



# News from THE RIPON SOCIETY

June 23, 2026

## SCALISE, HOUCHIN & OBERNOLTE HONORED WITH 2026 ROOSEVELT LEADERSHIP AWARDS

WASHINGTON, DC — At a dinner this past Friday evening at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, The Ripon Society presented three members of Congress with the 2026 Roosevelt Leadership Award, an honor that is given in the spirit of America's 26th President and is intended to recognize leaders who embody some of the same qualities that Theodore Roosevelt displayed throughout his life and career.

This year's honorees include House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (LA-01), U.S. Rep. Erin Houchin (IN-09), and U.S. Rep. Jay Obernolte (CA-23).

"The Roosevelt Leadership Award was established with one premise in mind," stated Ripon & Franklin President & CEO Jim Conzelman in remarks to kick-off the evening. "Namely, there is a lot of good, thoughtful work being done on Capitol Hill and in Washington that people do not regularly hear about. With trust in government at an all-time low, we believe it is important that Americans not only learn about this work, but learn more about the individuals who are responsible for getting it done."

To that end, Conzelman noted, the Roosevelt Leadership Award honors those leaders:

-Who have a sense of duty and service driven by a love of country.

-Who possess a desire to do what is in the best interests of the American people – regardless of party, and regardless of who gets the credit; and,

-Who embody the qualities that Theodore Roosevelt spoke of when he said: "The credit belongs to those who are actu-

ally in the arena, who strive valiantly; who know the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spend themselves in a worthy cause; who at best know the triumph of high achievement; and who, at worst, if they fail, fail while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

"The three leaders we are honoring here at the Reagan Library embody these qualities and more," Conzelman stated. "Between them, they have devoted more than 60 years to serving the American people. Individually, they have made their mark in many important ways."

Conzelman noted that this is the eleventh year the Roosevelt Leadership Awards have been presented. Last year's awards dinner was held in Honolulu, Hawaii, on the USS Missouri while the 2024 awards celebration was held in Key West, Florida, and featured a visit to the Truman Little White House where America's 33rd President spent so much time. The year before, the awards celebration was held in Rapid City, South Dakota, and featured a visit to Mount Rushmore. In 2022, the awards celebration was held in Austin and featured visits to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum and the George H.W.



2026 Roosevelt Award Honorees Jay Obernolte, Erin Houchin, and Steve Scalise in front of Air Force One at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

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Bush Presidential Library and Museum in College Station. Earlier in 2021, the dinner was held in Charlottesville and included visits to Thomas Jefferson's home at Monticello, and the home where James and Dolley Madison lived at Montpelier. The 2019 awards celebration was held at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, while

the 2018 awards were presented at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in Yorba Linda.

The 2017 celebration was held in New York and included visits to Theodore Roosevelt's historic home at Sagamore Hill and Franklin Roosevelt's estate and museum in Hyde Park. In 2016, the awards celebration was held at the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, Texas, while the inaugural Roosevelt Awards in 2015 was at the Reagan Library and included a visit to Rancho del Cielo, President Reagan's historic ranch atop the Santa Ynez Mountain range northwest

of Santa Barbara.

The Ripon Society is a public policy organization that was founded in 1962 and takes its name from the town where the Republican Party was born in 1854 – Ripon, Wisconsin. One of the main goals of The Ripon Society is to promote the ideas and principles that have made America great and contributed to the GOP's success. These ideas include keeping our nation secure, keeping taxes low and having a federal government that is smaller, smarter and more accountable to the people.

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## 2026 ROOSEVELT LEADERSHIP AWARD HONOREES

### STEVE SCALISE



Of the more than half a billion people who have called America home—and roughly 11,000 elected to the House of Representatives—only a rare few have risen to the highest ranks of congressional leadership. Steve Scalise is one of them.

For more than a decade—through majorities and minorities, victories and setbacks—he has helped lead the House Republican Conference. He is one of the longest-serving House leaders of the modern era: a trusted vote counter, coalition builder, and strategist whose imprint can be seen on nearly every major legislative achievement of his generation. In Congress, leadership is measured not only by speeches, but by earning the confidence

of colleagues year after year, Congress after Congress. Few leaders have done that as effectively—or for as long—as Steve Scalise.

To understand Steve's leadership, you have to start with his roots. His story stretches back four generations in Louisiana, back to the grocery store his Sicilian great-grandparents opened. From an early age, he was drawn to politics and public service. As a boy, he decorated his bicycle red, white, and blue and rode it through the neighborhood at election time, urging neighbors to vote. On the day he turned eighteen, he registered as a Republican.

First elected to Congress in a 2008 special election, he rose quickly within the Republican conference. In 2012, he won a contested race for chair of the Republican Study Committee, and by the summer of 2014, his colleagues had elected him Majority Whip. He has remained his party's vote-counter, coalition builder, and one of the leaders who helps shape policy that brings the conference together. Over many Congresses, he has earned the trust of members year after year—confidence that has made him one of the most effective and enduring leaders in the House. Today, he serves as House Majority Leader, a post he has held for the past three and a half years.

As the whip and now as leader his job is to find votes that are not yet there, and Steve has found them again and again—with narrow majorities for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, for trade agreements, and for the hard compromises that held the conference together when unity seemed out of reach. Throughout his leadership Steve's hand has been on nearly every major law enacted by Congress, including last year's Working Families Tax Cut. His own legislative record is substantial. He helped pass a bipartisan law to keep Chinese technology such as Huawei off our networks, delivered the RESTORE Act to return Deepwater Horizon penalties to the Gulf, and helped lead our government's fight against ALS alongside Saints great Steve Gleason.

But ask Steve what matters most, and it is not the titles or the legislation. It is his faith and his family—his wife, Jennifer, and their children, Madison and Harrison. They are the foundation of his commitment to serve and the source of the steadiness and purpose he brings to public life. Throughout his career, Steve has earned something that cannot be claimed but only built over time: the trust of his colleagues. That trust—formed through steadiness, judgment, and a willingness to lead when the moment demands it—has made him the respected leader he is today. Steve would never describe himself as exceptional. He says only that, of the many who have served in the House, he is fortunate to be one of them. Tonight, the rest of us are just as fortunate to call him a friend—and to thank him for his service, his leadership, and his devotion to our country. It is our great honor to present the 2026 Roosevelt Leadership Award to the Honorable Steve Scalise.

# 2026 ROOSEVELT LEADERSHIP AWARD HONOREES

## ERIN HOUCHIN



son Graham wasn't diagnosed with dyslexia until third grade – after years of sleepless nights and wrong information. At her kitchen table, she built a color-coded phonics system, cutting words into pieces Graham could arrange like a puzzle. When she ran for her state senate seat in 2014, she heard what she'd heard before: "It's not your turn." Her answer was to defeat a 26-year incumbent Democrat.

In Indianapolis, Graham's story became state policy. Erin authored the landmark law mandating dyslexia screening in every Indiana public and charter school and led a reform of the Department of Child Services. In Congress, she's continued that fight with her bipartisan 21st Century Dyslexia Act to modernize how schools identify and support students with dyslexia.

First elected to Congress in 2022, she has risen fast – now serving as Secretary of the House Republican Conference and sitting on the Energy and Commerce, Budget, and Rules Committees. She has authored two bills signed into law: the FAFSA Deadline Act, which ensures college financial aid applications reach families on time, and the Rural Broadband Protection Act, which safeguards taxpayer investments in connecting underserved communities.

Erin Houchin has never been content not to try. She contended at her kitchen table. She contended for a seat no one thought she could win. And she is contending every day in the House for the children and families of Southern Indiana. Her bipartisan Affordable HOMES Act passed the House with broad support, and her Science of Reading Act cleared committee unanimously. As co-chair of the Kids Online Safety Caucus, she is leading the effort to protect children from harmful AI and exploitative platforms. In recognition of her dedication to America's children, her bipartisan legislative record, and a career defined by the word on her back door, it is our great honor to present the 2026 Roosevelt Leadership Award to the Honorable Erin Houchin.

## JAY OBERNOLTE



When Jay was a kid growing up in Fresno, California, his father brought home an Apple II Plus computer and a book on programming. The machine had no disk drive – so every program young Jay wrote vanished the moment he turned it off. Every morning, he'd retype his code from scratch. But that stubborn kid found his passion. He graduated high school as valedictorian and enrolled at Caltech, where he founded a video game company in his dorm room. He then earned a Master's in Artificial Intelligence from UCLA – in 1997.

The company he founded – FarSight Studios – found its niche. From Big Bear Lake, California, Jay and his team spent three decades building family-friendly sports and pinball video games for Nintendo, Xbox and PC. But it was

Jay's flying that led him into politics. He holds the highest pilot rating the FAA issues, with over 5,000 hours in his logbook. What started as him seeking a seat on the board overseeing Big Bear's airport in that mile-high ski town, snowballed into greater offices: city council, mayor, the State Assembly, and now Congress.

First elected to the House in 2020, Jay quickly established a niche in Washington, DC too – as the go-to House Republican on tech policy. He now serves as Chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee, while chairing the Science Committee's Subcommittee on Research and Technology and serving on the Energy and Commerce Committee. He's had six bills signed into law, including the Fusion Energy Act, one that strengthened the cyber defenses of our nation's suicide hotline, and one which overturned California's de facto electric vehicle mandate.

But the crown jewel of his Congressional service so far may be his chairmanship of the Bipartisan House Task Force on Artificial Intelligence. Partnering with Democrat Ted Lieu, they produced a unanimous, 273-page report – what he called "probably the most detailed policy document on AI produced by any legislative body in the world."

The man of science. The man of business. Skilled intelligence in civic affairs. That's Jay Obernolte. He built a three-decade-old company from his dorm room, mastered artificial intelligence before most of Washington had an email address, and went to Congress to make sure America leads on that frontier. In recognition of his pioneering work on AI policy, and for opening up that next frontier for all of us, it is our great honor to present the 2026 Roosevelt Leadership Award to the Honorable Jay Obernolte.

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