

22 REASONS WHY FREE MARKET THINK TANKS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN ANYONE ELSE IN CHANGING PUBLIC POLICY (AND ONE REASON WHY THEY ARE NOT)

BY JEFF JUDSON

1.

Source of leading ideas. Free-market think tanks are the source of many ideas for columns by leading conservative columnists and the source of legislation by leading conservative lawmakers. The best and brightest journalists and lawmakers consume think tank work voraciously and rely on it.

2.

Most highly skilled. Free-market think tanks have the complete package of skills needed to influence public opinion and the opinions of lawmakers and the media. They know how to communicate, whether in writing, public speaking, electronic media, talk radio, mail and email, editorial board meetings, testimony, or research.

3.

Less expensive. If you could measure public policy influence by the pound, free-market think tanks get it done for less. A good think tank has the skills of a top-notch PR firm, a university faculty, a “rainmaker” lobbyist, and a new-media firm but operate on less than any one of them. They are in it to change the world.

4.

Powerful friends. Think tank directors and large donors often have their own considerable influence and close personal relationships with elected officials. If the politician doesn’t seek out the think tank research, he or she often will be *encouraged* to do so by the think tank’s donors and directors.

5.

Earn media better than anyone.

Think tanks get their op-eds placed frequently in major dailies, small weeklies, and everything in between. The media ask them for quotes. Most think tanks publish regular columns in newspapers. And they are on the cutting edge of emerging new-media outlets via the Internet.

6.

Politicians trust them. If objective and independent information is important to elected officials, they know they can trust most think tanks. Democrats and Republicans find trustworthy allies among think tank experts.

7.

Work harder. Think tank activists don't work by the hour, for profit. They work long hours until they win. Their psychic income promoting liberty exceeds their monetary income working for a non-profit.

8.

National influence. There is now at least one state think tank in all 50 states and a growing number throughout the developed and developing world in foreign countries. They are each part of a common family with common roots, they consume each other's work, they support and encourage one another, and they can pull together an instant national (or global) coalition on the most important public policy issues.

9.

Powerful research. Their research is

solid, easy to read, and based upon *truth*—which definitely gives them a leg up.

10.

Stellar reputations. Most free-market think tanks have been around for decades and have a long track record of productive activism. They are not front groups or so-called “Astroturf groups,” which are fake grassroots movements appearing overnight covered with the fingerprints of an industry lobbying campaign.

11.

Impervious to attack. Think tanks are independent and untouchable. Unlike lobbyists working for specific clients who operate at the mercy of a regulator or lawmaker, no public official can retaliate against a think tank, at least not in any way that could actually bring harm. In fact, when public officials seek retribution, the think tank's credibility—and fundraising—generally goes up, not down.

12.

More formidable. Think tanks and their experts outlast most politicians and are not dependent upon politicians for their success. As a result, they are a fearless adversary to politicians who seek to erode our liberty.

13.

Donors are confidential. The identity of donors is protected from involuntary disclosure. Most think tank contributions come from concerned individuals or private foundations, and lastly from corporations.

14.

Messaging experts. Because they understand the economic and historical rationale for a given public policy, think tank experts often understand—and can best articulate—why a policy is good or bad. As a result, they can coin a term, start a YouTube craze, launch a slogan, or respond most effectively under pressure at a hearing.

15.

Lower overhead. Think tanks operate more efficiently than much of the private sector. Few, if any, rent Class A office space, have lots of assistants, or buy anything that doesn't demonstrably support their public policy mission.

16.

Total commitment. Free-market think tanks' activists are committed to their core to preserving liberty. When they get off work, they talk about policy for fun, on the weekends, at parties, and at bedtime with their kids. They never give up.

17.

Singular focus. Unlike university academics or consultants, think tank experts have no distractions—no clients as such, no classes to teach, and no articles to publish in obscure academic journals. As a result, they can doggedly follow an issue, and all its daily developments, on an ongoing basis.

18.

Great in coalitions. Think tank

experts are open and eager to cooperate with just about anyone to win—others in the free-market movement or people from another political or policy perspective. They don't worry about protecting their turf or their intellectual property. They have no clients to gain or lose to another consultant or trade association. They just want to win.

19.

Pre-partisan. Free-market think tanks are not Republican, or even bi-partisan. They are *pre-partisan*. Think tanks originate ideas before the parties have ever heard of them, and they are delighted for either party to promote their ideas.

20.

Defining the leading edge of communications. Think tanks are on the cutting edge of activist influence techniques: blogging, social networks, developing popular Internet sites, tweeting, and even investigative journalism.

21.

Winning in the courts. Think tanks are natural allies with public interest law firms—non-profit law firms that litigate landmark cases to preserve liberty. When the cooperation is close, there is no more powerful and cost-effective force to move public policy than a think tank and a public interest law firm.

22.

Greatest Rolodex. Think tank scholars know, know of, or work with

virtually all of the major scholars in every emerging and established field of public policy research in the country, and many others around the world. Through this network, they can research and produce solid policy proposals quicker than anyone. You definitely want them in the room when writing a bill or negotiating with the other side on legislation.



Reasons Why Free-Market Think Tanks Are Not Influential

1.

No margin, no mission. Think tanks are chronically underfunded, given the challenges we face as a nation. When one compares the billions spent on political campaigns, the

billions spent on lobbying, the billions spent on advertising, and the billions spent on all other public relations and public affairs, think tanks achieve more on a dollar-for-dollar basis than these traditional mechanisms *combined* yet scrape by with a fraction of the funding. **There is no more powerful entity to influence public policy than a well-funded think tank.** ❧

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investment, the costs associated with supplying education information for all 67 school districts, would be around \$9 million. Therefore, because the first two phases would represent significant progress, implementation of phase 3 would prove to be too difficult a financial challenge to achieve at the current time.

The Committee has recommended that once the school districts have complied with the implementation of financial transparency, then charter schools, universities and colleges, water management districts, counties,

and municipalities should be phased in. This would dramatically increase the overall transparency that is available to all citizens. At this point, there will be sufficient information for citizens instantly to be able to view where their tax dollars are going. Therefore, when this change is completed and the financial information of our state is available to all, it will undoubtedly be a bright and historic day for Florida. ❧

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