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## **Opening Remarks at "The Politics of Star Wars" Event Dec. 8, 2015**

My name is Eli Lehrer. I'm president of the R Street Institute and I'd like to welcome all of you to our offices.

I'm also a huge Star Wars geek. *The Empire Strikes Back* is the first movie I can distinctly remember watching in a theater. I was inseparable from my Star Wars lunchbox as a kid. I had Star Wars sheets on my bed. I saved my allowance for four months to buy the big Millennium Falcon from Kenner. It's still in my parents' basement, but I wish it was in mine.

And I'm thrilled to be spending an evening talking about what I still believe is the greatest sci-fi franchise ever created.

Before we begin and introduce our moderator, I wanted to share a few thoughts on the politics of the Star Wars universe. In some ways, it's odd that a think tank of the right would host an event on Star Wars. There's little reason to think that it's intended to be a conservative manifesto and, indeed, much to think that it isn't.

Current maestro of the Star Wars Universe, J.J. Abrams ranks among Hollywood's largest political donors and gives only to Democrats. Series creator George Lucas is also a major Barack Obama donor. The commentary on current politics found in the Star Wars canon is often used as a chance to score cheap political points at the expense of the right. Take for example, the evil viceroy of the Trade Federation, Nute Gunray. Get it?

But the Star Wars Universe does offer a lot to interest and intrigue those of us who come from the political right. Before handing things over to our moderator, let me review just a few of those elements.

First, let's note that the Empire's tyranny is not just political, but also economic. In fact, a cut scene from the first movie—which contains the first time Luke hears about the rebellion onscreen—makes it pretty clear. Let's watch it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vt3jAJRR-Zk>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f00lkrWvur4>

You see, the Empire will turn us all into serfs.

Furthermore, the fundamental event that sets the events of the series into motion is a trade blockade. The Star Wars Universe realizes that commerce matters and, indeed, is part of freedom. Not all of it, but an important part.

Finally, the role of intellectual property in the Star Wars Universe offers a few lessons. In the Star Wars expanded universe, we learn the Incom Corp. was the initial developer of the X-Wing Fighter. Incom executives took the plans and parts to the rebellion when the Empire threatened to nationalize the company. The plans are then distributed and modified under a *de facto* open-source license so that the alliance itself can produce X-Wings, modify, and improve on them without Imperial or even corporate control. The main software used to control X-Wings is contained in R-2-series astromech droids which, themselves, can be reprogrammed by their owners. The X-Wing's controls, likewise, are borrowed directly from those of the T-16 Skyhopper, which is how Luke can learn to fly one so quickly.

Let me be straightforward: without open source for design and controls, without a right to repair, without a right to own the software in the form of an astromech droid, the Death Star would have destroyed Yavin 4 and the rebellion would have been stopped in its tracks. In short, bills like Rep. Blake Farenthold's YODA Act are vital to national security if we're to prevent super-weapons from being used to destroy planets.

There's a lot more we can learn from Star Wars. And the stories themselves are wonderful. Our distinguished panel has a lot more to say.

With that, let me hand it over to our moderator, Benny Johnson. Mr. Johnson is the creative director of [IJ.com/Independent Journal](http://IJ.com): my favorite—and the best--conservative news aggregator, as well as a great new source of original content. He previously worked for both *National Review* and BuzzFeed. It's a pleasure to have him and again, to welcome him, and all of you, to the R Street Institute.

Benny, may the Force be with you.