The Center for Racial Equity and Justice
Repent – Reform – Refocus

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"No African Americans take to the streets in protest to demand Whites to love us more. We demand a behavior change!" Rev. George C. Gilbert, Jr.

September 2026 Newsletter

Local Clergy Gather to Honor Deon Kay and Give a Call to Action

The Washington Informer, Sam Plo Kwia Collins Jr.

*Clergy and activists gathered at the site of the 2020 Deon Kay police-involved shooting to announce the finalized settlement that Kay's family reached with D.C. Attorney General Brian Schwalb. (Sam Plo Kwia Collins Jr./The Washington Informer)*By Jeff Thomas | Black Source Media | Sunday, May 2026

On the evening of Aug. 18 — more than a week after what would've been Kay's 24th birthday — Ford and a group of local clergy gathered at Deon's Lot, the scene of the police-involved shooting that claimed his life.

That's where Ford, with the Kay family, activists, and community members within earshot, announced the finalization of the negotiations. It's also where religious leaders lamented what it took to get the six-figure amount.

"To have a servant of the community decide for himself that that was too much money awarded…has to feel like a second death all over again," said Rahim Jenkins of the National Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. "Justice delayed is justice denied, but in this instance, there's the process of mourning that has been delayed. No closure for this family, and then to be willing to negotiate a lesser fee based on no sound evidence that there were any improprieties is problematic in and of itself."

Jenkins stood in a group that included: Nee Nee Taylor of Harriet's Wildest Dreams, Dr. Josephine Mourning of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Rev. George C. Gilbert Jr. of Holy Trinity United Baptist Church, Bishop Andre Gray of Agape Men's Fellowship, Steven Park of Little Lights Urban

Ministries, and the Rev. Anthony Radcliff of Embry African Methodist Episcopal Church.

For an hour, leaders of Christian and Islamic faiths took to a mic, tying Kay's death and Schwalb's appeal of the original judgment to conditions affecting residents in Black communities. For the Rev. Michael C. Bell of Peace Baptist Church in Northeast, the final judgment does not absolve the D.C. government of its responsibilities, nor does it deter community leaders from their mission.

"We will not dare sit idly by and allow you to haggle over the life of a young man who was taken from our community to devalue a young man whose future remained bright," Bell said. "Together we will give voice until, as it has already been said, that the justice stream will flow and righteousness like a mighty stream….This is not an event or a one-off. Justice is a lifetime pursuit, and we as the people of faith are committed to the sacred work of resistance."

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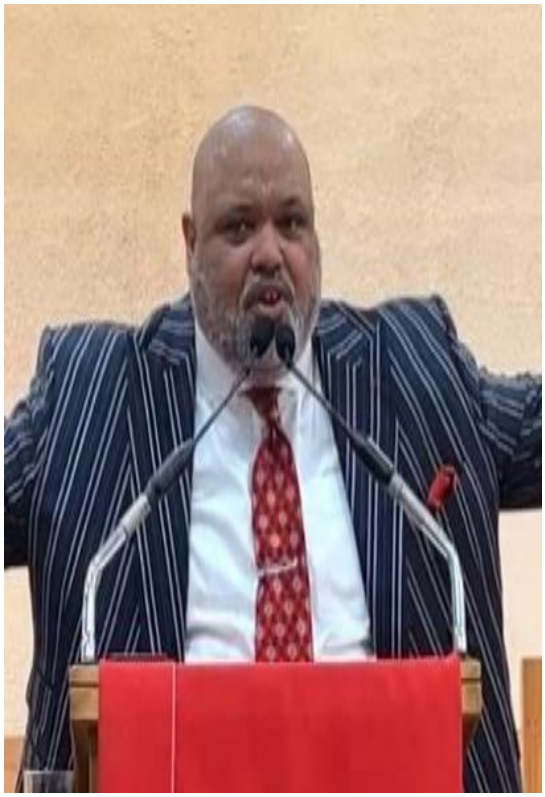

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NOTHING IS TOO SMALL!!!

What Else Is Going Back to School?

Israel Igualate

A new school year means new notebooks, new pencils, new lunchboxes, new clothes, and at least one new backpack that will disappear before October. It also means new state and federal policies — Bible readings, Ten Commandments displays, and federal school vouchers — affecting public education and religious exercise for students and their teachers.

Here are some of those policies you should be aware of as the new school year kicks off.

Texas Commands the Posting of the Ten Commandments in Classrooms

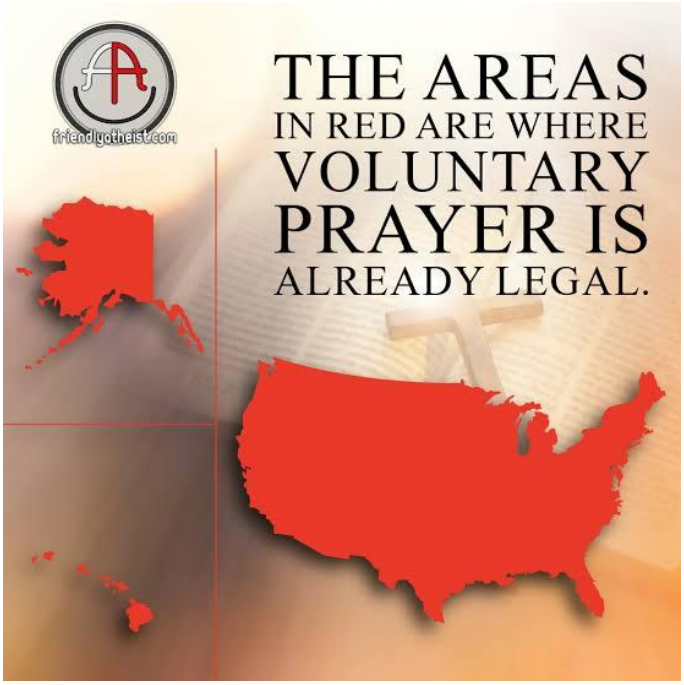
One of the most problematic policies to come out in the last few years is Senate Bill 10 in Texas – which requires every public school classroom, from kindergarten through 12th grade, to permanently display a state-selected Protestant version of the Ten Commandments. The bill, which was signed into law in June 2025, means that all students in classrooms displaying the Ten Commandments will be exposed to religious indoctrination, and those from other faith traditions will be excluded by design.

In April, after the law was challenged in court, the 5th Circuit allowed the displays to go up. Now, more than two dozen Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Baha'i, Unitarian Universalist and nonreligious families across 22 school districts are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to hear their challenge to the law.

Head to BJC's Texas Educators Resource Hub for an explanation on the mandate, fact sheets, talking points, a sample letter to parents, and a recorded webinar.

State-Organized Prayer in Texas Schools

Then there is Senate Bill 11, which required every Texas school district to vote on whether to create periods of state-organized prayer and religious study during the school day.



Parents, students, teachers, clergy and community leaders showed up and made the case against the law, and thanks to that work, nearly all of the state's approximately 1,200 school districts rejected it. Many districts instead adopted an alternative resolution recognizing the religious freedoms students already have.

If your child is in one of the school districts who adopted the state-organized prayer law, head to the state-organized prayer resource hub for fact sheets, talking points, training, and the school board resolution used during the initial effort to defeat this law.

Texas Changes its Curriculum and Forces Students to Read the Bible

Starting in 2030, Texas kindergartners are about to learn the Bible from the state of Texas — whether they're Christian or not and whether their parents want it or not.

This past June, the Texas State Board of Education approved a reading list that assigns biblical passages to students from kindergarten through high school. The reading list, which gives preference to one religious tradition over all others, was compiled without meaningful input from parents and educators, and instead relied on feedback from nine unelected political appointees or content advisors.

Texans didn't stay quiet, however; they raised their concerns through public testimony, a multifaith clergy letter, and direct engagement with the State Board itself. It'll be four years until the new

reading list takes effect, so there is still time to safeguard religious freedom, including through legislative activity next spring. Visit our SBOE page to keep up to date and get involved.

Gov. Pritzker's Big Beautiful Opportunity to Safeguard Public Education and the Separation of Church and State

Finally, in the state of Illinois, Gov. JB Pritzker has a decision that will determine whether Illinois taxpayers will fund private, religious education.

President Trump's Big Beautiful Bill created a new federal tax-credit voucher program that subsidizes private education, including religious education, that allows states to opt in.

Clergy members have signed letters urging Gov. JB Pritzker to keep Illinois out of the program. Residents are contacting their state senators in support of SB 3966, which would prevent the state from opting in. And a growing statewide coalition is organizing around that decision.

VOTE!

Trump threw 'tantrum' during Kennedy Center meeting, congresswoman says

Joey Garrison

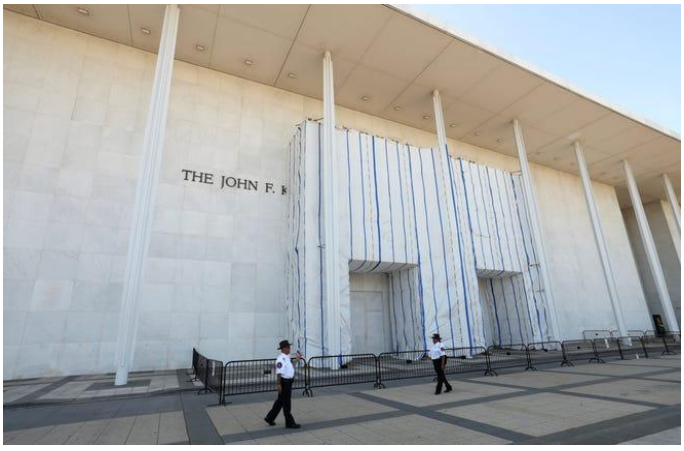
President Donald Trump threw a "tantrum" during a Kennedy Center board meeting when he learned that a federal judge blocked his administration's latest effort to put his name on the institution's building, according to a Democratic congresswoman who serves on the board. Rep. Joyce Beatty, D-Ohio, the lead plaintiff who the judge sided with in his ruling, recounted the heated Sept. 15 meeting in an appearance on MS NOW. She said the meeting, conducted on Zoom, opened with an update: in the case of Beaty v. Trump, "Beatty had been victorious."

"And he went into a tantrum," Beatty said. "I mean, let me just make it simple. It was the most unprofessional thing that I've ever witnessed or been a part of. He went into name-calling, everything from trying to say that I was an obstructionist, I was dumb. He said, 'I think you're incompetent.' And I said, 'I know you're incompetent.'"

Trump was in attendance as the board's chairman after appointing himself to the role weeks into his second White House term. As the president aired his frustrations to her, Beatty said she asked the president, "'Are we really going to do this? This is really unprofessional.' But I was not going to let him call me awful things. And he said he was going to hold me responsible if something fell out of the ceiling (of the Kennedy Center) and killed someone." And I told him, I said, 'You're already killing people. We're at war. We also have people who are starving,'" the congresswoman added.

The board, composed mostly of Trump loyalists handpicked by the president, voted at the meeting to close the bulk of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts immediately for renovations pushed by Trump. Kennedy Center officials aligned with Trump say the building has fallen into disrepair, posing safety hazards to people attending shows. Officials have also warned about severe financial troubles and potential

bankruptcy unless Trump's financial pledge and planned overhaul becomes a reality. But Trump, in a social media post after the meeting, warned that he won't move forward with the renovations – which he would pay for with his own money – unless the judge's decision blocking his name from being attached to the building is overturned. The Justice Department has appealed the decision. "If the ruling is a negative one, which it should not be, and is not overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, the Reconstruction and the Renovation of The Kennedy Center will not take place," Trump said.



When asked to respond to Beatty's claims about the board meeting, the White House did not deny the congresswoman's account.

“For decades, Democrats let the Kennedy Center rot as water damage spread, infrastructure crumbled, and a national treasure fell apart under their watch," White House spokeswoman Liz Huston said. "President Trump did what Democrats wouldn’t by finally committing the resources and the leadership needed to restore the Kennedy Center and make it the finest performing arts facility in the world." Recounting the board meeting, Beatty said Trump touted his career as a developer and told her that she had "never done anything. So I reminded him that he had more bankruptcies than anybody in the room," Beatty said. "I mean, it really went there, because I was not going to let him – he was there in his role as chairman of the board – bully me, intimidate me, and the facts for themselves." Beatty added: "He didn't win. He didn't get his vanity project. He didn't get his name on it for the second time, so now he's attacking folks."

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The March on Washington Starts in the Pews

by Jada Ingleton

With thousands expected at Lincoln Memorial on Friday, a fight for democracy is poised to take over the very grounds where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once shared his dream with America.

Led by the National Action Network (NAN) and Drum Major Institute, the 2026 March on Washington: Defend the Vote stands to emulate the mission of 63 years ago, when a quarter of a million people charged the National Mall to repurpose a nation.

More than an anniversary, conveners march for a future where freedom's no longer a ballot issue; and much like in 1963, the call is on faith leaders to show up and show out.

"On Friday, Aug. 28, 2026, we return to the Lincoln Memorial to defend the vote, protect equal opportunity, and demand economic dignity for our people," said the Rev. Dr. W. Franklyn Richardson, chair of the NAN Board of Directors. "In every season of struggle, from the abolition movement to the marches of the 1960s, it was the people of faith who turned belief into action and filled the streets with hope. We are called again."

Thousands are set to return to the Lincoln Memorial for the 63rd anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on Friday, Aug. 28. (Shedrick Pelt/The Washington Informer)

In partnership with Martin Luther King III and his wife, Arndrea Waters King — leaders of the Drum Major Institute — the Rev. Al Sharpton, founder of the National Action Network, is convening laborers, clergy, youth organizers, and community leaders for a profound movement rooted in remembrance and action-forward.

What Sharpton calls “a bullet in the heart of the voting rights movement,” the renewed demonstration comes amid urgent threats to voting rights, affordability for everyday people, and equal opportunity at the hands of regressive legislation, including the Supreme Court’s recent decision to gut Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

“We stand on the same ground because the work is not finished. The right to vote, the very foundation of our power, is being chipped away in statehouse after statehouse,” read the faith leader’s press statement. “When the vote is weakened, every other right grows fragile with it. That is why we march. That is what we mean when we say Defend the Vote.”

Aug. 28, 1963, came with a 10-point list of demands that spanned fair wages and workforce treatment, comprehensive civil rights legislation, desegregation, equity, and more, some of which are not far from the three-pronged cause driving Friday’s demonstration.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, civil rights leader and founder of the National Action Network, is calling all faith leaders, civil rights activists, and impacted families to Lincoln Memorial on Aug. 28 for the 2026 March on Washington: Defend the Vote. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)

Coupled with GOP-led suppression tactics like the Safeguard Voter Eligibility Act (SAVE) and efforts to minimize African American representation in Congress, Sharpton says the reality is King’s dream was not an admirable memory; it was “an assignment to complete.”

“I am asking you to be a part of history. Not a witness to it. A part of it,” read the faith leader’s plea. “The men and women who marched in 1963 were not waiting for a better moment. They made the moment. They walked into the heart of the nation and told the truth about freedom, about justice, and about the promise this country still owes its people.”

During the Civil Rights era, Black churches proved to be the backbone of civic engagement, often serving as meeting points for rallies, shelter, planning and training from pulpit to protest for many movement leaders. Not to mention, some of the most prominent names in social justice were faith leaders as much as civic activists — or just passionate 20-somethings unafraid “to do the daggone thing,” said Community of Hope A.M.E. lead pastor, the Rev. Tony Lee.

“They just saw there was a need in the world, and they went for it,” Lee told The Informer before reflecting on the value of living traditions. “I think it’s important for us to let younger generations have a good sense of history and understand, in some ways, they don’t have to wait their turn. They just need to snatch the platform, snatch their moment, and move.”

For him, that looks like collaborations with trusted advisor and public policy strategist, the Rev. Dr Barbara Williams-Skinner, to tackle election protection ahead of the November midterms, including serving as a Virginia coordinator for Poll Chaplain/Peacekeepers Training.

Additionally, Lee beamed as one of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church pastors taking part in the Rev. Harry L. Seawright’s voter campaign for the Second Episcopal District.

As for where he’d like to see more from the church, the faith leader cited utilizing digital platforms to campaign on a large scale, along with underscoring the impact of mobilizations like the 2026 March on Washington, which he told The Informer back in July he plans to attend.

Other than that, the role of the Black Church is what it has always been: “to be relevant and right in the middle of it all.”

“Elections have consequences,” Lee continued, “and it’s our job as faith communities and as pastors to help make sure that our communities are better.”

Some of Friday’s participating partners includes organizations with local headquarters, such as the: American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP), the Faith in Action National Network and its political advocacy arm Faith in Action Fund, plus

the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which is headquartered in Baltimore.

Additionally, the Working Families Party, National Urban League (NUL), Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., People Power United, Vote.org, and multiple houses of worship, to name a few, have confirmed participation, along with guest speakers Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-Vt.) and New York House Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D) — all rallied for Washington to "hear a voice that cannot be ignored," Sharpton said.

Meanwhile, NAN Chairman Richardson's one charge to faith leaders across the nation is to march with the spirit of the Black Church, what he considers the "conscience of America."

"I am asking every house of worship to make this a moment of witness. Announce it from your pulpit. ... Bring your congregation. Stand with us on that sacred ground," Richardson stated. "The same God who carried our ancestors will go before us still. Let us march together, and let the church rise once more."

The Center for Racial Equity and Justice (CREJ) is proud to announce a strategic partnership with renowned civil rights attorney Jordan Howlett to expand legal advocacy and accelerate systemic reform in civil rights cases.

Strengthening the Fight for Systemic Justice

This milestone partnership unites CREJ's robust community resources and systemic research with Attorney Jordan Howlett's elite legal expertise. Together, the organization and legal team will co-counsel high-impact civil rights cases, focusing heavily on racial discrimination, police accountability, housing equity, and voting rights protection.

By combining grassroots advocacy with courtroom litigation, the collaboration aims to provide comprehensive legal representation to marginalized communities while pushing for broader legislative changes.

Core Objectives of the Partnership

- **Strategic Litigation**: Co-counseling federal and state civil rights cases to challenge systemic bias and discriminatory practices.
- Community Legal Clinics: Launching a series of free legal clinics to offer direct consultation, know-your-rights education, and resource mapping for communities facing systemic roadblocks.

- Policy Advocacy: Leveraging data and courtroom insights to draft and champion policy reforms at local, state, and federal levels.A

Shared Vision for Lasting Change"

We are entering an era that demands both immediate legal defense and long-term systemic offense," said the Executive Director of the Center for Racial Equity and Justice. "Partnering with Attorney Jordan Howlett allows us to bridge the gap between community pain and judicial accountability. His proven track record and relentless dedication to justice make him the ideal partner to amplify our mission."

Attorney Jordan Howlett expressed equal enthusiasm for the collaborative work ahead. "True justice requires more than winning cases; it requires dismantling the structures that create victims in the first place. This partnership with CREJ ensures that our legal battles are deeply rooted in, and supported by, the very communities we fight for."

About Jordan Howlett, Esq.Jordan Howlett is a leading civil rights attorney recognized for his high-profile advocacy in racial discrimination, police misconduct, and constitutional law. His practice is dedicated to securing accountability and protecting civil liberties across the nation.

The Presidency Is a Job, Not a Branding Opportunity

By Rev. George C. Gilbert, Jr.

There is something troubling happening in Washington that goes beyond partisan politics. It raises a larger question about leadership, public service, and the meaning of the presidency itself. President Donald Trump has spent much of his public life building a brand around his own name. Long before entering politics, the Trump name appeared on hotels, residential towers, casinos, golf courses, merchandise, and other business ventures. That practice is unsurprising in private business: branding is part of selling a product. But the presidency is not a private business, and the United States government is not a corporation owned by the person temporarily occupying the Oval Office.

During Trump's second term, his name and likeness have increasingly become intertwined with public institutions and government initiatives. Reporting has documented efforts involving the Kennedy Center, the U.S. Institute

of Peace and other federal institutions and programs. The controversy surrounding the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts provides perhaps the clearest example. The Kennedy Center was established by Congress as a living memorial to President John F. Kennedy. In 2025, its Trump-aligned board voted to add Trump's name to the institution. A federal judge later ruled that the board lacked authority to rename the center without congressional authorization, and Trump's name was removed from the building in June 2026. Yet the matter did not end there.

In August, the board voted again for physical recognition of Trump on the building, including an inscription crediting him with its restoration and renovation. This week, the board voted to close the Kennedy Center for renovations after another court order blocked restoration of Trump's name to the facade. Trump and his allies say the building requires extensive repairs and that recognition is warranted for his role in securing its future; opponents have challenged both the legality of the naming efforts and the way the institution has been governed.

Those facts raise a legitimate question: At what point does presidential legacy-building begin competing with presidential governing?

The President's Name Is Not the People's Name

The presidency belongs to the American people.

The White House belongs to the American people.

Federal institutions belong to the American people.

Our museums, memorials and cultural institutions form part of a national inheritance that existed before any current president and, ideally, will remain long after that president has left office. Presidents certainly shape history. Some eventually have libraries, highways, schools, airports and monuments named in their honor. But historically, much of that recognition comes through decisions made by Congress, state and local governments, universities, private organizations or later generations.

There is an important distinction between history remembering a president and a sitting president participating in the construction of his own memorialization.

That distinction matters because public office requires stewardship.

A president is not elected primarily to make certain that America remembers his name.

A president is elected to do the work.

Americans Need Results More Than Names on Buildings

For millions of Americans, the central questions of government are intensely practical.

- Can I afford groceries?
- Can I afford housing?
- Can my family obtain quality healthcare?
- Will my Social Security and Medicare remain secure?
- Can my children receive a quality education?
- Can working people earn enough to support their families?
- Can our communities be safe without sacrificing justice?
- Will government protect constitutional rights and the rule of law?
- Will America address poverty, homelessness, violence and economic inequality?

These are presidential questions.

Whatever one's political affiliation, those are among the standards by which citizens can examine an administration. The debate should therefore remain centered on measurable outcomes: laws enacted, policies implemented, costs, economic conditions, public safety, international affairs, constitutional governance and the effects of federal decisions on people's lives.

A name on a building cannot substitute for those results.

Leadership Is Service, Not Ownership.

There is also a deeper moral issue here.

Public leadership should never confuse stewardship with ownership.

A president receives extraordinary authority, but that authority is temporary. The Constitution does not give the president ownership of the nation. It entrusts an individual with executive power for a limited period within a system of checks and balances. That distinction is especially important for people of faith.

Jesus offered a radically different understanding of leadership: “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." — Matthew 20:27

Biblical leadership is not primarily concerned with getting one's name elevated. It is concerned with getting people's needs addressed. Jesus did not spend His ministry building monuments to Himself. He healed people. He fed hungry people. He touched people society had rejected. He confronted hypocrisy. He defended the marginalized. He taught truth. He served. The Christian understanding of greatness therefore presents a powerful question to every leader, regardless of party: How many people are better because you had power? That question matters more than how many buildings carry someone's name.

Let History Handle the Legacy

Every president naturally thinks about legacy. That is neither unusual nor inherently improper. Supporters of Trump argue that his approach to federal institutions reflects his background as a builder and businessman and that major restoration projects deserve recognition. Critics view the repeated use of his name and likeness across government as inappropriate personalization of public institutions. Citizens can examine the evidence and reach their own conclusions. But there is a principle worth protecting regardless of who occupies the White House:

- Presidents should concentrate on making history and allow history to decide how they are remembered.
- Abraham Lincoln did not build the Lincoln Memorial.
- George Washington did not construct the Washington Monument.
- Martin Luther King Jr. did not build his memorial on the National Mall.

Their names endure because later generations determined that their contributions deserved remembrance. There is something powerful about a legacy that does not have to be demanded.

America Does Not Need Another Brand. It Needs Leadership.

The danger of excessive personalization of government is larger than one president or one political party. If Americans become comfortable with presidents treating public institutions as extensions of their personal brands, that precedent can be inherited by whoever occupies the office next. That is why this issue should not merely be understood as "Trump versus his critics." It is about what Americans believe the presidency should be. The presidency should remain bigger than the president. Government should remain bigger than the politician. And public institutions should remain bigger than the individual temporarily entrusted with their stewardship.

America already knows Donald Trump's name.

The more important question is what the nation will ultimately say was accomplished while he held its highest office. Because eventually the signs come down. Administrations end. Political power changes hands. Buildings are renovated again. And history asks a much more demanding question than "Was your name on it?"

History asks:

"What did you do with the power you were given?"

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