

White House Urges Nonprofits to Push for Higher Taxes on the Wealthy

By Doug Donovan

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... Seeking Guarantees on Charitable Deduction

Some nonprofit officials believe that's precisely where charitable organizations should concentrate their efforts.

"If what they want to do is prevent changes to the charitable tax deduction, one of the fastest ways to assure that is to make sure the government is getting the revenue it needs through a higher tax rate," said Aaron Dorfman, head of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and one of the nonprofit leaders who attended Tuesday's White House meeting.

Other nonprofit chief executives who met at the White House included Diana Aviv of Independent Sector, Nancy Brown of the American Heart Association; M. Peter McPherson of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities; Larry Snyder of Catholic Charities USA; Vikki Spruill of the Council on Foundations; and David Warren, of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. Michael Brown, co-founder of City Year, also attended, as did representatives of the Association of American Universities, Jewish Federations of North America, Meals on Wheels Association of America, and New York Community Trust.

Ms. Stewart said the group met with Mr. Obama's chief of staff Jack Lew; Valerie Jarrett, a senior adviser; Gene Sperling, an economic adviser; and Cecilia Muñoz, director of the Domestic Policy Council.

The White House officials said that the charitable deduction is more likely to be altered if the president does not succeed in raising tax rates on the wealthy, according to Ms. Stewart.

Ms. Stewart said charity leaders told White House officials that before they would consider pushing for higher tax rates, “we have to be clear that we’re not in the cross hairs.”

The White House officials, she said, could not guarantee they would remove the charitable deduction from consideration in exchange for lobbying on tax rates. But, she said, “they said they’d be willing to have that conversation.”

Jonathan Greenblatt, director of the White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation, sent an e-mail Wednesday as a followup to everyone who attended the White House meeting. It reinforced the White House's view that "the elimination of the charitable deduction is at real risk if rates aren't raised—because otherwise, the math just doesn't work."

"We encourage you to make your voices heard through op-eds, public statements, and other means," he wrote. "We believe it's important that the broader public understand the potential impact that this situation could have on the nonprofit organizations and the communities you serve."

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