

In Memoriam of Dr. Edwin J. Feulner

The Asan Institute for Policy Studies
July 20, 2025

The Asan Institute for Policy Studies today mourns the passing of Dr. Edwin J. Feulner, who passed away on July 18, 2025. Dr. Feulner was the founder, trustee, and longest-serving president of the Heritage Foundation. He left an indelible mark not only on the United States but was also a great friend of Korea. We extend our deepest condolences to his wife, Linda, and his family for their loss.

Dr. Feulner was one of America's most influential thought leaders and an icon of the conservative political movement. Dr. Feulner was a good friend of the late Honorary Chairman Chung Ju-yung, the founder of the Hyundai group. Until his passing, Dr. Feulner was the chair of the Asian Studies Center at Heritage where he was the Chung Ju-yung Fellow for Foreign Policy Studies. This was a position established to honor and celebrate the close friendship between Dr. Feulner and Honorary Chairman Chung.

Over many years, Dr. Feulner was also a dear friend and mentor to Dr. Chung Mong Joon, Founder and Honorary chairman of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

Dr. Feulner was a strong supporter of the Asan Institute since its establishment in 2008. He served as a member of its international advisory board and was a speaker at every major conference the Institute hosted. Dr. Feulner also fostered close institutional ties between the Asan Institute and the Heritage Foundation under his leadership.

Dr. Chung's relationship with Dr. Feulner long predates the establishment of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. They first met almost 40 years ago when Dr. Chung began his Ph.D. at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). While the Heritage Foundation was still in its early stages, primarily focused on U.S. domestic politics, Dr. Feulner was also interested in U.S. relations with Asia. He

had written widely about U.S. alliances with South Korea and Japan, and he argued that victory in the Cold War against the Soviet Union depended on a strong network of alliances.

Despite his busy schedule, Dr. Feulner was an enthusiastic supporter of Dr. Chung's Ph.D. candidature. He generously shared his knowledge and became an intellectual guide to American politics and U.S. foreign policy. After Dr. Chung's return to Korea, the two men kept in regular touch over the years. On Dr. Chung's visits to the United States, he would always see Dr. Feulner and seek his counsel.

Dr. Feulner's leadership of the Heritage Foundation was the gold standard for how to turn ideas into policy outcomes in what he called the "battle of ideas." He pioneered innovative approaches to research and advocacy that think tanks around the world continue to emulate. It was therefore fitting that the idea for a similar Korean think tank was first discussed between Dr. Feulner and Dr. Chung along with other distinguished experts during a meeting in Hawaii. While South Korea has dozens of government-affiliated think tanks, most lacked the independence of funding and leadership that could speak truth to power. Dr. Feulner's support and advice were crucial in what would eventually become the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

Dr. Feulner was one of America's most influential thought leaders. Dr. Feulner and his colleagues have shaped how every U.S. administration since President Ronald Reagan has engaged the world. On a trip to Washington in March 1987, Dr. Feulner secured an invitation for Dr. Chung and his father to visit the White House to meet with President Ronald Reagan. It was not only a testament to the high regard in which he and the Heritage Foundation are held by the U.S. government, but it also reflected Dr. Feulner's commitment to working with allies like South Korea. American leaders constantly try to balance demands to put American interests first with a commitment to work with U.S. allies and partners in upholding a free and open liberal international order.

In understanding the Heritage Foundation's mission, Dr. Feulner would remind us on his visits to Seoul that "America First does not mean America Only."

Dr. Feulner was an icon of the American conservative political movement. During Dr. Chung's time in the Korean National Assembly, they had many conversations about how to strengthen the Korea-U.S. alliance. But his contributions were also recognized on a bipartisan basis. In 2002, to celebrate 25 years of his leadership at the Heritage Foundation, then President Kim Dae-jung, a progressive, awarded Dr. Feulner the medal of the Order of Diplomatic Service Merit for his services to promoting bilateral ties. We hope that Koreans of all political orientations will reflect on his legacy and contributions to the Korea-U.S. relationship.

Dr. Edwin Feulner's passing marks the end of an era in U.S. politics and the Heritage Foundation, a think tank to which he gave so much. But his loss will also be felt by partners such as the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, which learned from his example and visionary leadership.

To quote from his last address to the Asan Institute in 2024, "The ROK-U.S. relationship is a time-tested alliance of ideas, individuals, and institutions. You are the concrete embodiment of that relationship as an institution and individuals that generate ideas to preserve and advance our highly functioning alliance." We will miss Dr. Feulner's wise counsel and friendship, which were the concrete embodiment of our Alliance.

Ed may now be gone, but he shall never be forgotten.

As he always ended his letters and speeches to us, Onward!