



Grantmakers Income Security Taskforce

DRAFT and CONFIDENTIAL

**A GIST Discussion Paper:
Policy Analysis & Advocacy Groups Under Attack
Leading Up to the Federal Tax Cut Debates
November 2017**

Two key national policy reform and advocacy partners have recently come under concerted attack in the right-wing media. Both the Urban/Brookings Tax Policy Center (TPC) and the Center for Community Change (CCC) have been strongly criticized by numerous conservative and alt-right activists and media outlets in an effort to preemptively neutralize opposition to the Administration's tax reform plan. Failed efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act leave cutting taxes the single most unifying priority for the White House and congressional GOP leaders. All hands on deck are needed for this high stakes tax reform debate and foundations and grantees must be ready to anticipate and respond should further attacks occur

The Tax Policy Center was attacked for its release of microsimulation model estimates of the possible effects of the proposed tax cut framework issued by the Trump Administration and Senate and House tax chairmen. Because the Administration didn't release key details and parameters of the tax framework – even while making assertions about the effects of the proposal on the deficit and debt, on economic growth, and on distributional impacts – the TPC was forced to make reasonable assumptions on the missing details. In doing so, the TPC was quite explicit about their assumptions and how and why they were used. The White House and conservative pundits immediately attacked the TPC as biased, not credible and unreliable, trying to neutralize the TPC and its analysis. More importantly, the attacks tried to discredit any future analyses, once the details of the tax cut package are available.

Here's a small sample of the dozen or so pieces that have been written:

- [Tax Policy Center Propaganda: The media's go-to think tank trashes GOP reform without evidence](#). By The Editorial Board, Wall Street Journal, October 1, 2017.
- [Keven Hassett Spanks the Tax Policy Center](#). By Larry Kudlow, Town Hall, October 10, 2017.
- [Media Wrongly Label Liberal Tax Policy Center in 98 Percent of Stories](#). By Aly Nielsen, MRC NewsBusters, October 5, 2017.

Just a week later, right-wing media began attacking the Center for Community Change – and CCC’s funders – for opposing the Trump Administration’s proposals on health care, immigration policy, and tax and budget cuts. In a memo to funders, Mary Lassen, CCC’s Managing Director, described the attacks this way:

This week, CCC/A has dealt with some stark reminders of the doggedness of our opposition. CCC/A works to build the power of low-income people – particularly people of color – a proposition that threatens established power and, unfortunately, animates racism and hatred. As such, our organization has been one of the favorite foils of the far right and the “alt-right,” especially since the election of President Obama in 2008. For CCC/A and many of our allies, it seems the price of social justice work now includes a more or less constant barrage of right wing media attacks, hate speech, and, occasionally, direct threats.

With the open hostility of this political moment, we have seen an escalation of these attacks, including a flare-up of activity in the past week. Articles in Breitbart, Infowars, the Washington Free Beacon, and the Washington Times, among other alt-right channels, have published information about our foundation partners and described us as a key player in the “resistance” to the policies of the Trump Administration. We prefer to define ourselves as part of a movement to defend democracy and promote inclusion and justice.

Regardless, we see these attacks as confirmation that our work matters – that we are effective in raising the voices of low-income communities of color. Our staff treat it as a badge of honor. But although this particular flare-up is nothing new, we take protection of our institution, staff, board members, partners and allies very seriously. Even before this round of stories, we had completed a top to bottom review of our legal compliance, public relations risk (including infiltration), and our physical safety protocols. Social justice has enemies, and we are sober about that reality.

Here's a sample of some of the pieces attacking CCC and its funders:

- [Mega-companies distance themselves from charities found donating to anti-Trump group.](#) By Alex Pappas, Fox News, October 6, 2017.
- [Google Sponsors Event Honoring President of Nation's Largest Abortion Provider.](#) By Craig Bannister, CNS News, October 9, 2017.
- [NFL players' union teamed up with Soros to fund leftist advocacy groups.](#) By Valerie Richardson, Washington Times, October 5, 2017.
- [Why Are Mainstream Charities Funding The Anti-Trump 'Resistance'?](#) Investor’s Business Daily, October 5, 2017.

Opposition attacks undermining the credibility of organizations are not new. The TPC, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and other neutral arbitrators of tax and budget debates are routinely criticized by proponents of proposals when they don’t like numbers and analysis. It is increasingly part and parcel of most DC debates. It’s also important to acknowledge that there’s no evidence of any sort of a highly orchestrated conspiracy to attack and discredit highly-regarded, non-partisan think tanks like the TPC or grassroots advocacy groups like CCC.

However, the proponents of the tax cut package clearly fear that TPC, CCC and other of our partners will be as effective in the upcoming tax debates as they were in the ACA repeal-and-replace battles. The estimates and projections produced by TPC and its sister team, the Urban Institute's Health Policy Center (HPC) were repeatedly devastating for each of the several repeal-and-replace proposals. The numbers released by the TPC, HPC, CBO and other analytic organizations were a big part of why proposals to block-grant Medicaid and to undermine the health insurance markets failed. Likewise, CCC and other grassroots advocacy groups were highly effective in mobilizing their members to engage Senators, House Members, and other policymakers, educating them about the consequences of repealing the ACA or cutting Medicaid. Hence the efforts to preemptively neutralize key parts of the opposition before the debates start.

Because the stakes are so high (i.e., trillions of dollars in corporate and personal tax cuts, as well as control of the House and Senate in 2019) and because proponents of the tax cuts are so desperate for victory this time, the attacks may be more concerted, vicious and widespread than anything we've seen in the past.

Policy research, policy analysis, and policy advocacy groups must anticipate such attacks and prepare – as CCC did – before the attacks occur. Likewise, foundations and other supporters of policy analysis and advocacy groups must be prepared to be subjects of these attacks as well.

GIST is organizing a funders' conference call on November 28, 2017 from 2:00-3:30pm ET for funders to share information and insights and strategize about how best to anticipate and respond should further attacks on partners occur. Visit <http://www.gistfunders.org/events/nov2017oppositionattackswebinar.php> for more information and to register.