

SPRING 2025

SPNN^{NEWS}

State Solutions. National Impact.

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DURABLE FREEDOM INFRASTRUCTURE



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SPN IN THE MEDIA

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

BY TONY WOODLIEF

Biden DOJ Exposed the Deep State's Underbelly

"This is more than legal maneuvering, it's about justice. The justification Biden's DoJ gave for enshrining its guidance powers is that otherwise it would be too much work to clearly label guidance as non-binding, to estimate potential compliance costs, and to build cases using actual laws rather than specious interpretations. They didn't care to be burdened, in other words, with understanding the burden their directives place on Americans."

NATIONAL REVIEW

BY RAY NOTHSTINE

Trump Is Right: The States Should Handle Disaster Relief

"Trump's instinct to give states and localities more authority over the relief through block grants is an important first step towards accountability and a more efficient, responsive disaster-relief system that empowers those closest to the crisis to act swiftly and effectively. The ongoing mismanagement and politicization of federal agencies like FEMA reinforce that a plan to devolve more power to those on the ground is long overdue."



BY JENNIFER BUTLER

Trump is Taking on the Shadow Regulatory State

"For years, agencies have misused guidance to sidestep input and impose sweeping mandates without congressional approval. Trump's executive order takes aim at this practice, ensuring that guidance is treated as the regulatory action it truly is. One example? The Department of Education's last-minute guidance on name, image, and likeness, the policy that allows college athletes to earn money through sponsorships and endorsements."

THE HILL

BY JANE MCENANEY

The Case for Local Control: Rethinking the US Department of Education

"The American founders recognized this when they enshrined federalism in the U.S. Constitution through the 10th Amendment, leaving education to the states — and for good reason. In five years, we've seen the states give children more education options while working to improve academic outcomes. The federal government, meanwhile, has focused on pushing political agendas at the expense of students."

LETTER FROM THE *President*

Dear Friends,

It has been an eventful few months, both inside and outside of SPN. In Washington, a new president has taken residence in the White House and has brought with him a willingness to cut federal bloat and, in some cases, return power back to the states where local officials have a much better sense of their constituents' needs.

A new president at SPN is also on the horizon as the SPN Board leads the search for my successor following my decision to transition from CEO to strategic advisor. I have spent much of my time these past few weeks talking with fellow supporters, partners, and Network leaders about the future of SPN. It's been incredibly encouraging to hear your overwhelming support and confidence in SPN's unwavering commitment to solving problems at the state and local levels.

My decision to make this transition was years in the making, a result of careful consideration and planning with our board and leadership team. It has been the honor of a lifetime serving in this role, growing this 50-state Network into the powerhouse that it is today.

I was truly humbled to read these words from Kimberley Strassel in *The Wall Street Journal* shortly after our public announcement:

"A shout-out to **Tracie Sharp**, President and CEO of the State Policy Network, who announced

she'd be moving out of her role after more than two impressive decades. ***SPN has in that time become the hub for conservative and libertarian think tanks focused on state-level reform and played a huge role in wins on school choice and tax reform.*** SPN begins to search for a successor, and those are big shoes to fill."

Most of all, I want to thank *you*, the loyal supporters of SPN, for all you have done to empower SPN and our Network during my tenure as president and CEO. Together, SPN has grown into, as Kim says, *the* hub of good ideas in the states. In fact, we have scored more wins for freedom in the last 4 years than in the previous 40 *combined*. That simply wouldn't have been possible without your support.

I will continue to serve as CEO until a new leader is found. At that time, my role will shift as I serve as an ambassador for SPN, mentor leaders, and strengthen connections with our generous supporters. I look forward to sharing more information about the transition when the time comes.

Until then, however, there's still plenty of work to be done.

This issue of *SPN News* kicks off 2025 with updates from inside our state-based Network. As state legislative sessions have bills flying across



the country, our Network is at the forefront of these policy battles. We have an inside look at some of the issues at the top of Americans' minds this session and what our Network has planned to address them.

SPN has also placed a multiyear priority on building out what we call the Durable Freedom Infrastructure. These strategic capacities — like litigation centers, government affairs shops, and investigative journalism outlets — make a massive difference in how we approach policy change. We take a deep dive into this innovative initiative and share some stories about its effectiveness.

We caught up with Illinois Policy Institute CEO Matt Paprocki to learn more about his background as well as a strategy IPI is deploying to focus on transforming cities to transform the politics of a state.

A new network aimed at training school boards is making waves in the world of education. Our national partner spotlight dives into School Boards for Academic Excellence. They explore why school boards not only have the opportunity but the responsibility to act in the best interest of their students.

The federal Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) champions a principle that we in the SPN world know all too well — the

federal government is too large and needs to be cut down. Several of our partners, inspired by the opportunity and momentum, have begun to develop state-level DOGE programs. We sat down with Stephanie Smith from the Alabama Policy Institute to learn more about this developing government watchdog.

Thank you for everything you have done and will continue to do for SPN. Your support is fueling our efforts to make a difference in state-level reform that weathers political storms. No matter who is in residence at the White House, rest assured that SPN is on the ground in the states, working to make a difference in the areas that matter most to Americans.

I can't wait to share more with you as legislative sessions continue. As always, please feel free to visit spn.org for the latest news on wins in the states that you've made possible.

Take care,

Tracie Sharp

Tracie Sharp

*President and CEO
State Policy Network*





SPN PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Building a **Durable Freedom Infrastructure** to Secure Lasting Policy Change

For more than 30 years, State Policy Network has inspired, built, and incubated a Network of state-based policy organizations to develop fact-based research and analysis to fight for free markets, limited government, and federalism. In that time, we've seen the Network grow and evolve to build the capacities and influence necessary to win, even in the toughest political climates. We have observed six critical components, what we're calling the **Durable Freedom Infrastructure**, that state-based organizations are increasingly building and deploying to achieve greater influence, more effective advocacy, and increasingly sophisticated strategies.

This Durable Freedom Infrastructure has been the driver of major political shifts across the nation as **over 33 states have begun to build out the necessary capacities**. In friendly states, the Infrastructure gives our Network more ways to win. When politics are tough, it gives our Network more ways to defend against bad policy. This model has proven to work in states of all shapes and sizes — no matter if they're red, blue or purple.



LEADERSHIP ACADEMIES

Training friends of freedom to participate at all levels of government



STATE THINK TANKS

State policy research and advocacy



VOTER INSIGHTS

Understanding voter wants and needs to promote liberty

DURABLE FREEDOM INFRASTRUCTURE



MEDIA & INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Uncovering political corruption, in-depth reporting on local stories, circumventing media bias



LITIGATION CENTERS

Strategic litigation for liberty



POLITICAL CAPACITY

Using the necessary advocacy levers to pass policy into law (c4, c6, PAC)

State Think Tanks

The **state think tank** is the core intellectual capacity in a state. They are 501(c)(3) organizations focused on research, policy design, and effective advocacy and communication. Most state-based organizations in the Network advance policies in the areas of education reform, free enterprise, fiscal responsibility, energy, affordable and accessible healthcare, and a low tax and regulatory environment.

Our affiliates have come a long way from the ivory tower think tank model that relied primarily on white papers written to a niche audience of lawmakers and staff. These organizations have adapted to the changing environment of 21st century American civic and political life, which requires a more holistic approach to achieve durable policy change. Relevant and credible research remains the foundation of our Network. But this is now paired with sophisticated communications capabilities that package and distribute the policy ideas to reach influential key audiences. And a majority of our affiliates have taken the H-election, meaning they have the flexibility to take their policy research and solutions to the halls of power and lobby for change.

Our Network has engaged in some of the most important state policy wins in a generation. Education freedom is on the march, and state think tanks like **Alabama Policy Institute**, the **Pelican Institute**, the **Beacon Center of Tennessee**, and **Opportunity Arkansas** have been instrumental in helping their states pass education savings accounts in the last couple of years. Similarly, the **Grassroot Institute of Hawaii**, **Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation**, and the **Georgia Public Policy Foundation** were on the frontlines in their states cutting taxes last year. The Network has lead on right-to-work, pension reform, government transparency, and efforts to trim red tape. And they are expanding their horizons to take on the cost of housing, access to healthcare, and securing reliable, abundant energy to power the future.

“To address the need for more influence and a stronger strategy, organizations began to raise up a **political capacity** in their state to supplement the work of the state think tank.

Political Capacity

As our Network evolved into building the capabilities necessary to undertake and execute policy issue campaigns, the need for additional capacities quickly emerged. 501(c)(3) organizations have strict rules and limits on how much lobbying they are allowed to do – putting a hard ceiling on the necessary influence-building and advocacy activities necessary to see a bill become law. And 501(c)(3) organizations are legally prohibited from getting involved in explicit political and election activities.

To address the need for more influence and a stronger strategy, organizations began to raise up a **political capacity** in their state to supplement the work of the state think tank. The most common political capacity is a **501(c)(4)** organization that allows staff to undertake unlimited lobbying (direct and grassroots) as well as the ability to recruit, endorse, and spend money on candidates and issues. About one third of the SPN Network think tanks have accompanying 501(c)(4) organizations.

501(c)(6) membership organizations are another entity to increase influence. These organizations allow for advocacy and investment that advance the interests and priorities of the members. And **Political Action Committees** (PACs) are entities to raise and spend money directly on candidates.

This added political capacity in the states creates new leverage for think tanks to advance their suite of policy goals and defend federalism.

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Litigation Centers

The legislative process isn't the only arena where SPN Network organizations are fighting for change. The courts provide another critical juncture where major public policy decisions, as well as controversies over federalism, the separation of powers, economic liberty, and individual rights are decided. The **legal and litigation** capacity is an increasingly powerful tool among SPN organizations.

The Goldwater Institute generated a critical First Amendment victory in 2023 when the Arizona Supreme Court ended mandatory dues to the State Bar. **The Buckeye Institute** in Ohio recently had the second most amici for granted cases at the US Supreme Court, demonstrating an outsized influence at the high court. And the **Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL)** has racked up win after win, attacking federal, state, and local government programs that violate the Constitution's ban on race discrimination.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of SPN legal centers, including **The Buckeye Institute**, **WILL**, **Liberty Justice Center**, **Mississippi Center for Justice**, **Pelican Institute for Public Policy**, and **Texas Public Policy Foundation** were involved in challenges to the OSHA vaccine mandate as well as the abuse of emergency powers by governors and health departments. And the **Mackinac Center** and **WILL** successfully sued to end the abuse of emergency powers wielded by their governor and health department.

When this powerful legal muscle is deployed, think tanks get results that safeguard individual liberty, economic freedom, federalism, and the rule of law.

“When this powerful legal muscle is deployed, think tanks get results that safeguard individual liberty, economic freedom, federalism, and the rule of law.

Voter Insights

As our state think tanks have grown adept at building influence and achieving victories in the state legislature, new efforts are being undertaken to understand the priorities of key voters across the country. The **voter insights** capability deploys polling, listening sessions, and sophisticated market research to develop messages and issue sets that the public cares about. The **Institute for Reforming Government** has conducted major focus group and polling projects on suburban women and rural voters in Wisconsin. The **Beacon Center of Tennessee**, the **Foundation for Government Accountability**, the **John Locke Foundation**, and **Opportunity Arkansas** are conducting regular polling to inform strategy and messaging. And the numbers often provide powerful evidence of the public support for key reforms like education freedom, safety net reforms, and more.

Media & Investigative Journalism

The information ecosystem that provides the news, commentary, and journalism has completely changed. Social media curates narratives and stories to millions of people. Large corporate media companies have consolidated and focused their attention on Washington, DC, and local news reporting from the state house to the school boards and town councils is evaporating. This has left a massive gap — and opportunity — for SPN Network think tanks to build their own **media and investigative journalism** capacities to shine a light on elected officials, uncover corruption and abuse, and provide critical commentary and policy explainers to the voting public.

The Maine Wire and the **Connecticut Inside Investigator** have dedicated teams of investigative journalists shining a spotlight on government spending, unaccountable boards and bureaucrats, and the routine malign influence of unions and connected businesses who work to turn on the spigot of taxpayer dollars for special interests. The **Carolina Journal** has built out a full-scale newsroom of editors, writers, and producers to make politics, policy, culture, and state news accessible to wider North Carolina audiences. **Empower Mississippi**, the **Sutherland Institute**, and the **Mackinac Center** have podcasts to provide a long-form forum to discuss policy with newsmakers, elected

officials, and influencers. And the **Badger Institute** and the **Center for American Experiment** publish in-depth policy explainers and commentary on relevant issues to voters and policymakers.

Network journalism capacities are providing original reporting, insightful commentary, and in-depth investigations that are drawing large and influential audiences, driving narratives, and even winning awards.

Leadership Academies

There isn't a single state where our Network couldn't use more like-minded friends, capable allies, and influential activists. To meet this need, SPN Network organizations have developed **leadership academies** to train, inform, and activate new freedom fighters in the states.

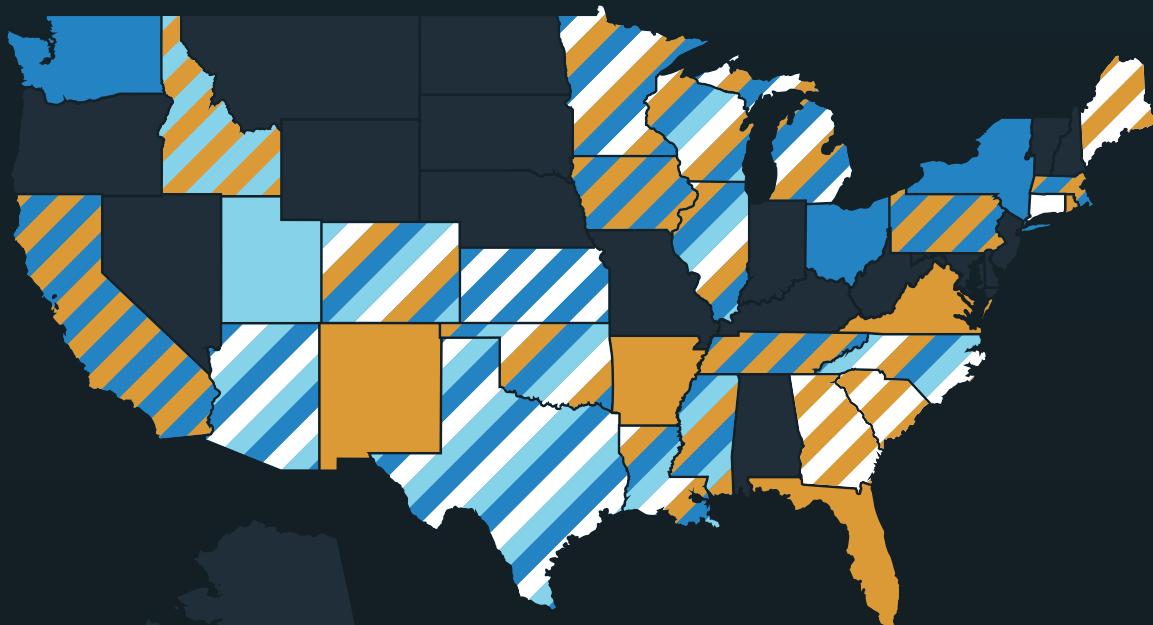
The **Mountain States Policy Center** and the **Texas Public Policy Foundation** have developed fellowships and

courses to immerse high school students in the principles of free markets, an understanding of the policy process, and exposure to leaders and mentors who can aid their professional development. The **Oklahoma Center for Public Affairs**, the **John Locke Foundation**, the **Mississippi Center for Public Policy**, and the **Mackinac Center** have leadership academies aimed at providing college students and young professionals with opportunities to network, speakers, coursework, and connections to the liberty movement. And the **Pelican Institute's** leadership academy identifies and equips future leaders in business, policy, and politics.

More than 33 states are working to build out these durable capacities with the help of our in-state partners. The results are clear: more policy wins, more revenue, more talent, and impact that goes far beyond DC's transient political tug-of-war. In the coming years, SPN will apply our focus to inspire, build, and strengthen the Durable Freedom Infrastructure in the states to equip them for the fights ahead.

Durable Freedom Infrastructure Map

■ LITIGATION ■ JOURNALISM ■ LEADERSHIP ACADEMY ■ ADVOCACY





CEO SPOTLIGHT

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



Matt Paprocki

PRESIDENT & CEO
ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE



You sense Matt Paprocki before you meet him. It's unmistakable with some people, their energy, their spirit — call it whatever you want. Before they walk in a room, they've already been there.

With Paprocki, president and CEO of the Illinois Policy Institute (IPI), the electricity and joy he emanates are infectious. It's too reductive to describe him as a "happy warrior," but the label seems apt.

Now, a cynic might say someone leading a free-market think tank in Illinois needs all the energy and joy they can get. For decades, generations even, the state has been the poster child for poorly run states. But an optimist like Paprocki says fighting for free-market principles in Illinois *gives* him energy. To hear him talk about it, it sounds like states like his Land of Lincoln are on the precipice of greatness — needing only a tap in the right direction.

No amount of optimism can change facts, though. Illinois politicians have found new and creative ways to promulgate corruption, high taxes, poor policy, and dismal leadership. And in 2023, self-proclaimed socialist Brandon Johnson was elected mayor of Chicago. Both Chicago and Illinois perennially suffer from outmigration, multiple credit downgrades, and declining employment levels.

The old strategies haven't worked.

But Paprocki refuses to give up on his home. So, he's flipped how he and IPI view their challenges. For years, defeating Illinois' shortsighted, populist policies and passing free-market ones was a pipe dream. But today, thanks in large part to Paprocki's new strategy, that's exactly what's happening.

“In other words, places like Illinois or New York aren't blue states, solidly opposed to liberty-minded policies — they're red states with blue cities that dominate their political landscape.

The Red/Blue Paradigm

In recent years, our 50-state Network has built out capacities to delve into the world of politics to achieve policy victories like school choice, sensible licensing and regulatory reform, tax cuts, and responsible budgets. Strategic capacities, like government affairs shops or voter insight polling, are crucial to see the forest through the trees.

Which brings us to the red and blue map.

It's bad strategy to solely use the R or D after a politician's name to predict how they'll legislate, as backroom deals or personal interest can often sway any politician's vote.

However, data show us that there's a better chance of passing free-market policies in most so-called red states than blue ones.

These are the realities for Paprocki and IPI. "For decades," Paprocki says, "I've always thought, 'Well Illinois is a blue state.' And it's easy to look at states like Illinois, New York, California, and Washington the same way. But I read something a few years ago that changed my entire mindset.

The biggest factor that determines how people vote isn't age, gender, income, race, or any of the other things we typically talk about. It's where you live. If you live in a major urban center, you likely vote to the left. If you live in a rural area across America, you likely vote to the right."

In other words, places like Illinois or New York aren't blue states, solidly opposed to liberty-minded policies — they're red states with blue cities that dominate their political landscape.

For years, SPN partners have tried countless strategies to incrementally turn their blue states purple. But based on this data, Paprocki realized that the goal should be to win the blue cities *inside* red states.

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Leadership from Character

Paprocki was born in Green Bay, Wisconsin, a fact he doesn't usually broadcast to his Chicago neighbors. As he puts it, "If you tell Chicagoans you're both a Packers fan and a conservative, it's a surefire way to make no one agree with you."

His father was an air traffic controller and his mother a homemaker. Paprocki lived a joyful childhood and as a teen achieved his lifelong goal of attending college at Notre Dame. But when he was a 24-year-old legislative assistant at the Illinois Statehouse, he faced one of the hardest tasks that can be leveled on a son — caring for his dying parent.

Paprocki was at work in the state capitol when he received a phone call from his mother. Her voice was trembling, and he could immediately sense her unease. She told him that she had been having stomach pains, so she went to the hospital. Once there, the doctors diagnosed her with stomach cancer.

As he wept at his desk, Paprocki felt the life go out of his body. This sensation wasn't new; six years earlier they lost his father to cancer. With his mind racing and emotions scorched, Paprocki knew what he had to do. He went into his boss's office and told him he had to leave his job to take care of his mother full time.

For the next eight months, Paprocki cared for his mother as she fought for her life. As the treatments and cancer progressed, one of the few comforts his mom could still enjoy was a foot rub from her son. It was during one of

those foot rubs on a cold December night that his mother smiled at him one last time.

At 24 years old, Matt Paprocki had no parents, no job, no money, and no purpose.

When he returned to his studio apartment in Chicago, he was met with the overpowering smell of rot. All the food in his refrigerator had spoiled. The power company turned off his electricity because he hadn't been able to pay the bill. Then, when he went to the train station to go back to his mother's house, he realized he had no money for a ticket.

So, he begged.

Thanks to the kindness of a stranger, Paprocki got back home. He eventually would get a job from John Tillman at the then upstart Illinois Policy Institute. Over the next 10 years, Paprocki would succeed Tillman and become the leader of IPI. But through all the promotions and progressions of life, he never forgot the despair and helplessness he felt in that cold Chicago train station — and how he found his purpose with his work.

It's that purpose that drives him to stay and fight for his home.

Creating the Infrastructure

"Milton Friedman taught us well," Paprocki says. "He talked about how the goal is not to get the right people to do the right things. Our job is to create an environment and an infrastructure where we can get the *wrong* people to do the right things."

In the past several years, Illinois Policy Institute has built out strategic capacities to secure long-lasting wins as a part of the Durable Freedom Infrastructure. Illinois Policy Institute boasts a government affairs team, which works closely with Liberty Justice Center to litigate cases across the nation that make game-changing policy changes.

The best-known example of this is most likely the 2018 Supreme Court Case, *Janus v. AFSCME*, where former union worker Mark Janus, represented by Liberty Justice Center, won a landmark case determining that government employees no longer have to pay union dues as a condition of employment.

“But through all the promotions and progressions of life, he never forgot the despair and helplessness he felt in that cold Chicago train station — and how he found his purpose with his work.”



IPI has also made communicating with the public a priority, particularly through political cartoons that remove the barriers around sometimes complex policy concepts. The cartoons make the knowledge much more accessible to the common man.

But Paprocki is taking this concept a step further and drilling down into Illinois Policy's home state. He aims to build new capacities to turn the tide in one of America's bluest cities.

Paprocki calls the environment and infrastructure he's building the "Blue Cities Strategy." In a nutshell, it dovetails with SPN's own Durable Freedom Infrastructure by focusing on marginal reforms in left-leaning cities that ultimately lead to statewide outcomes. One example Paprocki gives for the Blue Cities Strategy in action is IPI's recent work during Chicago's school board election.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) has long been the loudest voice in Chicago politics. It perennially pushes for policies that favor teachers over students, and unaffordable union contracts over responsible city budgets. And in 2023, the city elected a former CTU organizer as mayor. So, when Chicago held its first ever school board election in 2024, the hope for student-centered reform and school choice was low.

But Paprocki and IPI knew they could strategically move the needle. As he explains, "We produced a full-length documentary called *Local One: The Rise of America's Most Powerful Teachers Union* and ran a major campaign exposing their corruption. CTU started with 70 percent favorability and is now at 28 percent. We recruited, trained, and endorsed school board candidates, with nine running in competitive elections. For the school board election, CTU spent \$1.8 million and we spent \$50,000. We won six of the nine races."

Paprocki also talks about how the Blue Cities Strategy allowed IPI to defeat the major property tax hike that Chicago's mayor attempted to pass in 2024.

For decades, Chicago mayors have used property tax hikes as band-aids to plug holes in city budgets. Because of this, the city's property taxes have doubled in the last 10 years. So, when Mayor Johnson pushed a \$300 million property tax hike in 2024 — the second largest in Chicago's history — IPI's Blue Cities Strategy was put to the test. Paprocki explains, "The bill would have been a massive, massive property tax increase. But we talked to our audience, called them, had them call their lawmakers and aldermen. We kicked up such a fury on this thing that, for the first time ever, all 50 aldermen voted no. It went down 50-0 for the first time in Chicago history."

Then there was the real estate transfer tax (deemed the "millionaires' tax") that would have decimated Chicago's already hurting downtown real estate market. Most political commentators assumed it was a guaranteed win for the new mayor. But because of IPI's work, it went from a 71 percent approval to ultimately being struck down in a citywide vote.

IPI has proven the Blue Cities Strategy to work even in the bluest of cities. But Paprocki isn't satisfied with just Chicago and Illinois. "I am so fired up about how more Chicagoans than ever are voting for liberty-minded candidates and free-market ideas. These are the things we believe to be at the center of the American dream. I am so excited to attack that apathy. This is an opportunity for the entire country, and when I look at America as a whole, if we take this opportunity to pair the Durable Freedom Infrastructure with the Blue Cities Strategy, we can go into our major cities and get a percentage of people engaging with what we're working on. If we can successfully do that, we're going to look at a country that's freer and a country where more people have liberty."

Anyone who's met Matt Paprocki has experienced his energy firsthand. It's uplifting, exciting, and most of all, contagious. If there's a model for a leader who can expand the modern audience for liberty ideas, Paprocki is as close to a blueprint as it gets. And with the Blue Cities Strategy, the Durable Freedom Infrastructure, and SPN partners joining in the work, this energy will soon be nationwide.



The 2025 Policy Battles to Watch

While a lot of the attention these days is on Washington, DC, state legislative sessions are debating critical issues that will influence the direction of the country. As the new administration signals its intent to restore the balance of power between Washington and the states, state lawmakers have an opportunity to determine the outcome of policy battles in education, fiscal policy, energy independence, healthcare, and more.

Education Freedom: Full Speed Ahead

Empowering families to choose how to educate their children remains one of the most transformative reforms underway in states across the country and builds off of years of progress made by this Network. Fifteen states have already passed universal education choice programs, which give K-12 students the funding, regardless of family income, to pursue an education that best suits their needs. States like **New Hampshire, Georgia, Mississippi, and Montana** have some form of an Education Savings Account (ESA), such as an education choice tax credit or education tax scholarship for qualifying students, and lawmakers are working alongside SPN affiliates to expand their existing choice programs. Others, like **North Dakota** and **South Dakota**, will potentially see education choice programs passed for the first time.

In 2025, legislative battles in **Texas**, with the **Texas Public Policy Foundation** leading the charge, will determine if existing choice programs will become universal. Texas recently elected a new House Speaker, who is a committed champion of school choice, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation is leading a coalition to ensure that families throughout the state are aware of opportunities. **Tennessee** became the 13th state to pass universal education choice in February. **Idaho** and **Wyoming** followed close behind to become the 14th and 15th states respectively. The Education Renaissance of the last four years has continued to roll on in 2025.

While expansion of school choice programs remains a key issue, implementation of these programs and ensuring a robust supply of diverse education options are of equal importance. Last year, the **Libertas Institute** in **Utah** helped repeal burdensome zoning regulations that prevented microschools from starting or expanding existing models, allowing families to apply the Utah Fits All Scholarship Program funding to attend microschools. SPN's Velinda Jonson Family Education Fellow and contributing *Forbes* columnist Kerry McDonald continues to work alongside education entrepreneurs, like microschool founders, to help them build creative models and increase the supply.

SPN affiliates are also working to move the needle on reforms inside the public school system. The **Mississippi Center for Public Policy** has tirelessly advocated for improvements to open enrollment in the state to ensure students aren't prevented from attending a high-performing public school solely based on their zip code. In **Massachusetts**, the **Pioneer Institute** is advocating for increased access to the state's vocational schools for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or English language learners. Pioneer is putting together a toolkit of resources to spread these types of career and technical education programs to other states. **"Our affiliates communicate with each other, whether it's facilitated by SPN's 50-state viewpoint and perspective where we convene leaders from all over the country or if they're just reaching out on their own,"** said Jane McEnaney, SPN's director of education initiatives. **"SPN helps facilitate these conversations so ideas and lessons learned in one state can be shared with another, and we see that all the time among affiliates."**

The Future of Fiscal & Economic Policy

With the soaring cost of living, many Americans are asking, "Will things be cheaper in 2025?" Ben Wilterdink, SPN's director of policy initiatives, thinks it could be possible, in part thanks to SPN affiliates. "There are definitely some positive initiatives in the pipeline that states are leading on to make things cheaper," said Ben. In **Ohio**, **The Buckeye Institute** is working on tax reforms to index state tax brackets so that when inflation happens, those brackets move with inflation, and taxpayers won't see stealth tax increases year after year. Legislators in **Kansas** and **Nebraska**, thanks to the **Kansas Policy Institute** and the **Platte Institute**, will consider reforms that cap property taxes as they increase with home values. "The housing market has limited inventory and is experiencing record-breaking pricing, and these very large jumps in house valuations are increasing the rate that a lot of people are paying for their property taxes. This is not because the rates are increasing, but because the assessments of their home values are going up so much," said Ben. "That's really putting a strain on folks, especially our seniors in

CONTINUED »

these communities, who are often on fixed incomes. **SPN affiliates are looking at these types of reforms to ease the burden on homeowners and taxpayers.**"

Growing regulations at both the state and federal levels are another factor that often inhibits economic growth. Through efforts like the REINS Act, which seeks to bring more legislative oversight to regulations, states are hoping to curb regulations that burden businesses, drive up costs, and limit job opportunities. **Nebraska's Platte Institute** and the **Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs** are leading on these types of reforms at the state level, advancing policies to ensure state legislatures have a say in regulations proposed by state agencies or governors that could significantly impact the economy. For example, when a proposed regulation reaches a certain economic threshold — such as \$5 million in costs to businesses — it triggers legislative review, preventing unelected bureaucrats or federal agencies from unilaterally imposing burdensome rules.



SPN's **Center for Practical Federalism** is working to create transparency about the strings federal regulations impose on states, empowering state lawmakers to advocate for repealing these restrictions and returning power to state governments. With the federal government seeking to streamline through the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), states like **Maine, New Hampshire, and Alabama** are considering a state-level version of DOGE. The **Alabama Policy Institute** launched its ALDOGE initiative in December 2024 to address issues in Alabama's state government, including, "regulatory overreach, lack of transparency, and inefficiency in government expenditures."

Unleashing American Energy

Energy independence, reliability, and affordability are at the forefront of legislative agendas this year. "Energy is in everything and in the cost of everything," said Ben. "Everyone is very worried about the cost of living, but energy prices affect things that are built, products that are made, and how those products are transported. Energy is not some siloed issue. It really does affect everything that we touch every single day."

SPN's Energy Working Group convenes energy and environmental policy experts from across the nation to share solutions that will bring reliable, secure, affordable energy that is as clean as possible. These experts and the Network at large have long advocated for energy solutions that prioritize citizens. Energy systems exist to serve people, and as the 2021 blizzard in Texas demonstrated, failing to provide reliable energy can have dire consequences. Reliability must remain the cornerstone of energy policy, which means ensuring an adequate supply of baseload power sources — those that run continuously, are unaffected by weather, and can meet demand whenever needed. In contrast, heavily subsidized wind and solar energy, while widely promoted, are weather dependent, compromise grid reliability, and drive up costs for ratepayers and consumers.

One of the biggest debates the states will face on energy is grid reliability and affordability. States must prioritize replacing retiring baseload energy sources with equally reliable alternatives, like natural gas or nuclear energy, rather than relying solely on intermittent energy sources to maintain a stable and affordable grid. Nuclear energy is a clean and reliable source of power; however, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the federal agency overseeing nuclear energy, has not approved a new nuclear power plant since its inception in the 1970s. There is now an opportunity to advance nuclear energy, with groups like the **Caesar Rodney Institute** in **Delaware** working with federal officials to ease regulations for new nuclear energy sites.

In states like **Ohio**, the tech sector is increasingly driving demand for energy, particularly with large data centers seeking to expand their operations. As a result, some of these companies are in discussions with utilities to secure grid connections, with some even being asked to pay upfront for up to 10 years of energy use. **The Buckeye**

Institute has published research on the energy needs of these data centers and alternative energy sources, such as small modular reactors, to meet the intensive energy requirements. This emerging dynamic is unfolding in several states, highlighting the need to address the energy infrastructure and the explosion of growth in the tech industry.

Increasing Quality & Access in Healthcare

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Network leaders rallied to roll back regulations and remove red tape, which saved American lives and changed policy in at least 40 states. These efforts continue post-pandemic, with the goal of improving healthcare access and affordability. One reform includes expanding the scope of practice for healthcare providers, such as pharmacists and nurse practitioners, who interact with a wide range of patients, yet whose ability to provide healthcare services is often restricted. The **Beacon Center of Tennessee** supported the May 2024 passage of Senate Bill 869/House Bill 282, which allows pharmacists to prescribe certain medications for specific health conditions without needing approval from a doctor. This year, the **Virginia Institute for Public Policy** is championing similar reforms.

Another focus in healthcare policy is tackling certificate-of-need (CON) laws, which restrict the development or expansion of healthcare services or facilities. These laws require state approval for facilities to open or expand, often leaving rural communities without critical healthcare services. In Alabama, for example, expecting mothers in rural areas must sometimes drive hours for prenatal care. **The Alabama Policy Institute** is working to address this urgent issue to reform or repeal these restrictive laws to better meet patients' needs. "SPN's focus on healthcare is increasing access and affordability — those are our guiding lights," said Ben. "We want better health outcomes for all Americans, and we see better health outcomes when people are able to access care at an affordable rate."

SPN's unique 30,000-foot view of the policy landscape allows us to see the immediate impact of state-level reforms and the long-term strategic efforts needed to secure wins that will last beyond one legislative cycle.

We are actively invested in supporting our partners and their policy priorities in the states, ensuring they have the resources and guidance needed to secure wins that will change American lives. SPN's strategic approach allows us to respond quickly to emerging policy issues and address challenges, equipping the Network with the tools to move the needle on policies that prioritize citizens whenever and wherever opportunities arise.

Todd Davidson, SPN's vice president of programs, said, **"At SPN, we believe in local solutions led by local leaders bring about lasting policy change. To do that, we need something we call the 'durable freedom infrastructure.' This infrastructure is comprised of state think tanks, legal power, investigative journalism centers, and candidate and recruitment training. All these pieces of infrastructure at the state level are there to fight for policy reform today, defend policy reform against the opposition, and advocate for future policy reforms, leading to national impact."**





NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

Building a Network for Education Reform

School Boards for Academic Excellence (SBAE), launched in January 2024, is revolutionizing how local school boards operate across America. The organization serves as a national network connecting state-based organizations with school board members to promote academic achievement and parental empowerment.

SBAE emerged from a critical observation: While state legislators have numerous resources for policy development and training, school board members often lack access to reform-minded support outside the educational establishment. SBAE fills this gap by providing an independent perspective complete with model policies and training for board members seeking to improve their districts.

Working with 50 partner organizations across 39 states, SBAE's model of connecting organizations to empower them to go further together than if they had acted alone is reminiscent of our own at State Policy Network. In fact, many of the organizations SBAE works with are part of our 50-state Network.

"SPN has been a tremendous ally and partner of ours from the very beginning," said David Hoyt, SBAE's executive director. "People from various SPN affiliates, and SPN itself, were helping us think through our strategies and making initial connections with allies who might be interested in our work."

In fact, the connection to SPN spans well past initial connections. Amy Oliver Cooke, SBAE's board chair, serves as a visiting energy fellow at SPN. Members of SPN's 50-state Network who used to offer school board trainings independently, like **California Policy Center** and **Kansas**

Policy Institute, have now begun to partner with SBAE. The **Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty (WILL)**, for example, hosts an annual training for school board members in Wisconsin. In the last year WILL lent top-notch legal expertise to SBAE, drafting model policies to be disseminated to school board members across the nation and expanding its own reach.

One of the common threads in training school board members is teaching them the ownership that comes with their role. Many school board association trainings outside

of the SBAE network coach board members to take on very limited responsibility — mainly hiring a superintendent that will take care of most of the "real" work. If that superintendent decides to use the office for political activism rather than education professionalism, the school board is mostly taught to stay out of the way, thus removing its agency and authority. This goes

against the ideals held by both SBAE and SPN that state and local government is the best way to represent the will of constituents.

That's not the end of the conversation though. SBAE is working to teach school board members not only that they can hold their superintendent accountable, but more importantly, that it's their *responsibility* to do so.

In 2024, SBAE hosted its first Education Policy and Training Summit, welcoming school board members and state organizations from across America. The summit focused on practical governance skills, including parliamentary procedure and superintendent accountability, to address common challenges board members face. School board members enter the role wanting to help students in



Pillars of **SBAE**



Building your network



**Access to model school
board policies**



**Help getting legal advice
for school board members**



**Communications and
public relations support**



**Tools to foster
academic achievement**



David Hoyt
Executive director, SBAE

their district but they often have limited experience in government and no understanding of the practical steps needed to make a difference.

“With school boards, it’s a bit of the Wild West,” joked David. “These board members are basically being lied to by alleged authorities and being told that they have no ability to use their power. When you combine that with the fact that school districts are extremely complicated, and most of the time school board members are new to the policy-making process and overall, just normal, decent people who don’t think in terms of power politics, they don’t really understand what they’re up against. Their superintendent does, though, as does the teachers union. That’s where the challenge lies, but also where there’s great opportunity.”

With its first year under its belt, SBAE is hoping to grow both in size and influence in 2025. Because each school board in each state holds a different set of rules, there can never be too many people drafting model policies and connecting for one-on-one outreach. While 2024 was monumental for making connections and building relationships, SBAE hopes to elevate the level of resources it provides to better understand the impact of its training on school board policy.

While school board reform isn’t necessarily the most glamorous of improvements, it has longstanding implications for our nation’s future. School boards have a huge say in what is taught in each school and have the responsibility of ensuring the next generation gets the best education possible.

“One of the reasons I wanted to work in education policy is if you take a step back and look at the political system as a whole and think about how to change the direction of the country, there’s nothing more important than what the next generation of voters believes to be fundamental truth,” said David. “What they learn in classrooms for 13 years for six to eight hours a day is the foundation of knowledge that they’re going to draw on for the beliefs that will inform decision making for the rest of their lives.”

Not Just a Federal Play: **ALABAMA DOGE TAKES THE REINS ON STATE SPENDING**



When President Donald Trump announced his plan to create the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), he was addressing an issue that SPN and our 50-state Network know all too well — the federal government is bloated and needlessly encroaching into state and local governments.

It's not only the federal government that could use a good trim. Many state and local governments rely on taxpayer funds to fuel any number of projects and initiatives, regardless of their ROI. How can taxpayers push back on unnecessary spending?

When Elon Musk, head of DOGE, began using **Alabama Policy Institute's** talking points on X, API staff saw an opportunity to seize the moment to reduce waste on the state level. Their solution was ALDOGE, an Alabama-specific counterpart to DOGE aimed at monitoring and trimming state government spending.

"We decided to try to catch some of the lightning in a bottle of the public's attention on this at the federal level and bring it to the states," said API President Stephanie Smith. "Those of us who have been in the limited government, free-market world for a while know that there's a swamp in every state, there are large-scale bureaucracies in every state, there's regulatory overreach in every state, and there are spending issues in every state."

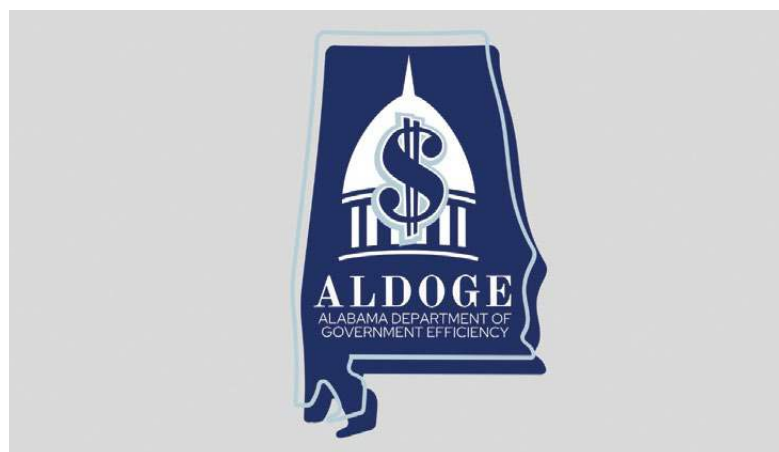
An initiative of API, ALDOGE aims to educate both the public and lawmakers on the excess of the state government. Almost immediately after launch, API began to receive phone calls and emails from Alabamians with ideas of areas that needed to be cut. The Alabama Policy team set up a portal to direct the public to ALDOGE. It's not just the public, however, who has made use of the new tool.

"The most interesting thing to me has been the statewide elected officials and legislators who have privately reached out to me with their information about where the bodies are buried," joked Stephanie. "They know best where the little nuggets we're looking for are and have given us a lot of leads. None of them have opted to put their name on them, which is fine. We're happy to be the bad guy."

With the public's help, ALDOGE has identified several areas that could be scaled back, both at the state and local level. In early February, ALDOGE released its first report detailing \$125 million of government spending in this year's budget that's currently going to non-governmental organizations or municipalities.

While their focus has been on the budget in 2025, Stephanie has big plans for the future of ALDOGE.

"I want the conversation to shift in the budget hearings and legislatively to ask the questions that need to be asked that are being asked in Washington, DC, thanks to DOGE. Is this project something the state government should do? Is this initiative something the state government should fund? We need to start asking that question first and only then decide how much money to spend on it."



Their long-term goal is to build out the initiative to include some sort of apparatus that would require the state to run any new spending by a body designated to critically think about government spending. The focus, as Stephanie says, should be on the people and what benefits them.

"There's currently no thought process about how to return money to the people in most states. If there's extra money, the government thinks that it has free reign to spend it. Our long-term goal is to have state governments operate with the mentality and understanding that these are taxpayer dollars, not public dollars."

For other organizations looking to create their own DOGE program, Stephanie notes that there are several different components that can make a program like this successful.

“The most important component is to have an outside, objective source to push for reform because it’s very hard to change things from within; that’s where SPN Network groups come in. These groups have a working knowledge of bureaucracy, the regulatory process and the budgetary process — all very easy places to hide spending money.”

On the “nice to have, but not necessary” tier are tools like AI models trained to analyze the budget as well as executive buy-in. In a best-case scenario, the outside organization can work with someone on the inside that can pull levers on government spending. While API doesn’t have that yet, they’re hopeful that the tide may turn with Alabama statewide elections in 2026. Even without an ideal political landscape, though, it’s worth the effort to change hearts and minds.

API isn’t the only SPN partner to have taken their state governments to task to implement cuts. **Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation, Mountain States Policy Center, Idaho Freedom Foundation, Pelican Institute for Public Policy**, and the **Josiah Bartlett Center** are just some of our partners working to implement state-level DOGE programs. Our network has pushed back on unnecessary government spending for decades, and we are primed to seize this opportunity.

“My overall message to the SPN Network is that there’s a swamp in every state. This is what the SPN Network was made for – draining swamps and pointing waste out. Whatever capacity is appropriate in your state is what you should work towards. This is who we are as limited government advocates.”



SAVE THE DATE



August 25-28, 2025 New Orleans, LA



State Affiliates

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

ALABAMA

Alabama Policy Institute
alabamapolicy.org

ALASKA

Alaska Policy Forum
alaskapolicyforum.org

ARIZONA

Goldwater Institute
goldwaterinstitute.org

ARKANSAS

Arkansas Policy Foundation
arkansaspolicyfoundation.org
Opportunity Arkansas
OpportunityArkansas.org

CALIFORNIA

California Policy Center
californiapolicycenter.org
Pacific Research Institute
pacificresearch.org

COLORADO

Independence Institute
i2i.org

CONNECTICUT

Yankee Institute for Public Policy
yankeeinstitute.org

DELAWARE

Caesar Rodney Institute
caesarrodney.org

FLORIDA

Foundation for Government Accountability
thefga.org
The James Madison Institute
jamesmadison.org

GEORGIA

Georgia Center for Opportunity
georgiaopportunity.org
Georgia Public Policy Foundation
georgiapolicy.org

HAWAII

Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
grassrootinstitute.org

IDAHO

Idaho Freedom Foundation
idahofreedom.org
Mountain States Policy Center
mountainstatespolicy.org

ILLINOIS

Illinois Policy Institute
illinoispolicy.org

INDIANA

Indiana Policy Review Foundation
inpolicy.org

IOWA

Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation
taxrelief.org

KANSAS

Kansas Policy Institute
kansaspolicy.org

KENTUCKY

Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions
bipps.org

LOUISIANA

Pelican Institute for Public Policy
pelicaninstitute.org

MAINE

Maine Policy Institute
mainepolicy.org

MASSACHUSETTS

Pioneer Institute
pioneerinstitute.org

MICHIGAN

Mackinac Center for Public Policy
mackinac.org

MINNESOTA

Center of the American Experiment
americanexperiment.org
Freedom Foundation of Minnesota
freedomfoundationofminnesota.com

MISSISSIPPI

Empower Mississippi Foundation
empowerms.org
Mississippi Center for Public Policy
mspolicy.org

MISSOURI

Show-Me Institute
showmeinstitute.org

MONTANA

Frontier Institute
frontierinstitute.org

NEBRASKA

Platte Institute for Economic Research
platteinstitute.org

NEVADA

Nevada Policy
npri.org

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy
jbartlett.org

NEW JERSEY

Garden State Initiative
gardenstateinitiative.org

NEW MEXICO

Rio Grande Foundation
riograndefoundation.org

NEW YORK

Empire Center
empirecenter.org

NORTH CAROLINA

John Locke Foundation
johnlocke.org

NORTH DAKOTA

Roughrider Institute
roughriderpolicy.org

OHIO

The Buckeye Institute
buckeyeinstitute.org

OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs
ocpathink.org

OREGON

Cascade Policy Institute
cascadepolicy.org

PENNSYLVANIA

Commonwealth Foundation
commonwealthfoundation.org

RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island Center for Freedom & Prosperity
rifreedom.org

SOUTH CAROLINA

Palmetto Promise Institute
palmettopromise.org

South Carolina Policy Council
scpolycouncil.org

SOUTH DAKOTA

Great Plains Public Policy Institute
greatplainsppi.org

TENNESSEE

Beacon Center of Tennessee
beacontn.org

TEXAS

Texas Public Policy Foundation
texaspolicy.com

UTAH

Libertas Institute
libertasutah.org
Sutherland Institute
sutherlandinstitute.org

VIRGINIA

Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy
thomasjeffersoninst.org
Virginia Institute for Public Policy
virginia institute.org

WASHINGTON

Freedom Foundation
freedomfoundation.com
Washington Policy Center
washingtonpolicy.org

WEST VIRGINIA

Cardinal Institute for West Virginia Policy
cardinalinstitute.com

WISCONSIN

Badger Institute
badgerinstitute.org
Institute for Reforming Government
reforminggovernment.org
MacIver Institute for Public Policy
maciverinstitute.com
Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty
will-law.org

WYOMING

Wyoming Liberty Group
wyliberty.org

State Affiliate Highlights

Note: Highlights are based on affiliate submissions. For real-time updates, please visit spn.org.

ALABAMA

Alabama Policy Institute

AlabamaPolicy.org



The **Alabama Policy Institute** launched ALDOGE in December 2024. By the end of 2025, the Institute plans to have a viable structure for ongoing analysis of state and federal spending, including an AI component. The Institute is engaging the public and preparing a comprehensive report for lawmakers regarding budget reforms, tax cuts, and fiscal transparency to consider for the 2026 legislative session. In addition, the Institute will launch a statewide marketing strategy regarding ALDOGE in order to have a positive impact upon 2026 statewide elections.



ARIZONA

Goldwater Institute

GoldwaterInstitute.org



Building upon the success of the original Right to Try effort, which allows terminally ill patients to access experimental treatments and was passed in 41 states before being signed into federal law in 2018, the **Goldwater Institute** is working to extend these vital protections through the Right to Try for Individualized Treatments (Right to Try 2.0). Right to Try 2.0 seeks to provide a pathway for patients with life-threatening or severely debilitating diseases to access investigational,

individualized treatments after they have considered all other available options. These therapies hold immense promise, particularly for the 30 million Americans with rare diseases, 80 percent of which are genetic with limited treatment options. The outdated FDA regulatory framework presents significant hurdles for timely access to these individualized therapies. Since 2022, Goldwater has achieved bipartisan success, enacting Right to Try 2.0 in six states: Arizona, Nevada, Mississippi, Maryland, Louisiana, and North Carolina. This momentum underscores the urgent need for this legislation. The 2025 goal is to broaden this state-level footprint and prepare to introduce Right to Try 2.0 at the federal level, aiming for Congressional passage and a presidential signature.





ARKANSAS

Arkansas Policy Foundation

ArkansasPolicy
Foundation.org



The **Arkansas Policy Foundation** is confident efficiency initiatives within state government will continue in 2025. The Efficiency Project launched by the Foundation in 2015 with the cooperation of then-Governor Asa Hutchinson's administration and PwC, an international consulting firm, resulted in state government reorganization from 42 to 15 agencies, collection of \$86.4 million in outstanding receivables, 184 initiatives at agencies, and reduction of the state employee count from 60,226 (FY 2017) to 56,621 (FY

2024). The Project led to agency strategic plans, procurement risk identification, modernization of compensation and benefits programs, accounting optimization, automated processes to serve customers, and digital technology use. Current Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders' Arkansas Forward initiative has identified more than 300 initiatives across the 15 agencies "that have the potential to return \$300 million in cost-savings and cost-avoidance to the people of Arkansas over the next six years."

Opportunity Arkansas

Opportunity
Arkansas.org



Opportunity Arkansas is working to implement comprehensive Medicaid reforms in 2025. Arkansas' Medicaid program, bloated by the Affordable Care Act's expansion, has become a dependency trap, not a safety net. Nearly one in three Arkansans are now dependent on Medicaid, with spending soaring 440 percent since 2000 to \$9.8 billion annually — over a quarter of the state's budget. This unsustainable trajectory jeopardizes other priorities like eliminating the state income tax and fully funding Education Freedom Accounts. There are nearly 250,000 able-bodied adults on Medicaid expansion, and Opportunity Arkansas' research has shown that

the majority are not working. Six reforms are needed: end the private option model (saving \$80 million in direct state costs annually), reinstate work requirements (proven to reduce dependency and move people back into the workforce), cap expansion enrollment, set a five-year limit for able-bodied adults, lock out fraudsters, and end retroactive eligibility. These changes would save billions, protect taxpayers, and prioritize the truly vulnerable. With a reform-minded administration in Washington, it's time to implement real reforms that align Medicaid with Arkansas' other welfare programs.



CALIFORNIA

Pacific Research Institute

PacificResearch.org



Achieving free-market healthcare reforms that lower patient costs, expand access to quality care, and protect innovation top **Pacific Research Institute's** 2025 policy wish list. PRI achieved a policy victory when Sacramento progressives announced that they would not introduce single-payer healthcare legislation this year. PRI President, CEO, and Thomas W. Smith Fellow in Health Care Policy Sally C. Pipes has worked tirelessly to educate Americans on the dangers of government-run healthcare. With GOP control of Washington, PRI will be working to repeal the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) — specifically drug price control provisions that threaten innovation and reduce access to life-saving medications. Pipes published a book,

The World's Medicine Chest, that demonstrates why price controls don't work and free-market reforms are best for patients and taxpayers. Repealing the IRA would achieve another PRI agenda item: ending green energy mandates that impose huge burdens on millions. New US Department of Energy Secretary — and former PRI board member — Chris Wright will lead the way toward US energy abundance and a free-market energy future. Finally, as more lawmakers support restoring phonics-based reading instruction, Democratic Assemblywoman Blanca Rubio, whom PRI's Lance Izumi profiled in "The Great Classroom Collapse," has again proposed reform legislation. PRI will continue informing Californians why this change is vital.

COLORADO

Independence Institute

i2i.org



In 2024, the Colorado Legislature passed SB 24-157, weakening the Colorado Open Meetings Law. **Independence Institute** received reports from activists, parents, and media about government bodies further limiting access to records. In response, the Institute's Political Law Center launched an initiative to restore transparency, forming a diverse coalition — "Team Transparency" — to draft and advocate for legislative and ballot solutions. The coalition includes allies and groups that often disagree with Independence but share a commitment to open government. Building this coalition required extensive outreach, one-on-one meetings, and monthly gatherings at Independence Institute. Sen. Rod Pelton and Rep. Lori Garcia Sander joined the effort, alongside more than 50 organizations, including the Colorado Press Association, ACLU, League of Women Voters, and Common Cause. The goals are repealing SB 24-

157, improving the Colorado Open Records Act and Criminal Justice Records Act, and testing legislative strategies in 2025 for a broader 2026 initiative. Independence Institute's expertise in ballot initiatives and public relations ensures a continued push for reform if lawmakers fail to act. The coalition's first bill, HB 24-1242, has been drafted to repeal SB 24-157 and expand transparency while reducing costs for citizens and media. While Independence isn't yet addressing tensions between mainstream media and independent journalists, it is closely monitoring related legal battles, including Utah's recent press credentialing case. Independence Institute stands committed to government transparency and ensuring public access to information. Lawmakers have also heard testimony in support of bills that would create a Colorado DOGE to identify and eliminate government waste, fraud, and abuse.

DELAWARE

Caesar Rodney Institute

CaesarRodney.org



The **Caesar Rodney Institute** advocates for responsible energy policies that protect coastal communities, marine ecosystems, and economic stability. A policy priority in 2025 is ensuring that offshore wind development is eliminated from the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) and that the law's focus remains on responsible resource management. Enacted in 1953, the OCSLA grants the federal government jurisdiction over submerged lands beyond state coastal waters, primarily for managing mineral exploration and development. While originally centered on oil and gas, the act has been interpreted to include offshore wind

projects — despite growing concerns about their environmental, navigational, and economic impacts. Offshore wind has failed to meet the act's objectives, and ongoing legal challenges highlight the risks these projects pose to marine ecosystems and coastal industries. The Caesar Rodney Institute will continue advocating for the removal of offshore wind from the OCSLA to prevent further industrialization of ocean waters. Holding federal agencies accountable and ensuring the law remains aligned with responsible resource management will protect the integrity of the Outer Continental Shelf and the communities that depend on it.

FLORIDA

Foundation for Government Accountability

TheFGA.org



By the end of 2025, the **Foundation for Government Accountability** aims to achieve labor reform wins in at least five states. Priorities include paycheck protection, annual union recertification, preempting local labor regulations, and eliminating paid time off for government union business. This is a new issue area FGA this legislative session, and the states primed

for reform include Florida, Utah, Indiana, West Virginia, and Ohio. Labor reform empowers workers, curbs government overreach, and ensures taxpayer dollars are not used for union political activities. With the momentum building in key states, FGA is committed to making these reforms a reality.

The James Madison Institute

JamesMadison.org



Florida has made significant strides over the past 20 years to position the Sunshine State as the benchmark for election integrity reforms. By 10 p.m. on election night 2024, all Floridians knew the winners of each election. However, Florida must remain vigilant to uphold election security and maintain public trust. During the 2025 legislative session, **The James Madison Institute** plans to address fraud and misinformation concerns regarding the citizen initiative signature

process, monitor and regulate foreign influence in elections, and secure the ballot process by implementing two-factor authentication for mail ballots. The Institute is currently updating its Election Integrity Policy Brief to include legislative changes to Florida's election code from 2021 to 2024, along with policy recommendations that will benefit the Sunshine State and serve as a model for other states.



Georgia Center for Opportunity

GeorgiaOpportunity.org



A key focus for the **Georgia Center for Opportunity** in 2025 is to encourage both state and federal leaders toward work-first welfare reforms. The safety net is rife with complexities, penalties, and disincentives that discourage people from pursuing meaningful work and forming stable families. The current welfare debate has been fixated on budget adjustments, but in reality, changes to funding — whether cuts or increases — will only perpetuate barriers to work, marriage, and self-sufficiency unless structural reforms are made. GCO, in

collaboration with partners at the Alliance for Opportunity, is working at the federal level to advance the One Door reform, which would allow more states the flexibility to integrate their welfare and workforce programs and streamline the path to steady employment. At the same time, GCO is helping leaders and partners in Georgia, Arkansas, and North Carolina pursue state-level reforms, such as audits and task forces, to review their safety net systems and identify opportunities to better connect welfare assistance to work support.



Georgia Public Policy Foundation

GeorgiaPolicy.org



For years, Georgia has been considered among the best states in the nation for business, and that has helped Georgia grow — both in terms of job creation and number of residents. Georgia is poised to welcome about 1 million residents this decade. But the state's status as a "judicial hellhole" when it comes to litigation threatens much of the good work of the previous years. That is why Governor Brian Kemp has called this his top priority this year. The **Georgia Public Policy Foundation** is part of a large coalition working with lawmakers to craft legislation that will make

an impact — and be approved by majorities in both chambers. Because this legislation is so complex, the Foundation's investigative journalism has told several in-depth stories on how lawsuit abuse impacts various industries — from apartment leasing to child care to trucking to convenience stores — and how those costs are then passed to consumers. The Foundation has identified allies within its owned audience who are helping supplement this work. Robust tort reform would be the biggest win and most transformative change for 2025 in Georgia.



HAWAII

Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

GrassrootInstitute.org

GRASSROOT
INSTITUTE OF HAWAII

The **Grassroot Institute of Hawaii's** main goal in the quarter ahead is to see that the many cumbersome and inflexible regulations slowing down disaster recovery efforts in Lahaina, Maui, are waived, relaxed or removed. The historic seaside town was destroyed in August 2023 by wildfires that took the lives of more than 100 people and displaced thousands. A year and a half later, debris cleanup is complete, but only a handful of homes have been rebuilt, and existing land-use rules and other regulations have stalled the rebuilding of the community, including

many of its beloved businesses along famous Front Street. Grassroot has issued two policy reports and testified on dozens of bills related to Lahaina's recovery. Many of its suggestions have been adopted by the Maui County Council and county mayor, or incorporated into Governor Josh Green's emergency proclamations. In 2025, Grassroot will continue speaking up for Lahaina residents and making the case for land-use, zoning, and permitting reforms that will help them return quickly, and without undue cost, to a reasonable semblance of their former lives.



IDAHO

Idaho Freedom Foundation

IdahoFreedom.org



The **Idaho Freedom Foundation** scored a major policy win this year with the passing of HB 93, the Parental Choice Tax Credit bill. The IFF has been on the front lines of school choice in the Gem State for 12 years. However, there is one win that would be even bigger. Ever since Medicaid expansion passed by ballot initiative in 2018, the IFF has been fighting to repeal it. Though proponents of the initiative were

adamant that it would save the state money in the long run, IFF knew it would quickly balloon out of control. Indeed, the cost of Medicaid expansion has skyrocketed from \$403 million in 2021 to a projected \$1.36 billion for 2026. It has proven to be inefficient compared to health insurance options, nowhere near cost effective, and a massive drain on Idaho's resources. The program has been such a financial disaster that five different bills are being considered to reform certain aspects, reduce it, or repeal it altogether. Reining in spending on bloated government programs is paramount to improving the long-term quality of life for Idahoans, and there is no more expensive and bloated government program than Medicaid expansion. While Governor Little joked in his State of the State address that 'Idaho was DOGE before DOGE was cool', we are pushing for him not just to reduce regulations, but also the state budget. If the IFF could secure one policy win, it would be legislation that severely limits or repeals Medicaid expansion in Idaho.



ILLINOIS

Illinois Policy Institute

IllinoisPolicy.org

ILLINOIS
POLICY

By the end of 2025, the **Illinois Policy Institute** would like to see the passage of legislation imposing a cap on state spending tied to the annual inflation rate. This would reduce the likelihood of future tax increases by ensuring predictable budget growth, prevent government spending from outpacing taxpayers' ability to pay, and create a more attractive economic environment for families and businesses.



 **IOWA**
Iowans for Tax Relief FoundationTaxRelief.org

At the start of the 2025 legislative session, **Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation** established the foundation for the property tax reform debate. Property tax reform is a main concern for Iowans. Through research, grassroots initiatives, public programs, and op-eds, ITR Foundation set the agenda for the property tax reform discussion. ITR Foundation proposed a 2 percent property tax cap, which was the only solution offered to address the problem. Research in support of the property tax cap was supported by the Foundation's ITR

Local initiative. ITR Local is a website that contains property tax information that Iowans can use not only to better understand their property tax bill but also to prepare for conversations with their local elected officials. ITR Local has complete property tax and budget information for Iowa cities, counties, and school districts. ITR also issued briefs calling for the Iowa DOGE task force to focus on addressing cost drivers like Medicaid and education as it explores reforms at the state and local level.

 **KANSAS**
Kansas Policy InstituteKansasPolicy.org

Kansas Policy Institute continues to push for the paramount policy reform that Kansas taxpayers need this year: property tax reform. A few proposals are being discussed in the Legislature, but city and county lobbyists are flooding the Capitol, pressuring legislators not to touch property tax relief. They say restrictions on valuations or tax increases will lead to service cuts, as though every penny they spend is necessary. It is inexcusable not to pass a reform bill: Kansas has some of the highest property tax rates in the nation, the property tax has increased 2.4 times the combined rates of inflation and population since 1997, and the largest counties and cities were sitting on more than \$5 billion in cash reserves at the end of 2022. At the time of this report, the Kansas Senate had passed a constitutional amendment that limits the increase in taxable real estate valuations to

3 percent annually. However, the Kansas House claims it doesn't have the votes needed to pass a constitutional amendment, so it introduced its own version of an assessment limit. According to a public opinion poll conducted by SurveyUSA, Kansans strongly favor limits on valuations and property taxes: 64 percent of taxpayers want a valuation limit, and only 18 percent are opposed. Approval of a 3 percent tax limit is even more significant, with 87 percent approval and only 9 percent opposition. Education spending makes up more than half of state spending, with \$18,634 on average per pupil. Achievement remains stubbornly flat for all children, and low-income kids remain at least two grade levels behind their peers. Kansas Policy Institute will continue to work with the Kansas School Board Resource Center, a KPI subsidiary, to strengthen the locally elected board of education members.

 **KENTUCKY**
Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy SolutionsBIPPS.org

Kentucky lawmakers passed HB 8 in 2022, setting the state on a path toward eliminating the individual income tax rate by establishing two primary fiscal thresholds that must be met annually to trigger half-percent cuts. First, General Fund revenues must exceed expenditures and the cost of a 1 percent reduction in the individual income tax rate. Second, the state's Budget Reserve Trust Fund must have a balance equal to at least 10 percent of General Fund revenues. Both thresholds were met in fiscal year 2024, which triggered a half-percent reduction in the rate to 3.5 percent. This goes into effect on Jan. 1, 2026. The **Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions** urged the state to move away from dependence on punitive income taxes and

embrace more pro-growth policies. For the first time in its history, Kentucky last year received as much revenue from consumption taxes as it did from punitive income taxes. The Institute's goal is to ensure spending remains under control in order to trigger another tax reduction by this fall. In 2024, lawmakers quit counting one-time expenditures toward the revenue trigger after spending nearly a half-billion dollars in disaster relief to western Kentucky communities in the wake of devastating tornadoes in December 2021, and to the eastern part of the state, which suffered destructive flooding the following spring. Those expenditures were the primary reason revenue requirements failed to trigger a rate reduction for 2025.



LOUISIANA

Pelican Institute for Public Policy

PelicanInstitute.org



To better serve the citizens of Louisiana, the **Pelican Institute** has long touted the “One Door” model of integrating workforce and social services. Modeled after Utah’s highly successful Department of Workforce Services, the approach streamlines the administration of large federal and state programs so that recipients can more easily access and use the resources to meet basic needs, join the workforce, and achieve self-sufficiency. Governor Jeff Landry established the Louisiana Workforce and Social Services Reform Task Force in March 2024 via executive order to begin pursuing a more effective, integrated

model. The task force met several times, heard from national experts, explored state innovations, and charged working groups with studying various aspects of managing large federal and state workforce and social services programs. The Pelican Institute provided strategic counsel, research, connections to national experts, and administrative support. In January, the task force unanimously approved a report containing bold recommendations, including the creation of an agency that integrates all workforce and social services programming. It will be considered in the legislative session that begins in April.



MAINE

Maine Policy Institute

MainePolicy.org



Maine Policy’s biggest hope for 2025 is to rein in state spending and eliminate the many tax increases in Governor Janet Mills’ proposed budget. The governor’s proposal calls for \$11.6 billion in spending and several tax increases, including on tobacco products. Maine Policy is working with lawmakers in both parties to bring state spending growth in line with inflation,

which can be accomplished without punitive tax increases. Maine Policy created a budget outline that is being distributed in Augusta as an alternative to the governor’s proposal.



MICHIGAN

Mackinac Center for Public Policy

Mackinac.org



Michigan has spent nearly \$5 billion over the past two years on corporate welfare. **Mackinac Center**’s research suggests these special interest deals will create only 1 out of 11 jobs — at an enormous cost-per-job for taxpayers. That money would be much better used on roads and transportation or left in the pockets of taxpayers.



MINNESOTA

Center of the American Experiment

AmericanExperiment.org



Center of the American Experiment is joining forces with Opportunity for All Kids (OAK) to implement a two-year campaign to advance Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs) in Minnesota. The short-term goal (and the Center’s top priority) is to pass an ESA bill in 2025. The long-term goal is to create enough momentum for ESAs to become House File 1 and Senate File 1 in January 2027 by building public demand over the next two years. According to the Center’s Thinking Minnesota poll, school choice enjoys widespread

support from Republicans, Independents, and even Democrats. The challenge in Minnesota is to convert widespread but somewhat shallow support into actual demand for ESAs as the answer to Minnesota’s challenges in education. The goal of the two-year campaign will be to educate constituents and legislators about ESAs and in turn influence the 2026 election. In other words, legislators and caucuses will campaign on choice, and voters will make their decisions based on a candidate’s position on school choice.

Freedom Foundation of Minnesota

FreedomFoundation
ofMinnesota.com



If a company couldn't get customers to purchase its product for 20 years, it would be out of business. Too bad that axiom doesn't hold true for political parties. Every four years, Minnesota's Republican and Democratic-Farmer-Labor parties meet to endorse statewide candidates for office, yet neither has been successful in electing their preferred gubernatorial candidate for several decades. Instead, the winner of Minnesota's primary election becomes the eventual nominee, defeating the party's preference in an August primary. The **Freedom Foundation of Minnesota** has been working on election reform for nearly 10 years and one of those reforms appears to be garnering strong bipartisan support: a proposal that would move Minnesota's August primary election to the same second Tuesday in March as the presidential nominating convention. An early primary election would involve a greater number of citizens from all walks of life in the nominating process of their chosen political party. Currently, every Minnesota political party

holds separate precinct caucuses on a Tuesday evening in February. These very poorly attended meetings are often not ADA compliant, make no accommodations for voters who need absentee ballots due to family or work commitments, and don't allow the participation of active-duty military service members, to name just a few of the problems often mentioned by non-attendees. But when these voters are left out of the process, the political parties ignore the will of more and more voters. It is no secret that caucuses are poorly attended: In 2024, one week after only a few thousand Minnesotans attended their precinct caucus, nearly 600,000 voters cast a ballot in the presidential primary. That level of enthusiasm for a March primary election has been a tremendous bipartisan boost for efforts to move the state's primary permanently to March. If legislation is signed this year it will become effective in time for the 2026 statewide, legislative elections. The days of precinct caucuses controlled by political party bosses are nearing an end in Minnesota.



MISSISSIPPI

Empower Mississippi

EmpowerMS.org



Mississippi is surrounded! Yes, we are surrounded by school choice states, and yet legislators in our state have failed to act. As the 2025 legislative session winds down, **Empower Mississippi** is winding up. We are moving full steam ahead on school choice in our state. Why? Because parents are demanding it! The growing momentum in Mississippi is something that Empower will be acting upon through the rest of 2025. We are committed to seeing every child in our state have the ability to choose the education setting that works best for them. Through the work of Empower Mississippi's advocacy and outreach, including the recently launched Mississippi Ready campaign, we will ensure that the message from

parents and students is heard loud and clear at the state capitol. The days of attending a school simply because of your zip code and income are numbered, and lawmakers are beginning to take notice. With growing support in the House of Representatives, we'll focus strategic efforts on the Senate, where lawmakers are more reluctant to grant that freedom to Mississippi students and parents. But parents will not remain quiet. They are standing up and taking action – contacting lawmakers and taking to social media to spread the word about the need for options for their children. Momentum is growing, and so is the pressure for lawmakers to act. We need school choice for every Mississippi child!

Mississippi Center for Public Policy

MSPolicy.org



Mississippi Center for Public Policy's No. 1 goal in 2025 is to secure a decisive win for education freedom in Mississippi. This is part of the three-step strategy MCPP has been pursuing to achieve universal school choice. First, in 2024, MCPP helped reform school funding so that every student in the state has a personalized education budget. The next step is to ensure students can take their personalized budget to a public school of their

choice. Once that is achieved, MCPP will advocate for public to private school choice. MCPP has programs on red tape reduction, tax cuts, and civic education, but public to private school choice is the overarching objective for this session.





MISSOURI

Show-Me Institute

ShowMeInstitute.org



If **Show-Me Institute** had to pick one victory to achieve by the end of this year, it would be education reform that allows every Missouri family the freedom to choose the school best suited for their children. Educational choice for every Missouri student has been a priority for the Institute since its inception 20 years ago, and it is within striking distance. The Legislature is advancing bills that would create universal open enrollment for public schools, and the new governor — who has repeatedly declared his support for school choice — has proposed a budget that includes

millions of additional dollars in public funding for ESAs. The Institute has achieved important school choice victories in recent years, but progress has been incremental. As a result, Missouri has fallen behind other states. Forty-three states around the country — including most of Missouri's neighbors — have some form of open enrollment, and more and more states are funding ESA-type programs. It would be a great day for the Institute and an even greater day for Missouri families, who deserve the right to choose the best educational option for their children, if education freedom advances this year.



NEBRASKA

Platte Institute

PlatteInstitute.org



By the end of 2025, the **Platte Institute** aims to secure two victories: repeal of Nebraska's inheritance tax and regulatory modernization. Nebraska remains one of five states still imposing an inheritance tax, penalizing families for passing down assets and discouraging long-term economic growth. Eliminating this outdated tax would align Nebraska with national and regional trends and foster greater investment in the state. On the regulatory front, Platte is championing the GOAT (Government Oversight, Accountability, and Transparency) initiative, a bipartisan effort with seven legislative proposals designed to make Nebraska's regulatory system more efficient, transparent, and accountable. A centerpiece of this effort is the REINS Act, which would require

legislative approval for high-impact regulations that impose \$1 million or more in economic costs. Other reforms include mandating regular reviews of outdated regulations, conducting a full inventory of state reliance on federal funds, expanding remote public participation in rulemaking, and creating an Office of Regulatory Management to ensure cost-benefit analyses of new regulations. Additional measures would prevent agencies from using regulatory advisories to bypass formal rulemaking and consolidate outdated boards and commissions. Each of these reforms would be a meaningful step toward improving Nebraska's economic climate. Together, they represent a transformational shift in how the state approaches taxation and regulation.



NEW MEXICO

Rio Grande Foundation

RioGrandeFoundation.org



In 2025, the **Rio Grande Foundation** would like to secure some form of tax reduction, like eliminating New Mexico's tax on Social Security. The state is one of just nine to have such a tax in place. New Mexico also has massive budget surpluses thanks to the oil and gas industry. Despite a challenging political climate, modest tax breaks could be adopted soon.



NEW YORK

Empire Center for Public Policy

EmpireCenter.org



Contrary to popular belief across the political spectrum, New York's schools are not underfunded. In fact, New York spends more per pupil than any other state or country (except Washington, DC) — over \$30,000 per student. Despite this, performance in reading and math is below the national average. Given the spending and population density, New York City's schools should be the envy of the world, but they are not. The **Empire Center for Public**

Policy's new initiative, the K-12 SOS Scorecard, maps the spending and performance of 4,500 schools and districts across New York. Empire will target parents and politicians with data and stories, highlighting how the state's government-run K-12 system is failing to provide quality education. Changing the prevailing narrative will pave the way for comprehensive education reform.

 **NORTH CAROLINA**
John Locke FoundationJohnLocke.org

The **John Locke Foundation** has an ambitious agenda this legislative session. A top priority is ensuring victims of Hurricanes Helene (2024), Florence (2018), and Matthew (2016) receive the support they need. North Carolina's Office of Recovery and Resiliency has done a poor job of assisting citizens, leaving many waiting to move back to their homes seven years later and generating a \$319 million dollar budget shortfall. This session, Locke will advocate for the following disaster recovery reforms: dissolution

of the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR); completion of reconstruction of the remaining homes damaged by Hurricanes Matthew and Florence; guardrails that ensure the newly created Division of Community Revitalization (DCR) does not mimic NCORR's organizational structure or action plans; and a guarantee that the DCR remains a lean organization tasked primarily with contracting rebuilding efforts with private organizations that have proven track records in disaster recovery.

 **OHIO**
The Buckeye InstituteBuckeyeInstitute.org

The **Buckeye Institute** outlined priorities for Ohio's 136th General Assembly as Buckeye State policymakers turn their attention to passing the biennial budget. Regulations make energy more expensive and less reliable. By adopting Buckeye Institute-championed reforms, lawmakers can ensure a healthy supply of affordable, reliable energy. The Buckeye Institute's eight commonsense higher education reforms will ensure that Ohio prepares graduates for the 21st-century job market. School choice is popular in Ohio. By adopting The Buckeye Institute's six recommendations for school choice, the state can fulfill the promise made to Ohio's families. The Buckeye Institute urged lawmakers to keep overall

spending aligned with inflation and population growth. Failure to do so risks future fiscal crises, budget shortfalls, and potential tax increases. The Buckeye Institute called on lawmakers to further reduce personal income taxes and adopt a tax policy that encourages growth and investment. To avoid an income tax increase, Buckeye reminded elected officials to keep their promise to index personal income tax rates against inflation. Ohio's byzantine structure of local government is at the heart of the massive property tax increases. Seven Buckeye Institute-championed reforms will streamline local government and reduce Ohioans' property tax burden.

 **OKLAHOMA**
Oklahoma Council of Public AffairsOCPAThink.org

By the end of 2025, a major policy victory for the **Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs** would be the passage of the REINS Act — a reform to rein in unelected bureaucrats and restore legislative oversight of major regulations. Currently, state agencies impose rules with the force of law without approval from elected lawmakers, leading to bureaucratic overreach that stifles economic growth and burdens businesses. The REINS Act would require legislative approval for any agency rule with an economic impact of \$1 million or more over five years. This ensures costly or overreaching regulations are properly scrutinized before taking effect. Florida, Indiana, and Kansas have passed similar reforms, proving that limiting unchecked agency rulemaking strengthens economies and protects taxpayers. OCPA has been a leading advocate for this legislation. The bill has passed the House of Representatives

and awaits a crucial committee hearing in the Senate. If enacted, it would reduce regulatory bloat, encourage innovation, and restore decision-making power to elected representatives. The REINS Act isn't just about cutting red tape — it's about accountability, transparency, and economic freedom.



 **PENNSYLVANIA**
Commonwealth Foundation[Commonwealth Foundation.org](https://CommonwealthFoundation.org)

The top policy reform the **Commonwealth Foundation** hopes to see in Pennsylvania this year is a direct funding stream for educational choice, either through an Education Savings Account or refundable tax credit. The Commonwealth Foundation continues to advocate for Lifeline Scholarships, which would provide students at the state's lowest-performing schools with scholarships to attend another school, as well as the Child Learning Investment Tax Credit, a universal education tax credit program. A direct funding stream would be truly transformative for

educational choice in Pennsylvania. The current tax credit scholarship programs have grown significantly, but they aren't meeting the full market demand for choice. Commonwealth's research from February found that a record 85,570 K-12 scholarships were awarded in the 2022-23 school year, the most recent year for which data are available. But nearly 80,000 student scholarship applications went unfunded — nearly half of all applications. This "waiting list" for choice illustrates the clear need for a direct funding stream to provide more options for Pennsylvania families.

 **SOUTH CAROLINA**
Palmetto Promise InstitutePalmettoPromise.org

Palmetto Promise Institute has been the go-to organization in South Carolina for private and public school choice research since its founding in 2013. Shortly after Palmetto's launch, it crafted the first Educational Savings Account (ESA) bill in state history with Rep. Shannon Erickson. (Erickson is now chair of the Education & Public Works Committee and Palmetto's founding president is now state superintendent of education.) It has been a rough road since, with the State Supreme Court striking down two different ESA programs (2020, 2024). The most recent court action pulled the rug from under low- and moderate-income

parents only a few weeks into the school year. Since then, Palmetto has raised private funds to help keep ESA kids in their schools (Palmetto ESTF Family Rescue Fund) and educated legislators on the options available for another shot at ESA legislation. As of this writing, that new ESA bill (S 62) has passed both the Senate and House by wide margins and is headed for conference committee. With numerous legal fixes embedded and a version in play that takes the program to universal, the third time should be the charm, and there will be new opportunities for children trapped by their zip codes in schools that don't work for them.

 **TENNESSEE**
Beacon Center of TennesseeBeaconTN.org

This year, Tennessee passed the nation's 13th universal school choice program. The passage of universal school choice legislation is a monumental step for Tennessee families, providing them with the freedom to choose the best educational opportunities for their children, regardless of their background or zip code. As with any policy win, the work doesn't stop when the bill is signed. Implementation is crucial to seeing the program

grow. **Beacon Center's** partners across the State Policy Network who are several steps ahead of Tennessee in the school choice fight have helped Beacon identify opportunities to engage throughout the implementation process. Between now and the end of the year, Beacon will provide parents and schools with the information and resources they need to help Tennessee become the best state for education freedom in the country.

 **TEXAS**
Texas Public Policy FoundationTexasPolicy.com

By the end of 2025, the **Texas Public Policy Foundation** aims to secure universal education freedom through the passage of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). Education freedom is a founding priority for TPPF, and it is closer than ever to being a reality for Texas families. The governor, lieutenant governor, and Speaker have all made education freedom a top priority this legislative session. SB 2, which has already passed out of the Senate, would establish the largest day-one ESA program in the country, giving Texas

families unprecedented access to high-quality educational options. Parents across the state are calling on lawmakers to deliver real solutions that put students first, and their voices are making an impact. The data are clear: ESAs improve student outcomes, foster innovation, and create a more competitive education landscape. As the legislative session unfolds, TPPF is at the forefront — engaging with lawmakers, mobilizing grassroots support, and ensuring that Texas leads the nation in education freedom.

UTAH

Libertas Institute

Libertas.Institute



By the end of 2025, **Libertas Institute** aims to transform grassroots activism by building the strongest pro-freedom family network in the nation. Through the Tuttle Twins and the Children's Entrepreneur Market, thousands of families already embrace liberty-minded values — but many don't yet know how to turn

their passion into action. That's where Libertas comes in to connect engaged families with organizations that align with their values, helping them make a real impact on policy, education, and local governance. Libertas will expand civic engagement, empower young leaders with internships and career opportunities, and strengthen the liberty movement at every level. For pro-freedom organizations, this means access to a highly motivated and philosophically aligned audience eager to get involved. Whether through digital outreach, event partnerships, or donor engagement, Libertas Network will ensure that liberty-focused groups thrive. The goal this year is a growing, active, and connected liberty movement — one where families aren't just learning about freedom but living it, advocating for it, and shaping the future.



Sutherland Institute

SutherlandInstitute.org



States are showing the wisdom of federalism for producing good public policy. **Sutherland Institute** has made tremendous strides in the federalism space, releasing a research audit on Utah's implementation of federalism when it comes to state and federal agency interaction, and hosting a variety of guests on its podcast, *Defending Ideas*, to discuss ways Utah can strengthen federalism. Sutherland also recently announced its Work and Opportunity Initiative, through which it is spearheading efforts to

address benefits cliffs — which have significant federal policy components — in the state and across the nation. A win in 2025 would put states in the driver's seat on these issues by enacting two policy reforms: a welfare reform pilot allowing more state flexibility, and more transparent federal guidance. As states enact innovative policy solutions, they strengthen the case for a robust federalism that keeps the federal government in its constitutional lane.

VIRGINIA

Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy

ThomasJeffersonInst.org



Virginia is on the edge of a self-inflicted energy crisis. The 2020 Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA) set ambitious targets requiring the state to achieve 45 percent clean energy by 2030 and 100 percent by 2050. The unrealistic targets have created challenges in a state with a surging demand for energy. Commercial energy demand quadrupled over the last five years, yet the VCEA has forced the closure of baseload hydrocarbon energy sources like coal, and restricted the development of natural gas. Virginia now imports more energy than any other state. Expensive renewable energy sources like solar and wind can never be relied upon to fully service the state's data centers, which require uninterrupted power. Battery storage technology

remains insufficient and too expensive to address large-scale reliability concerns. Despite the looming energy crisis, Virginia continues to pass legislation to strengthen the worst provisions of the VCEA. Legislators have sought to require a "social cost" of carbon on any cost-benefit analysis, to force large solar farms over local community objections, to take control of smart meters, and to subsidize electric vehicles, which only further stresses Virginia's overloaded grid. The **Thomas Jefferson Institute** has been the leading voice in pushing back against the green extremist agenda behind the VCEA and so many other crippling laws. The most important goal over the next year is to repeal or seriously reform the VCEA.

Virginia Institute for Public Policy

VirginiaInstitute.org



Virginia has emerged as a national leader in regulatory reform, implementing one of the most successful regulatory reduction initiatives in the country. The Office of Regulatory Management (ORM), created in 2022 with an executive order by Governor Glenn Youngkin, with assistance from the **Virginia Institute for Public Policy**, has achieved a 21 percent reduction in regulatory requirements and eliminated 41 percent of text in guidance documents. These reductions have generated approximately \$1.2 billion in annual savings for Virginia's citizens and businesses as of January 2025. ORM estimates that this achievement will increase to 33 percent of

regulatory requirements by the end of the year, surpassing ORM's original goal of 25 percent. These highlights and additional outcomes are now available in the Institute's March 2025 report, "The Virginia Model of Regulatory Reform: A Roadmap for Success." Created through an executive action, ORM's continued improvement of regulatory policy remains vulnerable to reversal by future administrations. Utilizing strategic coalition building, educational outreach efforts, and further legislative engagement, the Institute will encourage lawmakers to make ORM a permanent office, a policy win for every citizen and business in Virginia.



WISCONSIN

Badger Institute

BadgerInstitute.com



If the **Badger Institute** could see just one win for Wisconsin this year, it would be limits on the actions of municipalities, counties, and states that make it costlier to build homes. As elsewhere, house prices have soared in Wisconsin, which until recently was much more affordable than most other places. Early research shows that a swarm of regulations, however well intended, accumulates into \$60,000 to \$90,000 in added costs on what homes do get built — and deters a great deal of building from ever taking place. Such regulation is a policy choice, and Badger is working on storytelling to persuade policymakers to agree to relief.



Institute for Reforming Government

ReformingGovernment.org



A big win would be a successful year for the **Institute for Reforming Government's** Court Watch initiative. In February, IRG launched Court Watch to bring oversight and accountability to Wisconsin's judicial branch. Judges and justices, often overlooked and under-appreciated, wield immense influence over the daily lives of Wisconsinites. Despite their power, they frequently operate without scrutiny. Most citizens can't name Wisconsin Supreme Court justices or cite key state court cases — yet a single ruling can unravel years

of legislative progress. Through Court Watch, the Institute is committed to ongoing oversight and public education on the judiciary's profound impact. IRG has begun issuing primers on critical cases affecting families and businesses.

If left unchecked, a quiet shift toward activist majorities — especially in the Supreme Court or Appellate Court — could dismantle voter ID, school choice, tort reforms, or Governor Scott Walker's public sector union reforms. Court Watch is tracking decisions, analyzing rulings, and ensuring judges uphold the law.



Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty

WILL-Law.org



Wisconsin's school choice program is at a crossroads. Ensuring the long-term viability of the nation's first modern school choice initiative is a top priority for the **Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty** in 2025. A 2023 lawsuit challenging the program failed on procedural grounds, but opponents are preparing to refile — especially if the state Supreme Court remains under liberal control — likely targeting its complex funding structure. The current model ties school choice funding to local property taxes, creating confusion, legal risk, and financial instability for both public and private schools. To safeguard school choice, WILL is leading the charge to decouple funding from local property taxes and shift it entirely to state funding. Unlike Wisconsin, most states with school choice fund

their programs through state appropriations, ensuring stability and transparency. This reform would eliminate a key legal argument used by opponents seeking to dismantle the program; reduce property taxes, saving Wisconsin taxpayers nearly \$300 million annually; and provide financial stability for schools, preventing budget disruptions and protecting families who rely on choice options. With a \$4.3 billion state surplus, this is a rare opportunity to secure long-term stability for school choice, neutralize legal threats, and reduce Wisconsin's overall tax burden. WILL remains committed to ensuring that Wisconsin families continue to have access to high-quality education — free from political and legal uncertainty.



WASHINGTON

Freedom Foundation

FreedomFoundation.com



Last year, the **Freedom Foundation** reached an all-time high of 40,241 government union opt outs and hit another significant milestone. In the six years since the U.S. Supreme Court's Janus decision, the Freedom foundation has assisted more than 200,000 public employees to leave their unions. For 2025, the organization has set an ambitious goal of 50,000 opt outs throughout the nation, removing an estimated \$47.5 million

from union coffers. In addition, the Freedom Foundation is targeting a number of states with legislation to dramatically reduce government support for public sector unions. Key legislative proposals include prohibiting public employers from collecting union dues as well as curtailing release time for public employees who are paid by taxpayer dollars to preform work for the unions.



WYOMING

Wyoming Liberty Group

WYLiberty.org



Wyoming Liberty Group's top priority by the end of 2025 is to ensure that lawmakers and citizens are fully informed about the realities of nuclear waste storage before any further policy decisions are made. During the 2025 General Session, Wyoming Liberty's research played a significant role in every legislative discussion on the state's rapidly expanding nuclear ambitions. What began in Wyoming as a single natrium reactor demonstration project quickly accelerated into plans for multiple reactors, a centralized dry cask storage facility for spent fuel, and small modular reactor manufacturing sites — proposals that caught Wyomingites off guard. Given Wyoming's historically anti-nuclear stance, Wyoming Liberty Group stepped up to provide crucial research on

spent fuel storage and reactor manufacturing so decision makers had the facts needed to evaluate the complicated legislation. As a result, all legislative attempts to move forward on nuclear waste storage related to centralized storage facilities and reactor manufacturing were put on hold. Lawmakers overwhelmingly recognized that there are as yet too many unanswered questions. Discussions will likely continue as interim committee study topics, and Wyoming Liberty will further its education efforts so that by 2026, any policy decisions are based on solid research and enjoy broad public support. Wyoming's future in nuclear energy must be shaped by informed, deliberate policymaking — not rushed decisions with unknown consequences.

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

50CAN

Abundance Institute

Acton Institute

America's Future

America First Policy Institute

American Conservative Union

American Consumer Institute

American Council of Trustees and Alumni

American Enterprise Institute

American Institute for Economic Research

American Juris Link

American Legislative Exchange Council

Americans for Fair Treatment

Americans for Prosperity

Americans for Tax Reform

Archbridge Institute

Arizona Free Enterprise Club

Arizona Liberty Network

Association of American Educators Foundation

Atlas Network

Bill of Rights Institute

Capital Research Center

Cato Institute

Centennial Institute

Center for Education Reform

Center for Independent Employees

Center for Independent Thought

Center for Individual Rights

Center for Latino Leadership

Certell, Inc

Children's Scholarship Fund

Cicero Institute

Citizens Against Government Waste

Citizens Council for Health Freedom

Common Sense Institute

Commonwealth Partners Chamber of Entrepreneurs

Competitive Enterprise Institute

Do No Harm

DonorsTrust

EdChoice

ExcelinEd

Federalist Society

Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE)

Fiscal Alliance Foundation

Forge Leadership Network

Foundation for Economic Education

Franklin News Foundation

Free the People

Free to Choose Network

Heartland Institute

Independent Institute

Independent Women's Forum

Inspired Life

Institute for Family Studies

Institute for Free Speech

Institute for Humane Studies

Institute for Justice

Institute for Policy Innovation

Institute of Economic Affairs

Instituto de Libertad Economica

Jersey 1st

Judicial Watch

Kentucky Forum for Rights, Economics and Education

Leadership Institute

Libertarian Policy Foundation

Liberty Justice Center

Louisiana Family Forum

Lucy Burns Institute

Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

Massachusetts Fiscal Alliance

Media Research Center

Mercatus Center

Middle Resolution Policy Foundation

Millennial Debt Foundation

Mountain States Legal Foundation

Napa Legal Institute

National Review Institute

National Right to Work Legal Defense & Education Foundation Inc.

National School Choice Awareness Foundation

National Taxpayers Union Foundation

New Civil Liberties Alliance

North Carolina FreeEnterprise Foundation

Pacific Legal Foundation

People United for Privacy Foundation

Property & Environment Research Center (PERC)

Philanthropy Roundtable

Prison Fellowship

Project 42

Reason Foundation

Reformers Academy

R Street Institute

Save Our States

Southeastern Legal Foundation

Speech First

Stand Together Trust

Steamboat Institute

Students for Liberty

Tax Foundation

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty

The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University

The College Fix

The Foundation for American Innovation

The Free State Foundation

The Fund for American Studies

The Heritage Foundation

The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal

The Jesse Helms Center

The Policy Circle

True Charity

Truth in Accounting

Upper Midwest Law Center

Young America's Foundation

Young Voices



Our Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Our Strategy

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

CONTACT

📞 703-243-1655 *phone*
703-740-0314 *fax*
✉ give@spn.org *email*

Learn more at: [SPN.org](https://spn.org)

📍 NEW ADDRESS!

📍 1500 Wilson Blvd
Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22209

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Tracie Sharp
President and CEO

Rebecca Painter
Senior Vice President

Tony Woodlief
Senior Executive Vice President

Emily McCallister
Executive Vice President

Todd Davidson
Vice President of Programs

Brooke Medina
Vice President of Communications

Other Ways to Give

BY CHECK

Checks should be made out to State Policy Network and sent to:

Attn: Tracie Sharp
State Policy Network
1500 Wilson Blvd, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22209

BY CREDIT CARD

Visit spn.org/donate to make a contribution via credit card on our secure donation page. If you would like to arrange a recurring donation by mail, please contact **Zack Urevig** at 219-776-9268 or by email at zurevig@spn.org.

BY WIRE TRANSFER OR BY APPRECIATED STOCK

If you wish to donate via Wire Transfer or Appreciated Stock, please contact **Zack Urevig** at 219-776-9268 or by email at zurevig@spn.org to let us know that you would like to make a gift.

LEAVE A LEGACY


If you are interested in more information on how you can include State Policy Network in your will — or would like to explore other legacy giving options and become charter member of the Thomas Roe Legacy Society — please contact **Nitsa Jennings** at 619-244-4580 or at nitsa@spn.org.




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