinois.



---

## IOWA

**IOWANS FOR TAX RELIEF FOUNDATION** • [taxrelief.org](https://taxrelief.org)

**Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation** has been working to advance parental choice in education and pro-growth fiscal policies that strengthen Iowa's economy and allow taxpayers to keep more of their income. This legislative session saw the enactment of the Students First Act, which created a universal Education Savings Account (ESA). The Students First Act was passed early in the session, and it builds on previous successes in expanding school choice. ITR Foundation also helped to advance a major state government reorganization measure. Governor Kim Reynolds proposed, and the Legislature passed, a bill that consolidates and realigns state agencies. By reducing the size and scope of government, this law will save taxpayer dollars and increase government accountability. The Foundation is also taking the lead on property tax reform. ITR Foundation's Property Tax Toolkit has been crucial for helping Iowans and elected officials consider various reforms that will bring about much-needed property tax relief. The Foundation has also been championing further income tax-rate reduction, including a path toward eliminating the income tax. Whether it is allowing parents more freedom in education, lowering the tax burden, or reducing the size of government, ITR Foundation is on the frontlines to advance conservative policies.



---

## KANSAS

**KANSAS POLICY INSTITUTE** • [kansaspolicy.org](https://kansaspolicy.org)

Kansas families were close to finally experiencing significant tax relief this year. Kansas legislators were successful in passing a spending package that included a flat tax proposal that would have saved taxpayers a total of \$372.3 million by fiscal year 2025. The bill passed with overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate before being vetoed by Governor Kelly, which was expected. Unfortunately, the Senate was a few votes short in its attempt to override the veto. While that was frustrating, three Republican legislators chose not to support an override due to political pettiness unrelated to the policy at hand. Kansas got much closer to advancing much-needed tax reform, and with more hard work in the interim, is poised to deliver millions in economic relief for residents. Now that lawmakers and the public have been educated on the crippling false narrative around the 2012 Brownback tax cuts that became an insurmountable roadblock, the path will be achievable. **Kansas Policy Institute** (KPI) is already working with legislative leadership to bring a different bill back in 2024 that addresses the concerns of rural Republicans. KPI will be ready to hit the ground running and get Kansas families the relief they need. KPI continues to push for meaningful K-12 education reform. If passed Senate Bill 113 would have allowed eligible students to utilize an ESA to cover education-related expenses such as tuition to a private school, homeschooling, or tutoring. Although this portion of the bill was disappointingly vetoed by the governor, there remains strong support for school choice programs in the state as more parents seek better education opportunities outside of the traditional school system.





---

## KENTUCKY



### BLUEGRASS INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS • [bipps.org](https://bipps.org)

The **Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions** is happy to report that Kentucky's 2023 legislative session began addressing the longstanding influence of teachers' unions by passing the most comprehensive safeguards for employees since right-to-work in 2017. Senate Bill 7 prohibits government entities from collecting and transferring tax dollars to unions. Unions must now collect dues and political contributions directly from employees. The new law removes government from the equation so Kentucky taxpayers are not subsidizing union politics. It also mandates that unions provide members with annual detailed spending reports. A significant portion of the dues collected by the Kentucky Education Association is sent to the National Education Association (NEA), which, in turn, spends those dollars supporting leftist candidates, causes, and policies. In 2021, the NEA spent less than 9 percent of the nearly \$380 million it collected on the needs of its members. If 2023 was the year for labor freedom in the Bluegrass State, then 2024 will feature educational freedom. When Kentucky's Supreme Court ruled against the Education Opportunity Accounts program in 2021, opponents thought they were dancing on the grave of school choice. Instead, the court's ruling will likely end up resulting in expanded choice. The 2021 law limits using EOA dollars for nonpublic school tuition to students in nine of the state's 120 counties. However, a constitutional amendment, which passed out of a House committee during this session with 34 co-sponsors and will likely be on the 2024 ballot, removes the same constitutional barrier.

---

## LOUISIANA



### PELICAN INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • [pelicaninstitute.org](https://pelicaninstitute.org)

**Pelican Institute's** Comeback Agenda has driven the debate on two major issues. First, a package of education reform bills anchored by the Louisiana Sunshine Scholarship Program, a universal education scholarship account bill, is moving through the process. Following the footsteps of other states this year, the Louisiana House overwhelmingly passed the ESA program. Second, lawmakers are currently debating what to do with an unexpected glut of tax collections—\$1.9 billion extra—especially as they approach the state's constitutionally mandated expenditure limit. The Pelican Institute has made the case that lawmakers have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to constrain the growth of government, pay down debt, and provide tax relief to every taxpayer rather than spend every dime and grow the state's budget over the long term. All this debate will ultimately set up the conversation around this fall's elections, in which every statewide office, every legislative seat, and every state board of education seat will be decided, many of which (including the governor) will be open races, thanks to term limits.

---

## MAINE

**MAINE POLICY INSTITUTE** • [mainepolicy.org](https://mainepolicy.org)

**Maine Policy Institute's** biggest win thus far in the 131st Maine Legislature's first session is getting Republicans in the House and Senate to coalesce around income tax reform in biennial budget negotiations. In past sessions, Republicans worked with their counterparts to give Mainers one-time "relief checks" during the pandemic when Maine Policy encouraged them to pursue real, structural tax reform. This session, Republicans have made clear their ambitions to achieve structural tax reform, and lawmakers will likely settle on somewhere between \$150 million and \$400 million in tax reform in Maine's next supplemental budget, made possible by cutting the bottom rates of Maine's graduated income tax schedule.



---

## MASSACHUSETTS

**PIONEER INSTITUTE** • [pioneerinstitute.org](https://pioneerinstitute.org)

This year, William S. Smith, PhD, Senior Fellow at **Pioneer Institute** and Director of the Pioneer Life Sciences Initiative, published a book on how the Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY), a cost-effectiveness methodology used in Europe and elsewhere to rate drug therapies is problematic for certain types of patients, including those with cancer, rare diseases, the elderly, and people living with disabilities. Smith had published numerous papers on the QALY during the last few years. The book, *Rationing Medicine: Threats from European Cost-Effectiveness Models to America's Seniors and other Vulnerable Populations*, was widely distributed on Capitol Hill by a patients' rights advocacy group. The U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Health subsequently passed a ban on the use of the QALY in rating drugs for federal programs, and the legislation later passed the full committee.



---

## MICHIGAN

**MACKINAC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY** • [mackinac.org](https://mackinac.org)

This legislative session, the **Mackinac Center for Public Policy** defended a tax cut trigger that will let Michigan taxpayers keep 5 percent more of their income in 2024. Although Governor Gretchen Whitmer vetoed two tax relief bills last year, the Center's research and commentary on the issue helped set the stage and garner public support for future tax cuts. In January, lawmakers announced that a 2022 budget surplus would trigger an automatic state income tax reduction. The governor and legislative leaders tried twice to backdate state transactions to deplete the surplus and deny Michiganders tax relief. But through robust legal analysis and research, the Mackinac Center equipped lawmakers on the frontlines to defend the tax cut. The Center also boosted support and awareness of the tax cut through local, state, and national media placements. In another victory for the taxpayers, the Mackinac Center held the state's largest teachers' union accountable after the Michigan Education Association and its health insurance affiliate, MESSA, illegally applied for and received \$12.6 million in Paycheck Protection Program loans. While both entities returned the funds, taking them in the first place denied eligible businesses from receiving them. The Center's lawsuit under the False Claims Act brought the union's fraud to the attention of the federal government, sending a clear message that no one is above the taxpayer—or the law. The US Department of Justice fined the union and MESSA, and awarded attorneys' fees to the Center.



---

## MINNESOTA



### CENTER OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT • [americanexperiment.org](https://americanexperiment.org)

With control of the House, Senate, and governor's office squarely in control of the opposition, **Center of the American Experiment's** role at the Minnesota Capitol shifted much more to defense. Early in the 2023 session, Governor Tim Walz proposed a 100-percent carbon-free electricity mandate by the year 2040. American Experiment immediately nicknamed this legislation the "Blackout Bill" because it will force electricity prices to skyrocket and undermine the reliability of the electricity system, resulting in rolling blackouts. This branding effort drove the narrative on this bill as everyone from legislators to the news media began using the moniker. Energy policy fellow Isaac Orr testified against the proposal and met privately with legislators to strategize on floor action and amendments. American Experiment's call to action facilitated the delivery of more than 30,000 emails to Gov. Walz and legislators, 49 personalized videos sent to legislators, and 1,000 Tweets on the topic. The entire campaign relied on data from the Center's 70-page report titled "The High Cost of 100 Percent Carbon-Free Electricity by 2040," detailing how the mandate would cost the state \$313.2 billion through 2050 and lead to devastating blackouts. The bill unfortunately passed in the Senate, 34–33, but because of the Center's efforts, the public will know who to blame when the policy fails and Minnesota experiences electricity blackouts.



### FREEDOM FOUNDATION OF MINNESOTA • [freedomfoundationofminnesota.com](https://freedomfoundationofminnesota.com)

After the 2022 midterm election, Democrats in Minnesota gained a narrow one-seat majority in the state Senate, giving their party total control over state government. This new progressive leadership team that controlled both the House and Senate began laying out their legislative priorities, including radical changes to state election law. As the dust settles on the 2023 legislative session, it is apparent that the **Freedom Foundation of Minnesota** defeated enactment of statewide ranked-choice voting (RCV). The FFM has produced a widely distributed report on the problems associated with RCV and has testified numerous times against this unnecessary reform that only two states have adopted. "Rather than increasing voter participation and ensuring that every vote truly counts, ranked-choice Voting confuses voters, lessens voter satisfaction, and disproportionately disenfranchises voters of color. It is an extremely flawed electoral system that continuously fails to deliver on its central and most important promise: to change politics for the better," said Annette Meeks, CEO of the Freedom Foundation. Because of FFM's educational work on this important issue, the final version of the election reform bill did not include the provision authorizing RCV in the 2024 election.

---

## MISSISSIPPI

### EMPOWER MISSISSIPPI • [empowerms.org](https://empowerms.org)

Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves signed the Mississippi Full Expensing Tax Reform Act, which will allow for a full and immediate deduction on an investment for a business in the same year that the investment is made. This will replace incremental deductions on a depreciation schedule. This law can benefit all businesses, no matter the size and no matter the tax structure. Whether the business is incorporated and pays corporate income tax, or whether it's an LLC or S Corporation or sole proprietor mom-and-pop where the owners pay personal income tax on business profits, full expensing for business investment benefits them all. **Empower Mississippi** CEO Grant Callen commended the Legislature for passing the bill: "This will encourage businesses of all sizes to grow by investing in equipment and other items that will allow them to expand their capacity, hire more employees, and contribute to growing the state's economy. Because only one other state has taken this step, this change will make Mississippi more attractive to existing businesses that want to stay and grow, as well as those looking to move from other states."

### MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY • [mspolicy.org](https://mspolicy.org)

The **Mississippi Center for Public Policy's** proposal to make Mississippi's bureaucracy more accountable was taken up by the Legislature and became law. Senate Bill 2053 will significantly increase financial accountability. By requiring government agencies to report any overspending early, this measure will constrain the growth of the administrative state in Mississippi. The Center also achieved a breakthrough with its campaign to reform the state's antiquated school funding formula. For decades, the existing school funding system has produced unsatisfactory outcomes, hampered the growth of charter schools, and served as a barrier to school choice. Persuading a majority of lawmakers of the need for change has been a priority—and this year, it happened, giving the Center a great opportunity to present a detailed reform proposal for 2024. The Center published a responsible budget for Mississippi and shared it with every lawmaker to encourage them to keep spending increases under control. The final budget that emerged, with \$6.7 billion state-general funds, was almost exactly in line with Center recommendations.



MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR  
**PUBLIC POLICY**

---

## MISSOURI

### SHOW-ME INSTITUTE • [showmeinstitute.org](https://showmeinstitute.org)

The **Show-Me Institute** saw progress on open enrollment bills this legislative session. Institute analysts have been advocating for open enrollment for more than a decade, and this year there was the most momentum. Open enrollment would permit thousands of Missouri children stuck in underperforming schools, to access alternative learning environments. bill in the history of the state. There's clearly a growing push for school choice in Missouri, and it's reflected in the Legislature. For the first time, an open enrollment bill passed the House. An open enrollment bill would thousands of Missouri children stuck in underperforming schools, giving them real alternatives for the first time. While the bill ultimately failed to pass the House, its encouraging that the dominoes are starting to fall and empower Missouri students and families.





---

## MONTANA



**FRONTIER INSTITUTE** • [frontierinstitute.org](https://frontierinstitute.org)

**Frontier Institute** has been driving bold policies to improve the lives and freedoms of all Montanans. The Montana Zoning Atlas project has united a diverse coalition of groups from the left and the right around free-market housing reforms to address strict local zoning regulations that make homes unaffordable for workers, renters, and young families. Frontier has helped craft at least four pro-housing bills, with each winning wide bipartisan support. Governor Greg Gianforte has championed Frontier's bills in his policy agenda and recently signed three zoning reform bills into law that encourage housing development and roll back regulations to address the state's housing shortage. Frontier Institute's proposal expanding the scope of practice of pharmacists is only one vote away from the governor's desk. This proposal authorizes pharmacists to independently prescribe routine medications to patients, helping fill the gaps in healthcare access for rural underserved communities. This law would make Montana the second state with such a broad authorization for pharmacist prescribing. Governor Gianforte has signed a package of bills representing the largest tax cut in Montana history. These measures deliver nearly a billion dollars in permanent tax relief to Montanans. These tax measures are the fruit of fiscally conservative budgeting that Frontier Institute championed in 2021.

---

## NEBRASKA



**PLATTE INSTITUTE** • [platteinstitute.org](https://platteinstitute.org)

This year, Nebraska implemented its Truth in Taxation public hearings and notification process as passed by the Legislature in 2021. Nebraska has the seventh highest property tax rates in the nation, according to the Tax Foundation. This legislation gets citizens involved, requiring a county to notify taxpayers and hold a public hearing if a political subdivision's proposed budget grows at more than 2 percent. In 2022, county assessor offices began sending postcards to residents of a subdivision explicitly stating, "NOTICE OF PROPOSED TAX INCREASE"; specifying the time, date, and location of the Truth in Taxation hearing; and indicating estimated property-specific taxes as a result of the revenue increase. Nebraska is one of only three states who currently have a Truth in Taxation statute. The **Platte Institute** championed this legislation, and its passage and implementation will keep citizens engaged and informed on potential tax increases for years to come.

---

## NEVADA

**NEVADA POLICY** • [npri.org](https://npri.org)

With a Democrat-heavy legislature, **Nevada Policy** has worked to push back against several pieces of problematic legislation introduced this session. Republican Governor Joe Lombardo has vetoed several bills that NPRI opposed which included: a bill which would have allowed enactment of rent controls; a bill that would have banned certain types of lightbulbs; and two bills pushing prevailing wage.



---

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

**JOSIAH BARTLETT CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY** • [jbartlett.org](https://jbartlett.org)

The **Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy** released a conversation-changing study on education funding in New Hampshire in April. The study showed that public school spending rose by \$1 billion over two decades, as enrollment fell by 30,000. The study exposed the “school budgets have been cut” lie and showed taxpayers how much their districts raised spending as enrollment fell. It’s now the benchmark for all public-school funding discussions in the state.



---

## NEW JERSEY

**GARDEN STATE INITIATIVE** • [gardenstateinitiative.org](https://gardenstateinitiative.org)

With the highest corporate taxes in the nation and a business climate regularly ranked at the bottom, New Jersey has been in desperate need of reform. This spring the **Garden State Initiative** released a report, “The Real Cost to New Jersey of Being an Outlier: The Impact of Steep Corporate Tax Rates,” that demonstrated how New Jersey’s high business taxes have led to an outmigration of businesses, loss of income to other states, and a stagnant economy and population relative to the United States. The report also recommended eliminating tax incentives and closing loopholes as part of a plan to phase down or eliminate the state’s corporate business tax. The report garnered significant attention from the media and Legislature. In his budget address, Governor Phil Murphy announced a plan to allow a “temporary” 2.5-percent surcharge on businesses to expire, a tacit admission that high taxes hurt the economy. But GSI, along with a coalition of labor and business leaders, has called for the state to go further, noting even with the sunset of the surcharge, the Garden State will still have the fourth highest tax rate in the country, and the highest in the region.





---

## NEW MEXICO

### [RIO GRANDE FOUNDATION](#) • [riograndefoundation.org](#)

New Mexico's "long" 60-day legislative session came to a close and the **Rio Grande Foundation** played a role in numerous policy debates. The bad news: Despite the state having a \$3.6 billion budget surplus (42 percent year-over-year), the progressive-dominated Legislature failed to address fundamental problems with the gross receipts tax. Moreover, long-overdue education reform and restoration of the "balance of power" in emergencies was not addressed. The good news: After months of work and a detailed report on the state's medical provider shortage by RGF, the Legislature partially reformed New Mexico's medical malpractice system and ended gross receipts taxation of deductibles and copays. Numerous other bad policies—a mandatory paid leave program, "net zero," a "clean fuel standard," and big minimum wage increases, to name a few—were not adopted. Also, after more than three years of being in an emergency, New Mexico's COVID emergency order ended on March 31. Finally, the Rio Grande Foundation hosted Todd Myers for a talk about his book *Time to Think Small* at a luncheon on April 5. The Foundation's *Tipping Point New Mexico* podcast hit episode 500 at the start of May.

---

## NEW YORK

### [EMPIRE CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY](#) • [empirecenter.org](#)

Following detailed warnings from the **Empire Center**, New York state officials are trying to tap the brakes on the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), the sweeping 2019 law that aims to drastically reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions. Governor Kathy Hochul attempted to use state budget negotiations as cover to significantly trim the emissions reductions that would be necessary in coming years before the state begins financially penalizing families and businesses under a "cap and invest" system. Environmentalists prevailed and blocked the changes, but early April marked a turning point in New York as CLCPA champions began acknowledging what their policies would do to New York. Even Hochul's top environmental officials warned that "fighting climate change won't work if people and businesses can't afford it." The Empire Center has demonstrated for years that state officials were understating—and in some cases even failing to determine—costs, and continually highlighted the CLCPA's mandated expenses, such as the \$8 billion to \$15 billion school districts will need to electrify their bus fleets.

---

## NORTH CAROLINA

### [JOHN LOCKE FOUNDATION](#) • [johnlocke.org](#)

The **John Locke Foundation** is still in the thick of an active legislative session and is heartened by the momentum of a number of consequential bills. The Foundation has engaged with lawmakers on everything from housing zoning reforms to a watershed expansion of school choice. North Carolina's Legislature is still in session at the time of this update, but the pistol purchase permit—a Jim Crow-era law that disproportionately deterred Black North Carolinians from exercising their rights—has finally been repealed. The Foundation is optimistic that by the close of this legislative session, it will be known as a significant season of advancing rights and liberties for all North Carolinians!



---

## OHIO

**THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE** • [buckeyeinstitute.org](https://buckeyeinstitute.org)

Robert Alt, president and chief executive officer of **The Buckeye Institute**, presented oral argument before the Ohio Supreme Court in *Schaad v. Alder*, one of Buckeye's six municipal income tax cases challenging House Bill 197, Ohio's emergency-based income tax system that absurdly deemed work performed at home to have been performed in often higher-taxed office locations for taxation purposes. Alt noted, "The city of Cincinnati made an immodest proposition that would require the Ohio Supreme Court to dispense with 73 years of unbroken precedent and overrule five of its previous decisions in so doing." He urged the court to "decline that audacious invitation and instead take the side of hardworking Ohio taxpayers who have been denied constitutional protections and due process." Even before the pandemic, Josh Schaad, Buckeye's client, worked offsite for his employer, and—in years past—has requested and received refunds for his work performed outside Cincinnati's city limits. When the Ohio General Assembly passed House Bill 197, Schaad's municipal income taxes increased even though he spent less time at his main office location. The Buckeye Institute sued the city of Cincinnati and the state of Ohio on Schaad's behalf, writing that House Bill 197 "offends the basic principles of equity, and the Due Process requirements of the United States and Ohio Constitutions."



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

---

## OKLAHOMA

**OKLAHOMA COUNCIL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS** • [ocpathink.org](https://ocpathink.org)

**Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs'** (OCPA) greatest win for the 2023 legislative session was helping to secure passage of legislation enacting universal school choice. OCPA has worked on this issue for nearly 30 years. Oklahoma's program (unique in that it's a refundable tax credit) will be one of the most robust in the nation. House Bill 1934 creates the Oklahoma Parental Choice Tax Credit Act and provides refundable tax credits of \$5,000 to \$7,500 per child to cover the cost of private school tuition. Families who choose to home-school would qualify for a tax credit equal to \$1,000 per child under the plan. Every child in Oklahoma is eligible for a school choice tax credit, and the \$5,000 to \$7,500 will cover all or most of the tuition cost at most private schools in Oklahoma. OCPA's research, coalition work, grassroots efforts, action alerts, parent power rally, presence at the capitol, and much more contributed to this policy victory. Many moving pieces behind the scenes helped get this bill across the finish line and headed to the governor for his signature. OCPA's hard work and longtime dedication to this policy issue has made it possible for all Oklahoma families to choose an education that best meets the needs of their child.







---

## OREGON

**CASCADE POLICY INSTITUTE** • [cascadepolicy.org](https://cascadepolicy.org)

During the pandemic, many states, including Oregon, relaxed academic standards for high school graduation, making a diploma an unreliable guarantor of proficiency. **Cascade Policy Institute** responded by developing an option that would give both successful and struggling students an alternative to a failing system: turn the little-used GED process into a pathway to demonstrate knowledge and graduate early. Currently, Oregon students under 18 must be emancipated or drop out if they want to take the GED exams. Even if students pass exams with high scores, they are only awarded the GED certificate, not a diploma. These factors make the GED a low-prestige option. Cascade devised a legislative proposal—introduced with bipartisan sponsors as HB 3068—that would allow 11th and 12th graders to take a high school equivalency test and receive a diploma upon passing. Parental consent would be required for students under 18. During the House Education Committee hearing, a legislator noted she was surprised by how challenging the subject tests within the GED exam are. She said that if college-educated legislators took the exam without any test prep, some probably would not pass. House Bill 3068 will acknowledge the stringency of those exams by awarding high school diplomas to successful test-takers, thereby providing more stature to the GED. For students ready to move on to higher education, vocational training, or work, this will be a valuable option—one that other states can copy. The bill passed the Oregon House unanimously on April 5 and passed the Senate on June 22..

---

## PENNSYLVANIA

**COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION** • [commonwealthfoundation.org](https://commonwealthfoundation.org)

While many states are wrapping up their legislative sessions for the year, special elections and partisan fighting delayed the start of Pennsylvania's 2023 session. The **Commonwealth Foundation** kept busy building support for its priorities—issues that Governor Josh Shapiro also touted on the campaign trail. Enacting Lifeline Scholarships, accelerating cuts to the corporate net income tax, and shortening the regulatory permitting process continue to be the goals. Overall, one of the Commonwealth Foundation's biggest wins this year was expanding the Overton window in education reform by transforming school choice from an unpopular political idea into a viable, mainstream policy that is attracting high-profile bipartisan support—and the timing could not be better. The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court ruled in February after an eight-year court battle that Pennsylvania's system for funding public education is unconstitutional. The court's requirement that "every student receives a meaningful opportunity to succeed" can only be met if parents are able to send their children to quality schools of their choice. While the split Legislature attempts to negotiate how to restructure education funding, Commonwealth continues to shape the debate and make school choice central to any solution. As new school choice programs spring up across the nation, it is more crucial than ever that Pennsylvania empowers its students with the education freedom they need to succeed.



---

## SOUTH CAROLINA

### PALMETTO PROMISE INSTITUTE • [palmettopromise.org](https://palmettopromise.org)

After nine years of shoulders to the wheel on Education Scholarship Accounts, the ESA bill (S.39) finally passed this year. Given the enormous sweat equity involved in that win, it seems odd to select a different issue for “biggest win this legislative session.” But that would have to be Certificate of Need repeal (S.164). **Palmetto Promise** invested seven years in CON repeal as well. Governor Henry McMaster heard Palmetto’s pleas for rolling back CON by executive order and called for full repeal. Then Senators Wes Climer, Tom Davis, Danny Verdin and Shane Massey powered a bill through the Senate (twice). The House would not be denied in 2023, as brand-new committee and subcommittee chairs Sylleste Davis and Mark Smith achieved a consensus in that body no one thought possible. CON is dead in South Carolina for all but nursing homes and acute care hospitals. But the acute care exception will be gone in three years. Dr. Matt Mitchell, the go-to authority on CON laws, rates the South Carolina repeal the most significant in America since 2015. The full repeal of Certificate of Need in South Carolina will save lives, there is no doubt about that. Healthcare will also be less expensive, more accessible, and likely of better quality. But even beyond those inestimable benefits, with such a complete repeal of CON, South Carolina may very well be shedding its reputation as an “incremental” state when freedom is on the line. The future of liberty looks bright.

### SOUTH CAROLINA POLICY COUNCIL • [scpolicycouncil.org](https://scpolicycouncil.org)

Thousands of South Carolina students and families will have more choice in education thanks to a newly passed K-12 scholarship program, which was elevated to success by the **South Carolina Policy Council**’s research and polling during the legislative session. Starting in the 2024-25 school year, parents of eligible students can use the scholarships to pay for private school tuition or a host of education-related expenses, including textbooks, computers, approved tests, tutoring, and even transportation to other schools. SCPC has long championed school choice in South Carolina, with our recent work playing a critical role in the scholarship program’s passage. Last year, we conducted a statewide poll which found that a majority of South Carolina voters supported a scholarship program, while our more recent January poll found similar voter support. The polls were cited in multiple news stories, which generated huge interest in this year’s bill-turned-law. SCPC also published an analysis of the scholarship program in February, urging its passage. The analysis was a vital resource for lawmakers as the bill was debated and advanced in the Legislature. It also helped educate the public on the bill’s merits. Thanks to these efforts, thousands of South Carolina students will have improved learning opportunities with more freedom and choice in their education.





---

## TENNESSEE

**BEACON CENTER OF TENNESSEE • [beacontn.org](https://beacontn.org)**

The first session of the 113th Tennessee General Assembly has adjourned, and **Beacon Center of Tennessee** is proud to say that important work was done to protect Tennesseans' freedoms, including expansion of parental choice, protecting worker freedom, making government work better, healthcare reform, and the largest single tax cut in Tennessee history. In January, Beacon's Entrepreneurship and Innovation Council outlined a series of tax reforms that would make Tennessee more competitive and business friendly. Governor Bill Lee and legislators proposed legislation adopting each of the Center's tax recommendations, which all ultimately passed. As a result, more than 140,000 small businesses no longer have to pay the state's business/gross receipts tax, and the top tax rate for other businesses was cut by 37 percent. Another reform makes filing personal tangible property tax returns easier for small businesses by streamlining their paperwork, which can often cost more to comply with than the tax itself. And last but certainly not least, Beacon has long called on the Legislature to fix Tennessee's anti-competitive franchise and excise tax, which is tied for the highest corporate tax of all bordering states. Governor Lee's reform package fixed that problem. Along with a one-time grocery tax holiday of three months, these reforms returned \$400 million in tax cuts to taxpayers this fiscal year and \$150 million in ongoing tax cuts annually.

---

## TEXAS

**TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION • [texaspolicy.com](https://texaspolicy.com)**

Because of the **Texas Public Policy Foundation's** efforts, Texas is poised to pass the most conservative reforms of a generation in the 88th Texas Legislature. More bills have been filed this year than any other session, and more than 100 filed bills align with TPPF's priority items. This full representation is a testament to the team's hard work during the interim and early days of the session. TPPF secured a victory on its highest legislative priority, education freedom, when the Texas Senate passed Senate Bill 8, historic legislation allowing the parents of 5.5 million children to take a central role in their children's education. TPPF's second highest priority, property tax relief, also shows progress with Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 1, which represent more than \$15 billion in relief; TPPF is calling on both chambers to provide even more tax relief, with the goal of the total package being \$20 billion or higher. In addition to these priorities, Texas has also made great strides in other realms with the following victories: the Texas Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 7, which ensures grid reliability and energy affordability; the Texas House unanimously passed House Bill 4, which provides the strongest data privacy protections in the nation; and the Texas Senate passed Senate Bill 14, which protects Texas children from harmful, unscientific sex-reassignment medical procedures.



---

## UTAH

### **LIBERTAS INSTITUTE • [libertasutah.org](https://libertasutah.org)**

"It was the largest group in twenty years." That is what one Capitol worker said about the education choice rally that took place on Jan. 24, 2023. With more than 1,500 parents, students, teachers, and other concerned citizens filling the Capitol building, it's no wonder legislators voted to support House Bill 215 from Rep. Candice Pierucci. This bill created the Utah Fits All scholarship, a universal Education Savings Account (ESA) that gives parents control of their education tax dollars in the state. The scholarship will provide a perfectly fit education for about 5,000 students in its first year. Scholarships will be awarded at \$8,000 per student in a digital wallet. This program allows for dual enrollment in public schools too. Students can participate half-time in their local public school and receive half of the scholarship to individualize the rest of their education. In 2007, Utah passed the nation's first universal voucher law. But it was repealed by referendum after a multimillion-dollar political campaign was launched against it. Years after that defeat, **Libertas Institute** began investigating alternative policy proposals for education choice. Rather than focusing on private school choice, Libertas began advocating to the public for a much-improved policy in an ESA. Five years of hard work by a broad coalition of partners, community leaders, advocates, and families resulted in this victory. The massive support from legislators during this session was a signal that they support parents' rights to choose the best education for their children.



### **SUTHERLAND INSTITUTE • [sutherlandinstitute.org](https://sutherlandinstitute.org)**

Of the many influential laws passed during Utah's 2023 legislative session, two major policy wins stand out for Utahns—protecting religious freedom and expanding education opportunities for students. These advances are due to the passage of two bills, House Bill 163 and House Bill 215. With the passage of House Bill 163, students' religious attire can now be integrated with athletic uniforms and school dress, allowing students the ability to observe their religious obligations and freely participate in athletic activities. House Bill 215 provides Utah teachers with significant pay increases, while also establishing the Utah Fits All scholarship program, an education choice program that creates scholarships for students seeking alternatives to public education. **Sutherland Institute** worked closely with legislators to help position Utah as a leader on sound policy that protects religious freedom and puts students in the best position to succeed in their education.



---

## VERMONT

### **ETHAN ALLEN INSTITUTE • [ethanallen.org](https://ethanallen.org)**

Progressive Democrats have the majority in Vermont's Senate and House. The biggest issue this legislative season was a clean heat standard, basically a circular payment system forcing low- and moderate-income residents to pay their own cost of electric conversion to achieve climate goals. Electric conversions were to be funded by a fuel surcharge said to be 70 cents per gallon to fund a \$2-billion program. The **Ethan Allen Institute** found that the true cost of the program was \$5 billion, which would require a \$4-per-gallon surcharge, or a \$2,800 average increase per family for heating fuel each year. This argument hit progressives on points they care about most: economics and equity. There was a huge groundswell after the testimony. Town papers started filling with letters; phone calls flooded the statehouse. At the last minute, progressives folded and added a two-year study period before enactment of the legislation. In Vermont, delay is victory. The appreciative response Ethan Allen has received from citizens shows how policy work can provide real help to neighbors. The next project is to counter the progressives with studies during this two-year delay.







---

## VIRGINIA

### VIRGINIA INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • [virginiainstitute.org](https://virginiainstitute.org)

The **Virginia Institute for Public Policy** has built lasting and effective coalitions for more than two decades, including Virginia Fair Elections (VFE) and the Virginia Education Opportunity Alliance (VEOA). These coalitions are based on education in their respective policy arenas, with members focused on giving the next generation a bright future, including quality K-12 education and hope in a nation where election processes are honest and transparent. Ranked-choice voting (RCV) and Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) were top priorities for Virginians during the 2023 session, and these coalitions created a platform for exchanging ideas and educating the public. The biggest win this legislative session was containing RCV to its current scope, withstanding immense bipartisan efforts to expand RCV in Virginia. Of the five RCV expansion bills, some proposed minimal changes to the current local RCV option, while others pushed the envelope to extend RCV to federal elections. All five bills were defeated, with the education of legislators being one of the pivotal thrusts behind the result. Another big win this year was the growth of the VEOA coalition, resulting in standing-room-only committee testimony by remarkable grassroots advocates who shared personal stories during a hearing on the ESA bill. The bill passed in subcommittee but was held over in the full committee until the next session. Despite the setback, the showing of parents at the committee, especially from underserved and racially diverse backgrounds, was unprecedented.



### THOMAS JEFFERSON INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY • [thomasjeffersoninst.org](https://thomasjeffersoninst.org)

In a General Assembly session notable for its "election year posturing and positioning" and with a budget proposal containing some of the **Thomas Jefferson Institute's** tax proposals still in conference committee, the Institute's greatest success was the return of electric rate oversight to the State Corporation Commission (SCC) and a move away from the crony capitalism advocated by the state's biggest electric producer. Spending more than \$26 million on campaigns, Dominion Electric had persuaded a compliant Legislature for the last 10 years to engage in politicized electric rate setting, resulting in policies that put all risk for Green Agenda items like the Virginia Clean Economy Act on ratepayers, with concomitant rate increases. For the last four years, Institute senior fellow Steve Haner has ripped into the dealmaking that would result in less affordable and less reliable energy at further cost to the consumer. Writing in the Institute's own media platforms as well as social media and legacy newspaper op-eds, Haner also enlisted the support of the state's former governor, George Allen. The result showed small advances last year, but demonstrated a major reform this year as the SCC was again given jurisdiction over matters that had been taken from it.

---

## WASHINGTON

### FREEDOM FOUNDATION • [freedomfoundation.com](https://freedomfoundation.com)

Following the COVID school shutdowns beginning in March 2020, the **Freedom Foundation** has prioritized—and experienced success in—educating teachers about their ability to leave their unions and stop paying dues to a political agenda they may not support. The Freedom Foundation has helped many thousands of teachers across the country resign their union membership. During the spring 2023 state legislative session, the Freedom Foundation was actively involved in helping the Florida and Arkansas legislatures pass a Teacher Paycheck Protection bill to get the states and local school districts out of the business of deducting teachers union dues from public school employee paychecks, putting the responsibility of dues collection on the unions themselves. Kentucky and Tennessee advanced similar legislation, and Kentucky even overrode their governor’s veto to make it law. The Freedom Foundation elevated teacher paycheck protection bills in published articles, media interviews, and at coalition meetings to raise awareness about the growing national movement at the state level. The Freedom Foundation held a first-of-its-kind teacher conference in Denver on July 10–12, 2023, to bring hundreds of teachers from across the country together to learn about union alternatives, gain the tools to fight back against the radical agenda being forced into their classrooms, and build a community with like-minded educators so they aren’t ostracized and alienated by the teachers’ union bullies.



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

**Washington Policy Center** saw two long-time recommendations implemented. The first was a ban on “title-only” bills by the state senate. These bills were essentially blank placeholders that could be introduced to avoid cut-offs with language inserted later enabling an end-run around the public notification process. Now legislative proposals must be spelled out completely, giving citizens five days’ notice before public hearing or action is taken. WPC also saw progress on a tax transparency website that will give citizens the ability to identify which of the 1,740 taxing districts their charges come from. In addition, WPC was able to offer testimony outlining the reasons a new tax on smart technology is bad policy for Washington. Taxpayers avoided a \$100-million bill thanks to the proposal’s rejection.



---

## WEST VIRGINIA

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

For a biggest win, it’s hard to argue against what Governor Jim Justice called the “largest tax cut in West Virginia history.” The **Cardinal Institute** has been advocating for sound tax reform throughout its history. This year, it amplified efforts by hosting an online Tax Reform Week featuring highly touted tax policy experts such as Art Laffer and Grover Norquist. The governor’s office followed Cardinal’s lead by hosting an in-person Tax Reform Roundtable, inviting Cardinal Executive Director Garrett Ballengee and other West Virginia leaders in government, business, and civil society. This roundtable discussion was televised on West Virginia Public Broadcasting. With record revenue surpluses setting the scene, a record of transformational policy wins bolstering the confidence of lawmakers, and a clear vision guiding the efforts for tax reform, the moment proved ripe in 2023. As a result, West Virginians can now look forward to a 21.25 percent across-the-board reduction in their personal income tax rates, rebates for taxes paid on certain classes of tangible personal property for individuals and small businesses, and a system of revenue triggers that put the Mountain State on the pathway to eliminating the personal income tax.



---

## WISCONSIN



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

In June, legislative leaders reached a bipartisan agreement (approved by the governor) that appropriates the largest funding increase for school choice programs in the state's history. The Institute is producing a stream of videos in which teachers, students, children, and school leaders in both the private school choice and public charter sectors explained the innovations their schools are implementing—and how bringing choice/charter funding into something like parity with per-pupil district school funding is necessary for the nation's oldest school choice environment to flourish. The video storytelling, with accompanying op-eds, fit into a broader school choice coalition's work to lobby in support of a unified ask. Badger's other priority is tax reform, specifically, moving to a flat tax. Bills to do that have been introduced in both chambers, with authors citing the Badger Institute's work with the Tax Foundation. The governor remains vehemently opposed, so prospects for passage are uncertain, but the fact that this conversation is happening at all in the state that gave birth to graduated-rate income taxes more than a century ago is progress.



### WISCONSIN INSTITUTE FOR LAW AND LIBERTY • [will-law.org](https://will-law.org)

Free access to public records is essential for transparent and accountable government. After a 2022 Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling made it easier for governments to withhold records without recourse, the **Wisconsin Institute of Law & Liberty** sprang into action. Last summer, WILL released "Broken Records: A Call for Legislative Reform in Wisconsin Public Records Law," a policy brief that called on the Legislature to fix Wisconsin's public records law. In February, with the support of a WILL-led coalition of open-government advocates, the Legislature introduced the Open Government Protection Act. The bipartisan bill would ensure that "bad actor" governmental entities that unnecessarily withhold or delay releasing government records to citizens and watchdog groups would be held accountable for their actions. The bill received a public hearing in the State Senate and is expected to be voted out of committee in the coming weeks, with the full Senate taking action thereafter.



### INSTITUTE FOR REFORMING GOVERNMENT • [reforminggovernment.org](https://reforminggovernment.org)

In early 2023, the **Institute for Reforming Government** launched a new Center for Investigative Oversight to formalize its efforts to hold the executive branch accountable. Since the launch, the CIO has been off to the races, releasing investigative reports, submitting dozens of open records requests, and educating lawmakers on the importance of executive branch oversight. In March, the CIO held an oversight strategy session with leadership offices and the co-chairs of the Joint Audit Committee, along with a congressional chief of staff and SPN's Center for Practical Federalism fellow. The goal was to help these individuals understand and begin engaging in meaningful oversight of executive branch agencies. The CIO is already helping frame the debate in divided government as lawmakers look to exercise their authority over state policy and spending. These beginning steps will turn into hearings and actionable reforms throughout the rest of 2023 and beyond.

## NATIONAL PARTNERS

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

1851 Center for Constitutional Law	Energy & Environment Legal Foundation	National Review Institute
1889 Institute	ExcelinEd	National Right to Work Legal Defense & Education Foundation Inc.
Acton Institute	Federalist Society	National School Choice Awareness Foundation
American Conservative Union	First Liberty Institute	National Tax Limitation Committee
American Council of Trustees and Alumni	Forge Leadership Network	National Taxpayers Union Foundation
American Enterprise Institute	Foundation for Economic Education	New Civil Liberties Alliance
America's Future	Fraser Institute	Next Generation Freedom Fund
American Juris Link	Free State Foundation	Pacific Legal Foundation
American Legislative Exchange Council	Free To Choose Network	People United for Privacy Foundation
Americans for Fair Treatment	Free the People	Philanthropy Roundtable
Americans for Prosperity	Freedom Center of Missouri	Principles That Matter
Americans for Tax Reform	FreedomWorks	Prison Fellowship
Archbridge Institute	Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge	Property & Environment Research Center
Ashbrook Center	Galen Institute	R Street Institute
Association of American Educators Foundation	Heartland Institute	Reason Foundation
Atlas Network	Heritage Foundation	School Choice Wisconsin
Beacon Hill Institute for Public Policy Research	Independent Institute	Speech First
Becket	Independent Women's Forum	Stand Together Trust
Benjamin Rush Institute	Institute for Family Studies	Steamboat Institute
Bill of Rights Institute	Institute for Free Speech	Students For Liberty
Capital Research Center	Institute for Humane Studies	Tax Foundation
Cato Institute	Institute for Justice	The Center Square
Centennial Institute	Institute of Economic Affairs	The College Fix
Center for Education Reform	Institute for Policy Innovation	The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity
Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University	Intercollegiate Studies Institute	The Fund for American Studies
Center for Independent Employees	Jesse Helms Center	The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal
Center for Independent Thought	Judicial Watch Inc.	The Policy Circle
Charles Koch Foundation	Leadership Institute	Think Freely Media
Citizens Against Government Waste	Leadership Program of the Rockies	Truth in Accounting
Citizens' Council for Health Freedom	Liberty Justice Center	Young America's Foundation
Competitive Enterprise Institute	Lincoln Network	Young Voices
DonorsTrust	Lone Star Policy Institute	
EFoundation	Louisiana Family Forum	
EdChoice	Lucy Burns Institute	
	Manhattan Institute for Policy Research	
	Mercatus Center at George Mason University	
	Mountain States Legal Foundation	



### NATIONAL PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

The **American Enterprise Institute** is one of the longest-standing policy institutions in Washington, DC. Founded more than 85 years ago—just before World War II—AEI has become the leading voice for freedom, opportunity, and free enterprise through its policy research and world-class experts. Many of AEI's 140+ scholars have served in cabinet positions and as key advisors in government, as well as in the private sector and academia.

While its influence in Washington is unmatched, AEI's policy solutions go far beyond the beltway. AEI scholars provide analysis of domestic economic policies, social and cultural issues, opportunity and social mobility, education, and foreign affairs. AEI works to connect scholars with experts and thought leaders around the country who can make an impact with their work, and also hosts a national Leadership Network of state-focused policy professionals, many of whom work at SPN affiliate organizations.

"We are in Washington, but not exclusively of Washington," said Elyse Newbert, director of coalitions. AEI makes it a priority to connect research to the real-world problems Americans face in states and communities.

With the partnership of SPN, AEI is able to bridge its research to state issues and connect with state organizations working on similar policy interests. **SPN is the first place AEI calls to connect with state organizations and get a lay of the land on state policy issues.**

For example, SPN helped connect AEI with state organizations interested in the Institute's innovative housing policy research, which recommends implementing light-touch density (or modest increases in the housing supply) and building walkable communities to address the nation's growing housing crisis. SPN also connected AEI with education leaders in the states when the Institute launched its Return to Learn Tracker (R2L) that provided one-of-a-kind data on a school's operating status, enrollment, and COVID policies during the pandemic. R2L proved to be an invaluable resource for the Department of Education, CDC, and White House.

We are also proud to have AEI as a regular sponsor of SPN's Annual Meeting, our premier gathering of the freedom movement. Annual Meeting provides a platform for AEI and other national organizations to bring their ideas before a large audience of policymakers, think tank leaders, and advocates for freedom who can turn these ideas into action for the American people.

"I was blown away attending my first Annual Meeting. I had never been to that big of a conference that was useful, with substantive policy, professional development, and networking. I can see all 50 of my counterparts in one room. It continues to be an event I look forward to every year," she said.

We are grateful for our partnership with AEI and shared commitment to protecting the values that have made this country prosperous and a beacon of hope for people around the world.



**"KNOWING WHO TO TALK TO IN EVERY STATE AND THE OTHER PLAYERS IN THE STATE IS AN INCREDIBLY VALUABLE RESOURCE SPN PROVIDES. WE DEEPLY VALUE THE LOCAL EXPERTISE FROM STATE THINK TANKS AND GETTING TO HEAR WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE GROUND."**

—Elyse Newbert, Director of Coalitions. AEI



# Safeguard the Future with Your Legacy



■ **Thomas Roe**, a successful businessman and advisor to President Reagan, created the State Policy Network so there would be a champion for freedom and opportunity in every state. With your partnership, we can preserve the power of state solutions and the profound impact they have on the lives of Americans now and into the future.

Thanks to the generosity of the Roe Foundation, we have a special matching gift opportunity. If you share with State Policy Network that you plan to make a legacy gift to SPN, the Roe Foundation will contribute an additional \$1,000 to SPN (up to \$250,000).

## Joining the Thomas Roe Legacy Society

**Become a member  
of our legacy society  
by making your  
estate plans known  
to SPN, such as:**

- A **simple bequest** that remembers SPN in your will.
- An estate gift of **publicly traded stock**.
- A **life insurance policy** that designates SPN as a beneficiary.
- A **bank, investment, or retirement account** that designates SPN as a beneficiary.
- A **gift in trust**.
- Other estate gifts in accordance with SPN's gift acceptance guidelines.



We would love to speak with you and help you clarify the legacy you'd like to leave. To begin this conversation please contact Nitsa Ioannides at (619) 244-4580 or [nitsa@spn.org](mailto:nitsa@spn.org).

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

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.


*State Policy Network is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Your gifts are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.*



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

**SPN.org**

 /StatePolicy

 @StatePolicy

 /company/state-policy-network