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April 4, 2011

Association Advocates Swarm Washington

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ASAE hosted its **largest legislative fly-in ever** last week for American Associations Day. ASAE CEO **John Graham** and a panel of association leaders spoke about the implications of the **deficit** on the tax exempt sector and what ASAE hopes to do about it.



Concern over the deficit is only going to create more questions about the tax exempt sector in the coming years, John says. Policy makers are already beginning to talk about the "relative prioritization of exemption," meaning is a **soup kitchen** more deserving of a tax exemption than a **trade association**? Several weeks ago, Senator **Chuck Grassley** called for a total review of the exempt sector, which has \$3.2 trillion in assets. John says that while he recognizes the need to discuss tax exemption, associations also need to be **clear about the value** they bring to society and what value might be lost if they had to pay taxes. "Our nation has very real problems and the solutions are going to be hard, and they're going to **involve compromise**," John says. "It's frankly hard for me to believe that life as we know it today is going to be life as we know it tomorrow."

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The IRS has already done significant studies of the Form 900s from **hospitals** and **universities**. Now, 501(c)(6)s are on its radar. "What that means, what that will look like, and who will get a letter in the mail, I don't know," says John (here with National Court Reporters Association CEO **Mark Golden** and ASAE Public Policy SVP **Jim Clarke**). He does see that one big issue will be whether some associations have become **too similar** to for-profit businesses as they've evolved over the years. "It just forces us as a community to very carefully **delineate the value** we uniquely bring vs. the value that a for-profit brings."



One of the top short-term issues for association leaders is repealing the **Form 1099** reporting requirements, which would create a paperwork burden for many groups. ASAE sent letters to members of Congress with over a **thousand signatures** opposing the provision and made the issue a focus of its meetings on the Hill. Though Republicans, Democrats, and the President all seem to agree it should be repealed, the "how" remains unresolved. ASAE's **Jim Clarke** reminded everyone that the battle isn't over until there's a **presidential signature**. "The House has passed this. They're going to say, 'We've done our job.' Well, the job is done when the law is repealed."

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National Truck Equipment Association senior director of government activities **Mike Kastner** serves as chair of ASAE's Public Policy Committee. Mike and Jim also encouraged ASAE's advocates to speak up against attempts to **limit the tax deduction** for charitable contributions on personal income taxes. The President's 2012 budget proposal includes capping the deductions for very wealthy taxpayers at **28%** (as opposed to the current **35%**). Some members of Congress (from both parties) have also proposed using the charitable deduction to offset health care reform legislation. Non-profits worry that this would **reduce their donations** at a time when many are already struggling to raise money.



ASAE's **Power of A** campaign was created to communicate the values and goals of associations both inside the Beltway and beyond. National Court Reporters Association CEO **Mark Golden**, who chairs the Power of A Committee, says the campaign's new website is intended to be hub for people to find data and stories that can be used to promote associations. He says they also hope to expand the use of both professionally-produced videos and FlipCam testimonials. "Everyone in this room understands the **social, economic, and civic impact** your group has and appreciates what would be missing if your organization ceased to exist," Mark says. "Lawmakers need to have that same **sense of the importance** of what we contribute. It's not enough to be quietly in the back doing good works."


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