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2020 Progress Report



Paul Ryan

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Measuring Results
Expanding Opportunity
Improving Lives

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The “American Idea” has been a constant during Speaker Ryan’s decades of public service and to him, it has always meant that the condition of a person’s birth should not determine the outcome of a person’s life. Throughout his career in Congress, Speaker Ryan championed principles and policies that allowed more Americans to achieve their version of the American Dream. In the past year, through the work of the *American Idea Foundation (AIF)*, he has worked to ensure those laws are properly executed.

The mission of the American Idea Foundation is to expand the “American Idea” by fighting poverty, improving vocational and educational outcomes, reforming our criminal justice system, expanding economic opportunities, and deepening the federal government’s use of evidence and data to drive decision-making. AIF does this by identifying groups and organizations around the country that are putting these goals into action, and supports their efforts in the following ways:

1. The Foundation works with academic partners to ensure that these community-based groups’ efforts and successes are buttressed by data and empirical evidence.
2. It brings policymakers to these organizations and explains first-hand why these programs are working, what evidence validates their success, and how these solutions can be scaled and replicated in other parts of the country.
3. The Foundation utilizes Speaker Ryan’s public profile to shine a light on these programs and draw attention to solutions that have demonstrated records of working.

COVID-19 has required the Foundation to shift its original focus from in-person events to virtual forums and from convening site visits to highlighting local success stories through various writing and communications projects. Even with these unanticipated challenges, we are particularly excited about three projects, undertaken this year and which will continue into next year, that showcase how the Foundation can lend its unique voice to policy discussions.

1. Expanding the Utilization of Evidence-Based Public Policy-Making

The Foundation has made great strides in normalizing the use of evidence and data in policy-making and in encouraging researchers and public officials to look to successful models for insight on how to tackle complex problems. Speaker Ryan, in a dozen conversations hosted by the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, the University of Notre Dame, and other organizations, spoke to the importance of policymakers relying on facts, rather than partisan sound bites, to influence policy decisions.

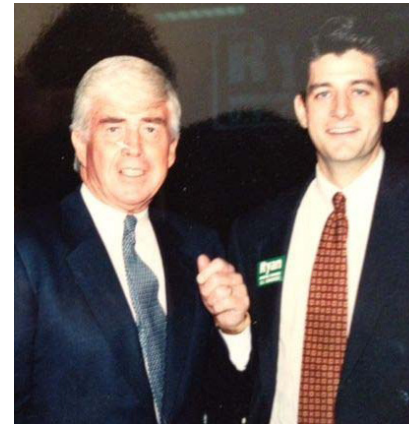
The Foundation examined programs like the Maternal, Infant, & Early Childhood Home Visitation Program, which provides individualized care to expecting or new mothers to improve health outcomes for families. This program is an example of a successful policy, rooted in evidence, that has provided practitioners with increasingly large amounts of data, which have shaped efforts year after year. Additionally, the Foundation jointly sponsored a panel with the American Enterprise Institute featuring academics, researchers, and advocates to discuss how federal agencies are implementing strategies to collect, safeguard, and share data across federal platforms.

A project that the Foundation is incredibly excited about is the creation of an “evidence-based clearinghouse.” This online platform will ultimately allow practitioners across the country to access and search through existing programs addressing specific policy issues – like recidivism, drug addiction, or vocational training – and learn from ongoing efforts. This will allow for better information sharing among practitioners and would address a need in the social services space, as current databases are cumbersome and ineffective. The clearinghouse will provide an easy-to-use, fully-functional platform so providers working on similar policy issues in different geographic areas can learn from one another. Working with partners like Project Evident, the Sorensen Impact Center, and others, the Foundation has been prioritizing the creation and funding of this platform in recent weeks.



2. Promoting Public Policies that Expand Opportunities for All Americans

The Foundation has used Speaker Ryan’s platform as a recent leader of the House of Representatives to lend a voice to the public policy challenges facing our nation.



2020 brought a long-overdue conversation about systemic racism and policing. The American Idea Foundation sent a letter to Attorney General William Barr encouraging the Department of Justice to utilize tools in the Evidence-Based Policymaking Act as federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies explore improving their policing strategies.

The Foundation also held a virtual panel discussion on reducing recidivism and creating second chances for citizens who were exiting the criminal justice system. The conversation featured an on-the-ground practitioner, Eddie Bocanegra of READI Chicago, which works to reduce gun violence in Chicago; a private sector leader, Heather Higginbottom of JP Morgan; and Cindy Spain of United Healthcare. Speaker Ryan led the conversation and discussed how the First Step Act, which passed in 2018 after years of collaborative, bipartisan discussions, could make a bigger impact if the private sector stepped up. The experts from JP Morgan and United Healthcare talked in detail about how their companies had developed specific platforms and models designed to give returning citizens, who had paid their debt to society

and atoned for their crimes, a chance at turning their lives around. Speaker Ryan also joined experts in penning the forward to a journal entitled, “Rethinking Reentry,” which detailed specific policies to address inequities in the criminal justice system. Whether discussing how to fight poverty as the keynote speaker to 1,000 mayors at the National League of Cities conference, or talking about how Jack Kemp labored to advance the concept of opportunity zones as a panelist at the Kemp Foundation Leadership dinner, the Foundation will continue to take advantage of opportunities to showcase policy accomplishments that make the American Idea more attainable.

3. Strategically Highlighting Inspiring, Local Success Stories

The Foundation was premised on Speaker Ryan’s belief that all answers are not found in Washington, DC. In fact, in his experience, very few answers are found in the halls of Congress! Rather, it is in our communities and on our Main Streets where the best innovations can be discovered and unearthed. To that end, the American Idea Foundation has continued to showcase examples of entities making a tangible difference in areas across the country. Among these bright lights are an Opportunity Zone in Erie, Pennsylvania which has community buy-in and is starting to revitalize parts of the city that had been rundown and distressed for generations; a faith-based organization, Beyond the Walls in Elyria, Ohio that is working to give food, shelter, and support to people of Ohio; or a “whole person” model that United Healthcare is utilizing to connect those on probation and parole with substance abuse treatment or mental health professionals to reduce the likelihood that individuals return to a life of crime. The Foundation is shining a bright light on these local success stories which not only provide hope during a time of cynicism, but also provide examples that policymakers can point to in working to solve issues like multi-generational poverty or substance abuse. The Foundation is working to bring academic researchers and policymakers to these organizations – whether in person or in a virtual format – so there can be a better exchange of ideas as future legislation is considered.

Without question, 2020 has brought unexpected and unprecedented health and economic challenges that have stressed the very fabric of our nation. When Speaker Ryan conceptualized the American Idea Foundation, he never imagined that our country would simultaneously be addressing a once-in-a-century pandemic, the most tumultuous economic period in generations, and conversations about racial inequalities and how to solve them. The Foundation has taken on these challenges, maintaining its focus on advancing policies that will help Americans reach their full potential, while also trying to make contributions to the debates of the day. As the Foundation begins its second year this October, we are excited to build on the progress that we have made and continue the projects that have started to show potential.

