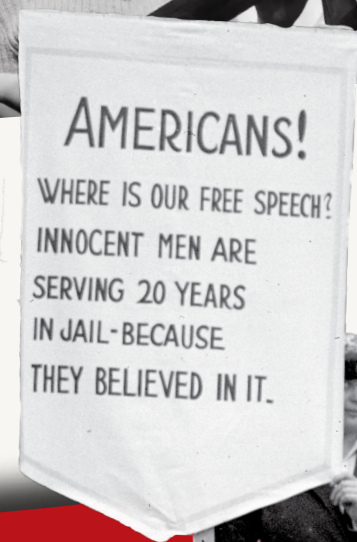


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FIRE QUARTERLY | SUMMER 2026

250 YEARS OF
FIGHTING FOR
FREE SPEECH



WE'RE IN THIS FREE SPEECH FIGHT TOGETHER

In every generation, there are always brave individuals who stand up to fight for human freedom. And generally speaking, they are on the losing side.

This is because every generation also has people who predictably stand up to demand that others have *less* freedom — of speech and thought, in particular. Human beings are natural-born censors. Throughout millennia, the authorities have silenced or eliminated dissenters through ostracization, banishment, arrest, torture, beheadings, burnings at the stake, crucifixion, or drinking hemlock.

It's easy to forget that sometimes. That's why I coined the term "the eternally radical idea," to describe the true nature of freedom of speech: It's not liberal. It's not conservative. It is, in fact, revolutionary — year after year, generation after generation.

Mere toleration of dissent is a radical enough thing. But the idea that we should *welcome* it? *Engage* with it? Consider the possibility that the dissent is *correct*?

That's *eternally radical*.

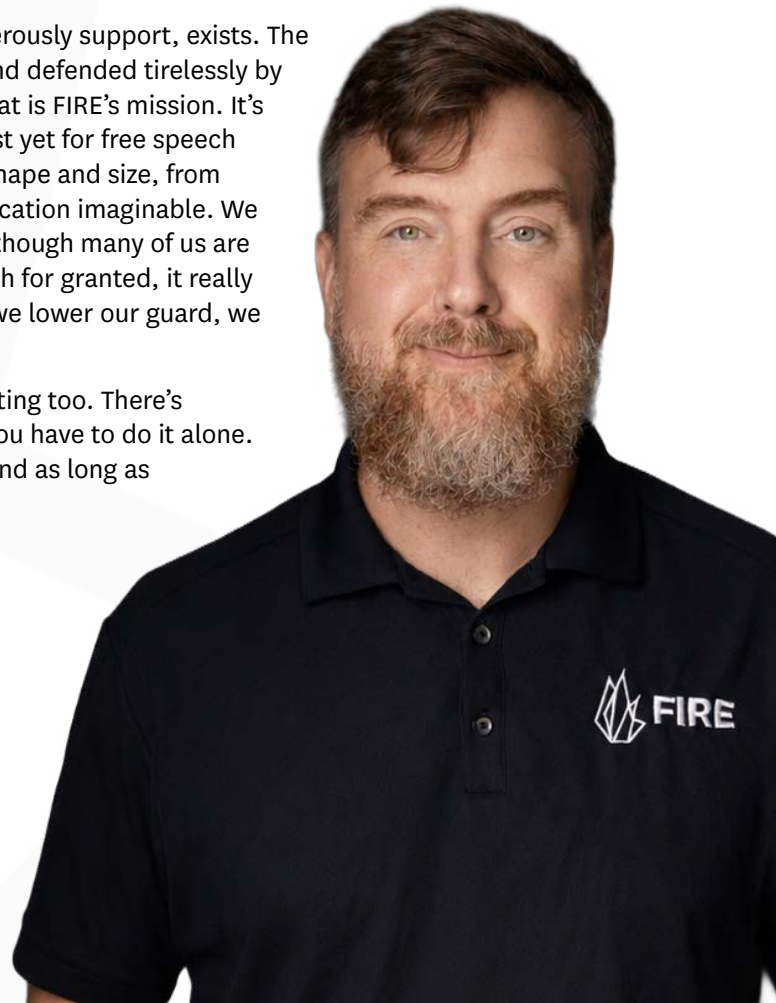
And it's why this American experiment — now 250 years old — is so special. Enshrined in our Founding documents is that very same radical idea: That the freedom to think, speak, publish, assemble, and petition our government must be promoted, protected, and preserved.

It's also why this organization, which you so generously support, exists. The principles of free speech must be enumerated and defended tirelessly by its proponents with each new generation, and that is FIRE's mission. It's not easy. The last few years have been the busiest yet for free speech defenders. Censorship has come at us in every shape and size, from every direction, and with every excuse and justification imaginable. We have tackled all of it with the knowledge that, although many of us are lucky enough to have grown up taking free speech for granted, it really is deeply counterintuitive and always in peril. If we lower our guard, we can lose it forever.

I don't intend to stop, and I hope you'll keep fighting too. There's nothing about being eternally radical that says you have to do it alone. As long as you support FIRE, you never will be. And as long as FIRE has you, neither will we.



Greg Lukianoff,
FIRE President and CEO





SOAPBOX 26

Still Revolutionary

**LEE
ROWLAND**



**HEATHER
MAC DONALD**



**ARYEH
NEIER**

ANN BEESON ★ LIV BOEREE ★ ADAM THIERER ★ CARSON HOLLOWAY ★ SARAH MCLAUGHLIN ★ ADVISORY OPINIONS
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LIVE PODCASTS FROM THE FIFTH COLUMN AND ADVISORY OPINIONS



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NOVEMBER 4-6

PRESENTED
BY  FIRE



FIRE SUPPORTS THE BIPARTISAN JAWBONE ACT TO **protect your expressive rights**

For years, FIRE has warned about the dangers of jawboning — the government’s use of threats to coerce private actors into censoring speech they cannot ban directly.

This problem has arisen across administrations of both parties. The Supreme Court case *Murthy v. Missouri* showed how Biden administration officials attempted to coerce social media platforms into censoring posts about Covid-19, elections, and other controversial topics. Likewise, the FCC chairman under President Trump pressured broadcasters into suspending *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* for comments the president didn’t like.

This problem needs a solution. That’s why in June, FIRE proudly endorsed the bipartisan Justice Against Weaponized Bureaucratic Overreach to Networked Expression (JAWBONE) Act, which was introduced by Sens. Ted Cruz (R) and Ron Wyden (D). The bill would rein in this unlawful coercion by the federal government against speech on social media and AI platforms as well as on broadcast airwaves.

The JAWBONE Act would explicitly prohibit jawboning by federal agencies and employees and ensure accountability by allowing victims to sue federal officials for damages. It would also ensure transparency by requiring government agencies to publicly report communications with

these companies, allowing victims to get notice that their rights may have been violated.

“Jawboning betrays our national commitment to freedom of expression. Congress should take action to stop it.”

— **WILL CREELEY**, FIRE legal director

A broad coalition joined FIRE in supporting this legislation, including the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans for Tax Reform, Americans for Prosperity, and the Knight First Amendment Institute. As Will Creeley, FIRE’s legal director, made clear in testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, “Jawboning betrays our national commitment to freedom of expression. Congress should take action to stop it.”

This is an important development in FIRE’s fight against government efforts to suppress protected speech. That effort is and should be bipartisan, because the jawboning certainly has been. We hope the JAWBONE Act is the first step toward stamping out federal jawboning for good.

—Greg Gonzalez

RECENT FIRE RESEARCH SHEDS LIGHT ON OUR FREE SPEECH PROBLEM— & **potential solutions**



**Gen Z
is nearly**

**more
supportive
of **violence**
against
speakers
than
Boomers**

You're probably already familiar with FIRE's College Free Speech Rankings. This yearly review of the state of free expression on campus gives prospective students an informed picture of schools they're considering and incentivizes universities to improve.

But FIRE's research team is also doing other work you might not be as aware of, work that allows us to more deeply understand the free speech problem we're facing both on and off campus.

For instance, a recently commissioned study used faculty donations to assess political diversity in academia and found that the average faculty member is nearly as progressive as Bernie Sanders. For those of us who want to see a robust culture of political debate and viewpoint diversity in the academy, these results are worrying.

Unfortunately, there are more worrying data points. Gen Z is nearly 10 times more supportive of violence against speakers than Boomers, for example. Campus deplatformings, attempts to silence disfavored speech on campus, are on track to nearly double last year's record of 184.

Other findings offer important nuance. Our research has found that students of certain religions have much higher support for allowing campus speakers on all sides, and that conservative women are as likely as liberal men to say words are violence. We have also investigated broader trends, such as why Americans distrust government regulation of social media and how tolerant and intolerant students differ on self-censorship.

While some of these results paint a grim picture, others point in the direction of possible solutions. Together, they reveal a free speech problem that is broader and more complex than any single ranking can capture. Without an understanding of the state and causes of censorship, we'd be shooting in the dark. With it, FIRE can aim more precisely and make its work more impactful.

-Chapin Lenthall-Cleary

Keep up with the latest FIRE research on Expression,
FIRE's Substack newsletter: **EXPRESSION.FIRE.ORG.**



★ ★ ★ ★

FIRE IS BUILDING ITS LEGACY THROUGH FREE SPEECH VICTORIES

★ ★ ★ ★

AMERICA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY IS A GREAT TIME TO REFLECT — NOT JUST ON OUR COUNTRY'S LEGACY, BUT ALSO OUR OWN. AT FIRE, WE WANT TO LEAVE BEHIND A LEGACY OF STAUNCH, PRINCIPLED COMMITMENT TO FREE EXPRESSION. WE HOPE TO VINDICATE THAT COMMITMENT WITH VICTORIES AGAINST THE FORCES OF CENSORSHIP, BOTH ON CAMPUS AND OFF.

Our win in the case of retired Tennessee law enforcement officer Larry Bushart is a great example. Following Charlie Kirk's assassination last year, Larry posted a Facebook meme quoting President Trump saying "We have to get over it." In response, the local sheriff labeled the meme a threat under a state statute, which led to Larry's arrest and 37 days in jail on \$2 million bond. The sheriff knew all along that Larry's meme wasn't threatening, but he did it anyway — a clear example of using government power to punish disfavored speech.

In December, FIRE sued on Larry's behalf to defend his First and Fourth Amendment rights. And after a long day of negotiations in Jackson, Tennessee, this spring, the parties agreed to settle the case. Larry received \$835,000 in exchange for dismissing his complaint.

Unfortunately, Larry was just one of hundreds of Americans censored for online speech following Charlie Kirk's assassination. And there are hundreds more whose rights have been violated for other reasons. Turbulent times like these are when our national commitment to free speech is tested the most. It's also when the legacy we're building as principled defenders of First Amendment freedoms should be top of mind.

That's why, when government officials stray from their obligations to uphold our rights, FIRE is there to hold them accountable, and always will be.

LARRY'S CASE IS JUST ONE OF MANY. **FIRE** HAS BEEN NOTCHING VICTORIES ALL YEAR LONG IN DEFENSE OF OUR EXPRESSIVE RIGHTS AND FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOMS. HERE ARE JUST A FEW MORE RECENT EXAMPLES.

PENSACOLA STATE COLLEGE prohibited the student-run LGBT magazine *Just Opposed* from going to print. The school claimed Florida's unconstitutional Stop WOKE Act tied their hands, but FIRE pushed back, explaining that the First Amendment prohibits this kind of viewpoint-based restriction. In May, PSC President Ed Meadows confirmed that the college restarted printing the magazine, securing a big win for free speech on all Florida campuses.

After a series of satirical student headlines and comedy sketches on April Fools' Day, **UNC CHAPEL HILL** issued a condemnation and announced an investigation to "address concerns" about their "harmful" and "offensive" content. FIRE wrote to the school, urging them to retract their statement and assure students that their free speech rights would be protected. On April 16, they did — even linking students to a free speech resource for further education on their rights.

TORREY PINES HIGH SCHOOL in California suspended a student for posting pro-ICE flyers reading "We ♥ I.C.E. – Real Americans," claiming they constituted "harassment" and "intimidation." Weeks earlier, the school permitted a student walk-out, which included anti-ICE signs and slogans, without incident. After the student secured representation from FIRE litigators, the school agreed to expunge the suspension from his record, acknowledging that viewpoint-based disciplinary action is unconstitutional.

Last year, **SUSSEX COUNTY, NEW JERSEY**, instituted a policy requiring everyone — even individuals and small groups — to apply for authorization to gather in a public square. FIRE wrote to the board explaining that this was an unconstitutional infringement on the right of citizens and small groups to assemble in a public forum without state permission. In May, Sussex County revised its policy to remain consistent with our First Amendment rights.

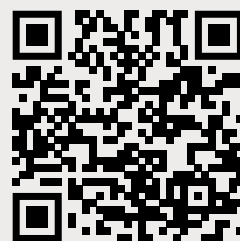
Faculty and students at **TENNESSEE'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES** can speak more freely now that SB 1741 — the "Charlie Kirk Act" — has been signed into law. FIRE proposed changes to an initial draft and enthusiastically supported the passage of the revised version. The law expands upon Tennessee's existing campus free speech law, ensuring that students are free to engage in robust, uninhibited debate and discussion that is foundational to every university education.

The **ST. CROIX CENTRAL SCHOOL BOARD** in Hammond, Wisconsin, announced last year that speakers could not make "allegations, charges, or complaints" against students or employees; use comments or gestures deemed "profane," "harassing," or "abusive;" or engage in "personal attacks." FIRE warned the board that these were unconstitutional restrictions on public comment. This year, St. Croix retracted its policy — a big win for every resident who wants to hold local officials accountable. -Cary Davis



LEAVE A LEGACY of FREE SPEECH

These victories carry forward America's legacy of free speech. Help us protect that legacy by joining our **Eternal Flame Society** and leaving a planned gift to FIRE.



To learn more about planned giving, scan the QR code or contact Ashley Adams, FIRE's senior director of development, at ashley@fire.org.

250 years later,
free speech is. . .



**STILL
REVOLUTIONARY**



A quarter of a millennium ago, the American project began in FIRE's birthplace of Philadelphia.

In a boarding house at Market and South 7th Streets, Thomas Jefferson drafted a document that would usher in a new nation and a new era. In the short term, the Declaration of Independence added fury to an already brewing revolution. But it also ignited an endeavor that continues to this day, and which remains just as revolutionary now as it was then: the pursuit and preservation of liberty.

Of course, people have been fighting for freedom since time immemorial. But what makes America unique is that this struggle was enshrined in its founding. The bedrock of our country wasn't blood and soil, but the ideas and ideals — chief among them being the freedom to speak, to hear, and to engage in the open exchange of ideas — that make democracy possible.

This is why Philadelphia is neither a surprising nor a coincidental birthplace for these American principles. William Penn strove for religious toleration and liberty of conscience as fundamental tenets of his newfound colony of Pennsylvania. In the years leading up to the Declaration, Philadelphia became a center of colonial pamphleteering, newspapers, and political debate, renowned as the "Cradle of Liberty."

It was home to Benjamin Franklin, who wrote that "freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government." It was home to the defense attorney Andrew Hamilton, who would be instrumental in the establishment of truth as a defense against claims of libel. And it was where Thomas Paine published his legendary pamphlet *Common Sense*, which called for the American colonies to not only separate from Britain but to construct a government

based on the natural rights that all people possess, no matter the station of their birth.

These influences and many others were in the air when Jefferson put pen to parchment in 1776.

The First Amendment was ratified in 1791, guaranteeing that Congress shall make no law abridging our freedom to speak, publish, assemble, worship, and petition the government. But as anyone with a passing knowledge of our history knows, the fight was far from over then.

In fact, it was only just beginning — and Philadelphia was ground zero for much of it.

It is where the hellishly censorial Alien and Sedition Acts were passed in 1798. It was where Pennsylvania Hall, built by abolitionists and suffragists as a "temple of free discussion," was burned to the ground in an act of violent suppression. It was where labor organizer and activist Emma Goldman had her lectures and demonstrations shut down by police under orders from the Director of Public Safety.

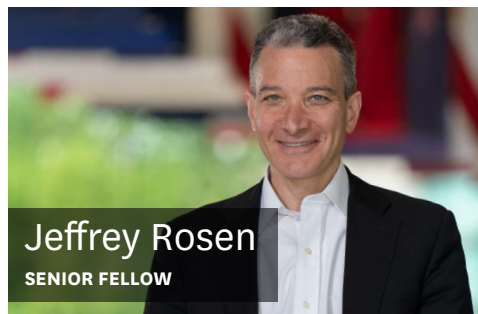
These incidents and many others highlight how tumultuous our struggle to defend and live up to our founding ideals has been, and continues to be. It also underscores the importance of having individuals and organizations who are willing to protect and promote those ideals.

A quarter century ago, FIRE's project began in America's birthplace of Philadelphia. Its mission is to ensure that our courts, campuses, and broader culture live up to America's promise. To guarantee that everyone on American soil enjoys the inalienable right to free expression enshrined in our founding documents. To fight for and defend these ideals when it is most difficult and altogether thankless — because that's what the principle demands, and what freedom entails.

We're proud to join the revolutionary struggle that is core to our country's founding and all humanity's dignity. It remains revolutionary two and a half centuries later, and will undoubtedly stay revolutionary forever. *-Angel Eduardo*

WELCOME TO FIRE!

A slate of new directors, advisors, and senior fellows join FIRE's ranks

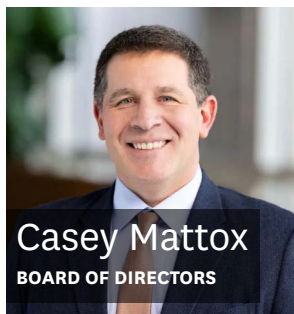


Best-selling author Jeffrey Rosen, one of America's foremost historians and legal analysts, has joined FIRE as a senior fellow — and launched a new podcast under FIRE's stewardship.

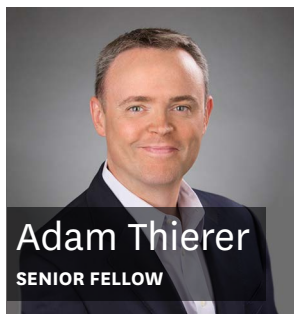
The Blessings of Liberty: Conversations on the Constitution, History, and the American Idea, brings together authors, historians, legal scholars, judges, journalists, and public intellectuals from across the political spectrum for thoughtful conversations about the constitutional and historical questions at the center of American life.

Rosen also will serve as a moderator for at least one session of FIRE's Soapbox, our inaugural free speech conference, which will be held in Philadelphia from November 4-6, 2026. The conference will celebrate the nation's 250th birthday in true American fashion through free expression, fearless debate, and civil dialogue.

Check out *Blessings of Liberty* wherever you get your podcasts, and enjoy Rosen's conversations with distinguished guests like Justice Neil Gorsuch, Justice Stephen Breyer, Ken Burns, and others.



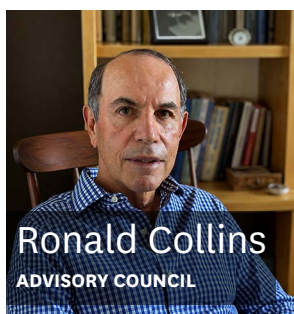
Casey Mattox leads efforts to promote the rule of law as vice president of legal strategy at Stand Together. He has spent his career in litigation and legal leadership roles focused on defending the rights of students, faculty, families, and many more.



For more than three decades, Adam Thierer has examined the policy implications of the digital revolution. He has written extensively on issues ranging from internet governance and media regulation to online child safety and federalism.



Rich Thau has become a leading voice in political communication and public opinion research. As president of the public policy consulting firm Engagious, his work bridges the worlds of advocacy, media, and electoral politics.



Retired law professor and First Amendment scholar Ron Collins' free speech bona fides run the gamut. He taught at the University of Washington School of Law and served as a Supreme Court fellow under Chief Justice Warren Burger.



Since retiring from the Cato Institute in 2024, economist Sallie James has devoted her time to advising non-profit groups and volunteering in her local community. James has made it her mission to support various non-profits working to promote freedom, civil society, and opportunity in education.



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

AMERICO CASCELLA

It is difficult to objectively distill what makes a society prosperous, successful, and peaceful, but perhaps the most obvious and common cornerstone is the right to free expression. I am grateful that our nation has enshrined free speech as a basic and fundamental tenet within its founding documents, even as it is presently challenged by efforts from multiple sides of the political spectrum.

Now, more than ever, we must defend and prioritize an individual's right of expression both in law and across the public sphere. I believe the litmus test of free speech protection is not whether we advocate for those with whom we agree, but rather whether we each stand up for the right of those with whom we disagree to speak, and especially so when their views are unorthodox, unpopular, or even offensive.

Only then can every one of us be certain of our own right to reason, to think, and to express our thoughts freely.

FIRE understands this with extraordinary clarity, and has deliberately designed its organization and operations to achieve targeted, direct, and tremendous effect in service of free speech. For a supporter like me, it delivers the best bang for the buck. Its mission and advocacy are nonpartisan, and its clients are represented without FIRE engaging in undue judgment as to the content of their expression. In doing so, it has established elevated credibility and unassailable moral authority.

As a vanguard for individual liberty, FIRE is the most American of institutions, and one of the most impactful civil rights organizations of our time. For me it has been, and continues to be, a privilege to support their essential and tireless efforts.

Americo Cascella is a private investor based in Dallas, Texas.



We are thankful for Americo's support as a member of FIRE's Ember Club. The Ember Club is a distinguished group of our closest allies and investors who contribute \$2,500 or more each year. We keep members informed and connected to the impact of their generosity through personal updates, event invitations, meetings with FIRE staff, and more.

To join the Ember Club or learn more, contact **Ashley Adams** at ashley@fire.org or **215-717-3473**.



P.O. Box 40128
Philadelphia, PA 19106
T: 215.717.3473
www.fire.org



@thefireorg

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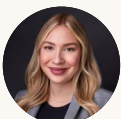
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Educating the next free speech generation

In late June, nearly 200 high school students gathered on American University's campus in Washington, D.C., for the Free Speech Forum, FIRE's week-long summer camp.

Students heard from an array of free speech luminaries, including musician Daryl Davis, FIRE Legal Director Will Creeley, former ACLU President Nadine Strossen, the National Coalition Against Censorship's Executive Director Lee Rowland, and FIRE staff like Nico Perrino, Ronnie London, Bob Corn-Revere, and President Greg Lukianoff. They also visited the Capitol, the Library of Congress, and the Lincoln Memorial, and created collages that will help inspire a Philadelphia mural project.

Students closed out the forum by sharing their advocacy campaign ideas, which were designed to help others understand the importance of free speech and how to defend it in their schools and communities when they returned home. We couldn't be prouder of this new generation of free speech advocates! -Molly Nocheck

Join FIRE's Monthly Member Calls!



FIRE's Monthly Member Calls allow supporters like you to connect with FIRE leadership, ask about current events and important free speech topics, and keep up with the latest FIRE cases.

↪ register for the next call!