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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Congressman Donalds Inspires Freedom Institute Students During ‘American Dream Conversations at Freedom’

NAPLES, Fla. — Oct. 7, 2025 — The Freedom Institute of Collier County welcomed U.S. Congressman Byron Donalds for a candid and inspiring conversation as part of American Dream Conversations at Freedom, the school’s signature speaker series that brings influential leaders to campus to share stories of perseverance, character, and the pursuit of excellence.

Moderated by Tom Grady, Freedom Institute Board Chair and former Chairman of the State Board of Education, the discussion captivated students for more than two hours as Congressman Donalds shared personal experiences that reinforced the values of discipline, personal responsibility, and resilience.

Congressman Donalds, who represents Southwest Florida, recounted his journey from Brooklyn, New York, to becoming one of Florida’s most influential political figures. He spoke openly about the lessons he learned through hard work, and how a commitment to learning and faith in one’s purpose helped shape his path.

“Life is a series of choices... choose to be disciplined,” said Congressman Donalds. “Master the things you don’t want to do. That’s how you set yourself up for success.”

He credited a high-school stock-picking program with sparking his early interest in economics and personal finance, a lesson that resonated with students involved in the

Freedom Institute's student-managed investment fund. Donalds emphasized the power of compounding and saving, introducing students to foundational ideas like the Law of 72.

His story of transferring between Florida A&M University (FAMU) and Florida State University (FSU) underscored the importance of relationships, networking, and humility.

"It matters who you surround yourself with," he said. "When you offer to do something for someone, keep their best interest in mind, not yours. Give it your all, help them succeed, and they'll help you."

He recounted how this mindset led to real-life opportunities including a pivotal one with financial advisor Tom Moran, who offered him a job after seeing his genuine curiosity and willingness to learn.

"If I had gone to Tom asking for something, instead of asking for advice, it never would have happened," Donalds said. "Invest in others for the right reasons. Invest in their success, and they'll invest in you."

"Don't just look ahead, be planted," he told students. "Work hard for someone else's success, and in the process, you'll learn a lot about yourself."

Congressman Donalds also shared his hiring philosophy: he values trustworthiness, professionalism, and grit, qualities often developed through athletics or by working through college.

"If you didn't have to work in college," he said with a smile, "then you'd better have a 4.0 GPA."

"Congressman Donalds embodied the spirit of the American Dream that with discipline, service, and hard work, all of our kids can achieve greatness," said Chris Marker, CEO of the Freedom Institute. "These conversations are about helping our students understand that freedom is a uniquely American right and responsibility. Congressman Donalds reminded us that dreams in America come true when young people commit to living with purpose, character, and courage."

American Dream Conversations at Freedom has previously featured influential public leaders such as Governor Ron DeSantis and Senator Rick Scott, offering students firsthand insights into leadership and the principles that strengthen our nation and allow individual success. The next guest conversation will be with Parker Conrad, co-founder and CEO of Rippling, a company he founded in 2017 that today is worth almost \$20 billion. He will speak in January 2026.

About the Freedom Institute of Collier County

The Freedom Institute of Collier County is a private high school that meets students where they are and helps them thrive through customized learning pathways, hands-on experiences, and a focus on leadership, character, and purpose. The Institute's American Dream Conversations at Freedom series brings civic, business, and thought leaders directly to students to share lessons about life, liberty, and the pursuit of excellence.