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For those of you who are able to attend the January 17, 2019 Kirby Alliance meeting at Morris Museum, we will be hearing from Dr. Arthur Brooks, President of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), regarding his insights to earned success and living “a start-up life.” Prior to the event next month, we thought it advantageous to provide for you a brief overview of AEI’s origin, current work, and transformation under Arthur Brooks’ leadership. As I researched for this month’s spotlight, I was struck by the timeliness of AEI’s work, as one of its key missions is to welcome civil disagreement, as a competition of ideas is essential to a free society. In a time of deep division in our country and abroad, it can often be encouraging to read of those offering opportunities to engage with those who hold different points of view.

Headquartered today in Washington D.C. with some of the strongest connections to Capitol Hill in the field, AEI is one of the oldest think tanks in the United States. It grew out of the American Enterprise Association (AEA), which was founded in 1938 by a group of New York businessmen, including executives from Bristol-Myers, Chemical Bank, Chrysler, and Paine Webber. AEI originally consisted of 12 resident thinkers who set up the institute to serve as an advocate for big business and the promotion of free enterprise. It became a major research organization and think tank in the 1970s, and today, AEI boasts nearly 200 scholars and support staff and an annual operating budget of \$55.8M.

AEI’s scholars focus on research across a variety of policy issues in three main research divisions: Domestic Policy Studies, Economic Policy Studies, and Foreign and Defense Policy Studies. The mission is to develop policy ideas backed by data analysis that will bring about a better understanding of “freedom, opportunity, and enterprise to more people in the United States and beyond.” Notably, since its founding, AEI has played a prominent role in politics in the United States (its influence grew even stronger during the administration of President George W. Bush, as Dick Cheney was a member of the Board) and several of its scholars have served in key government positions, most recently as FDA commissioner and assistant secretary of the Treasury for international finance. While there is a general public view of AEI as right-of-center, the organization describes itself as nonpartisan and, importantly, abstains from taking any institutional positions on policy issues (whether or not they are currently before legislative, executive, or judicial bodies); this markedly distinguishes AEI from other similar think tanks.

I would be remiss if I didn’t provide further color to the interesting character that is Arthur Brooks, President since January 2009. Before joining AEI, Dr. Brooks was a professor of economics and social entrepreneurship in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University for about ten years. Prior to his work in academia and public policy, he spent 12 years as a classical musician (a French hornist!) in both the United States and Spain. He is a bestselling author and a very active opinion writer for the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post.

Under Brooks' leadership, several new initiatives were developed, many of which represented a relatively dramatic shift for the Institute. Aside from overseeing a successful capital campaign and more than doubling annual resources, he spearheaded several relatively "cutting-edge" ventures for the organization that include the establishment of a communications system dedicated to expanding outreach "across the aisle," a presence on more than 100 college campuses, and new scholarly departments in areas such as poverty studies.

It is under this new department that much of the FMKF's recent support has been geared through two renowned initiatives: the Project on Human Flourishing (PHF) from 2013-2016 and the Human Dignity Project (HDP) from 2016-2017, so far. The PHF, which pairs well with the talk we'll be hearing next month, was a research and communications initiative steeped in the belief that that it is only through free enterprise that we can stimulate true prosperity and innovative thinking, as opposed to simply treating poverty. To achieve the successful dispensation of the philosophy that free enterprise is at the center of "cultural" policy even more so than "economic" policy, AEI established the aforementioned Poverty Studies Program with the goal of becoming the go-to source for conservative policy solutions, developed a best-selling book, *The Conservative Heart*, and featured high-profile events in an effort to reach broader audiences, including several talks at the National Constitution Center. This project's achievement led into the current Human Dignity Project, a multi-year effort based around the notion that all humans are assets to develop rather than liabilities to manage and will rely heavily on an expansion of AEI's education policy studies work.

Arthur announced his resignation this past March and will assume a joint position as Professor in the Practice of Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School and Senior Fellow at the Harvard Business School in the summer 2019, after just over a decade of leadership with AEI. (We are quite lucky to have snagged him for this talk, as he is in the midst of his "farewell tour" and publishing what is expected to be another best-selling book, *Love Your Enemies*.)

As we are all aware, it is unusual in today's political and cultural climate to embrace open debate, regardless of personal affiliation. Even further, for a think tank of this status to do so unencumbered by partisan considerations and special interests, in an effort to bring welfare and human dignity through economic practices into the mainstream conversation, is quite unique. This is the same approach to scholarship that AEI has taken since its founding and hopefully will continue to pursue in the years to come, beyond the transformative era of Arthur Brooks.

Prepared by Erin Clifford
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