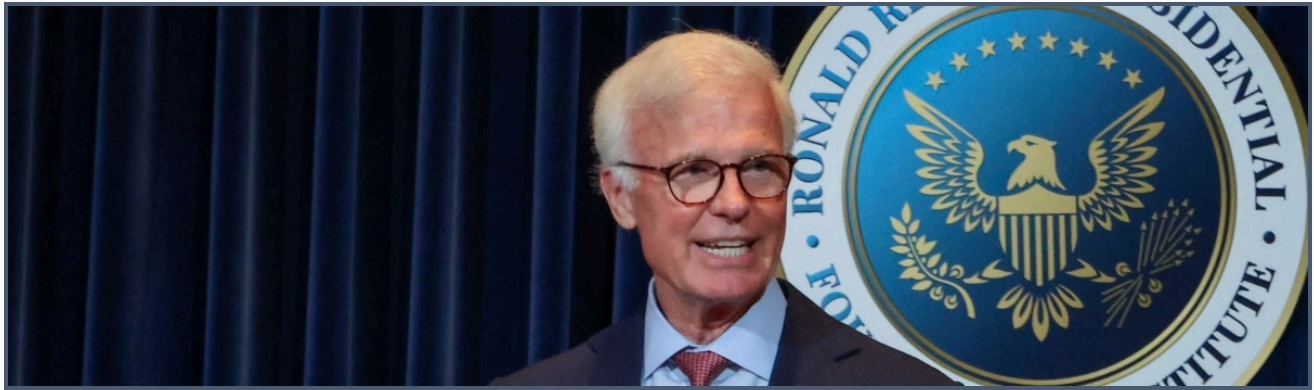


RONALD REAGAN CENTER ON CIVILITY AND DEMOCRACY

Autumn 2025 Newsletter



► A MESSAGE FROM FRED RYAN

Restoring Civility in the Digital Age

Since its inception, social media has profoundly reshaped American civic life. Platforms have opened new channels for civic participation, giving every citizen the ability to speak, organize and connect with people with similar interests. Yet the same tools that promised to bring us together have evolved to now more often divide us or drive us apart.

Algorithms structured to boost advertising revenue and time spent on social media platforms now reward outrage over conversation, promoting misinformation and content that provokes rather than informs us. In place of shared public dialogue, we find echo chambers that amplify our biases and erode common ground. What could be a digital town square increasingly resembles a series of closed rooms, each reinforcing its own distinct version of reality. Fortunately, Americans recognize this shift. According to CCD's 2025 [Survey on Civility and Democracy](#), 67% of Americans consider social media to be a toxic environment for civil dialogue, ranking it more toxic than news media and the U.S. Congress.

The consequences are now felt as much in the real world as they are online. When citizens lose trust in one another—and in the institutions that hold us together—our democracy grows fragile. Reversing these trends of polarization and resentment will take a renewal of personal and civic responsibility from each and every American, as well as our business and

political leaders.

Social media companies must shift their business model to rank truth above engagement metrics and advertising revenue. Parents and educators must help young people navigate digital life with restraint and wisdom. And all of us, as citizens, must model the discipline of civil discourse: questioning and verifying before sharing, granting respect to everyone and treating disagreement as a way to learn more and build coalitions rather than just score points against the other side. These platforms learn from our behavior, so they will change only when we do.

At its best, technology can strengthen the bonds of citizenship, bringing together Americans from thousands of miles apart. The task before us is to use it that way—intentionally, responsibly and with civility.



► GUEST CONTRIBUTOR GOVERNOR GLENN YOUNGKIN

Virginia Shows the Way: Protecting Kids Through Cell Phone-Free Schools and Smarter Social Media Limits

While social media is a powerful tool that can bridge distances, provide ways to highlight important causes, and give users helpful information, we've seen that it can also sow disconnection between neighbors, usurp parents' influence over their kids and create pathways for addictive behaviors. For children, especially adolescent youth, who are experiencing rapid brain development and developing their sense of identity and belonging, the data clearly show that the omnipresence of social media and its addictive algorithms make it dangerous for our kids. The imports are stark: significant increases in mental health disorders and discipline issues at school, and substantial declines in academic performance.

Elected leaders should be empowering and supporting parents and teachers through

thoughtful executive action and legislation, so that parents can set appropriate boundaries and teachers can enforce responsible school policies. It is this very partnership that has the power to dramatically improve the mental health and academic future of children across America.

Too many young people are spending the most formative years of their lives lonely and depressed. [U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) data from 2019-2021 reported that the rate of suicide has increased 167% since 2010 for girls and 91% since 2010 for boys. In the [same timeframe](#), boys and girls experienced a spike in depression of 161% and 145%, respectively. Scholars have explored the link between these troubling developments and the sky-high rates of social media usage among our youth. Today, teens [spend](#) an average of nearly 5 hours per day on social media.

This isn't a partisan issue, but rather a shared societal concern and I have been pleased with the collaboration with leading technology firms. The damage done by unfettered access to social media hurts our children, impacting their personalities and development, their physical and mental health, and their education, and will continue to, if left unchallenged.

Our children need help escaping the grip of social media. Parents have a fundamental right and responsibility, codified in Virginia law, to be in control of their child's upbringing, education and care. During my campaign, and throughout my term as Governor, I've sought out parent voices across Virginia and I heard the same message again and again: parents often feel alone, pressured to give in to the convenience of screens, and want help going up against the addictive algorithms of some social media.

In 2024, I signed [Executive Order 33](#) to establish "bell-to-bell" cell phone-free education in Virginia. This order added a necessary new element to our expectations of academic excellence and provided a roadmap for all 132 school divisions in Virginia to adopt this policy by the following Spring. In 2025, with divided government, we rallied a bipartisan majority in Virginia's General Assembly to adopt legislation that banned cellphone use "bell-to-bell" during school hours for all elementary and secondary school students. School should be a place of learning, socializing and human interaction free from the distractions of social media. As good teachers have always known, a vibrant, healthy, and innovative classroom environment depends on students' ability to focus and form genuine connections with their teachers and peers.

[READ GOVERNOR YOUNGKIN'S FULL COLUMN HERE](#)



► MARK YOUR CALENDAR

⚽ Dec 2nd 4:30PM – A Common Ground Forum: *Three Nations, One Game*

Are you ready for some fútbol? Well, soccer that is...In 2026, the USA, Canada and Mexico are hosting the largest sporting event in history: the FIFA Men's World Cup 26™. Come watch and join the likes of White House Task Force Director Andrew Giuliani, U.S. soccer legend Cobi Jones and several others as they explore how competition can coexist with respect, and how co-hosting the World Cup can foster civility across borders.

[Attend Virtually ►](#)

🗣️ Jan 9-11th – Ronald Reagan Oratory Competition

Do you know the next great communicator? We are gathering the nation's best young orators to compete for a \$1,000 grand prize and the title of the country's next great communicator.

[Competition Closes on Dec 1st ►](#)

🏆 Event with Medal of Honor Recipients

Join the Reagan Foundation and the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for a leadership forum celebrating the extraordinary leadership qualities exemplified by Medal of Honor recipients. These revered individuals extend their military valor to impart invaluable insights on leadership, effective communication, patriotism, and integrity. The event remains free for school groups with one adult chaperone per 15 students!

[Register Here ►](#)



► RECENT HIGHLIGHTS

Real Clear Politics Podcast

Real Clear Civility. Watch Fred Ryan season the news of the day with the timeless principles of civility. The panel discusses the main drivers of our growing incivility and what the Center on Civility and Democracy is doing about it.

[Watch Here ►](#)

Op-Ed Alert - "Bring Back Civility, Decorum, Character to Colleges"

The Founding Fathers knew the purpose of education: fostering critical thinkers and virtuous citizens. In The Center Square, we detail how higher education can and why it must recommit to its original mission.

[Read It Now ►](#)

A Special Relationship of Civility

In October, the Center honored the cross-Atlantic partnership between President Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by joining in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Iron Lady's birth. Leadership traveled to London for a series of events that reminded citizens of both countries of the special relationship between their nations and the lessons in civility and strength that their cooperation holds for them today.

[Read About It Here►](#)

[Watch President Reagan Statue Rededication►](#)

The 8th Annual Reagan Institute Summit on Education (RISE)

In September, the Reagan Institute welcomed U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt, U.S. Senator Tim Kaine, and dozens of other leaders in education and policy. Watch their conversations reimagining education for America's future.

[Watch Here ►](#)

[Center for Humane Technology]



Boston Children's
Digital Wellness Lab



► FEATURED ORGANIZATIONS

“The attention economy doesn’t just want your attention — it wants to change your behavior, shape your decisions, and even manipulate your emotions. Social media platforms are designed to hijack your mind.”

– Tristan Harris (co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology)

Center for Humane Technology: Center for Humane Technology (CHT) is a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that today's most consequential technologies, such as AI and social media, serve humanity. Through policy and public education, CHT brings clarity to how the tech ecosystem works in order to shift the incentives that drive it.

[Visit Website ►](#)

The Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI): The Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) is an international nonprofit that works to make the online world safer for kids and their families. FOSI convenes leaders in industry, government and the nonprofit sectors to promote the “Three Ps” of a better internet: enlightened public policy, industry best practices and good digital parenting.

[Visit Website ►](#)

The Digital Wellness Lab: The Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School seeks to understand and promote positive and healthy digital media experiences for young people, from birth through young adulthood. The Lab conducts rigorous research and translates its findings into actionable guidance for clinicians, caregivers, and the digital media industry.

[Visit Website ►](#)

If you have ideas related to this newsletter, please share them with us.

[EMAIL US](#)



► TOP READING PICKS

“Every time you check your phone in company, what you gain is a hit of stimulation, a neurochemical shot, and what you lose is what a friend, teacher, parent, lover, or co-worker just said, meant, felt.”

– Professor Sherry Turkle

📖 **Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age:** In this prescient book, renowned media scholar Sherry Turkle investigates how a flight from conversation undermines our relationships, creativity, and productivity—and why reclaiming face-to-face conversation can help us regain lost ground.

[Get the Book ►](#)

📰 **Governor Cox: 'Social media is a cancer':** Reporting in Politico highlights recent comments by friend of the Center, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, who has called social media a “cancer” that played a direct role in the fatal shooting of conservative activist Charlie Kirk and other political figures over the last several years.

[Read Article ►](#)

📊 **Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier:** Pew Research Center survey of 19 advanced economies shows the United States is a clear outlier with much larger shares (+29 percentage points) of Americans seeing social media as divisive than our international counterparts.

[See The Data and Read The Report ►](#)

📱 **Schools That Banned Phones See Surprising Results:** As 20 states and territories now prohibit phones and tablets in schools, with exceptions for students with disabilities, ABC News reports on a new study suggesting that phone bans can improve students' focus and grades.

[Read Article ►](#)



Simple Ways to *Stop* the Spread of False Information



► USE SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSIBLY

🛑 Stop the Spread of False Information

Elon Musk has famously stated: “You are the media now”, so let’s be Walter Cronkite. Using this simple guide to being a responsible actor with information online is an easy way to do your part in keeping our information ecosystem healthy.

[Start Here](#)

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Promoting Constructive Solutions to Restore
and Renew American Democracy.

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