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Advocacy Groups Launch Campaign To ‘Stop Deficit Squawks’ In Washington

Groups Call Out Deficit Fearmongering as Pushing an “Artificial Crisis” Used to Block Critical Spending to Help Everyday People

WASHINGTON, D.C. — This morning as Congress returns to Capitol Hill, a coalition of nearly twenty progressive advocacy groups launched Stop Deficit Squawks, a campaign targeting so-called ‘deficit hawks’ in Washington. The coalition will push back on the true agenda of ‘deficit squawks’ – groups and individuals that incite fears about the federal deficit to create a self-described “artificial crisis” and block critical investments in the everyday people who make up our economy.

The campaign comes as Congress takes up President Biden’s signature economic bills, with a fight over the debt limit looming. The group launched its website along with an introductory video, and will spend six figures on ads this summer to shed light on groups like the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), the Heritage Foundation, Americans for Prosperity and the American Enterprise Institute, who squawk about the federal deficit to hide their real aims: slashing the safety net, blocking equitable public investments like those in the American Jobs Plan and American Family Plan, and pushing corporate interests above those of the American people.

One such group of ‘deficit squawks’ is the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, which presents itself as “objective” and “non-partisan” despite being funded by corporate and far-right special interests. The CRFB, led by all white board members and executives, has historically opposed crucial investments in everyday people, including many that would uplift Black and Brown communities. The CRFB uses its “objective” reputation to push a pro-corporate, conservative economic agenda using discredited theories about a manufactured “debt crisis” to block key investments in our economy, most recently when Congress was debating the American Rescue Plan. They reserve their strongest objections for popular safety net programs like Social Security and Medicare, as well as programs that can help uplift communities of color.

“There’s nothing neutral or objective about continuing the ugly history of disinvestment in Black and Brown communities and slashing funding for public goods that all of us depend on,” said Amy Traub, Associate Director of Policy and Research at Demos. “Yet, deficit squawks are manufacturing an artificial crisis around debt to push the same failed small government, trickle-down economic policies that have consolidated wealth and power in corporate hands for decades. It’s no surprise they are ramping up their fearmongering now, as lawmakers are finally considering overdue investments in infrastructure, jobs, and families that could address inequities and get our economy on track. Lawmakers and advocates should be asking whose interests these groups really represent.”

Margarida Jorge of Health Care for America Now added, “The irony of deficit squawks’ artificial crisis is that it gives cover to right-wing politicians who threaten to create a real crisis with brinkmanship around the debt ceiling. Republicans did it twice under President Obama after Congress passed the Affordable Care Act. Now they’re threatening the same thing just as
Congress is considering long overdue tax fairness reforms and popular investments in American jobs and families. Any group that is lending a veneer of legitimacy to that type of thinking should be called out for what it is: irresponsible and dangerous."

Lindsay Owens, Interim Executive Director from the Groundwork Collaborative commented: “Now that their brand of austerity economics has been thoroughly debunked, it's past time for the deficit squawks in Washington to be exposed for what they've always been: corporate-backed special interest groups hell-bent on blocking popular, overdue, and economically beneficial investments in our communities.”

Jhumpa Bhattacharya, VP of Programs and Strategy at the Insight Center, added: “Deficit squawkery is racist. Period. It stems from the belief that Black people, immigrants etc are not deserving of government help. People will go to extraordinary lengths to justify not spending money to uplift Black, Latinx, Native, and Asian people, immigrants and women. This has everything to do with our deeply racist and sexist narratives of how the economy should work.”

Executive Director of the Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research Spencer Watkins said: “The argument that government cannot afford public spending is a red herring. Crying wolf distracts the public while neoliberal groups and politicians oppose and slash government programs and taxes on the wealthy. The winners in this situation are the same as those who benefit already under the status quo: wealthy white straight married men. The losers are the same communities our society repeatedly fails to serve, including women, communities of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ people. To build a society that works for all people in the United States will require big changes in spending and investment—in healthcare, housing, childcare, paid leave, and taxation, to name a few. The question should not be whether we can afford to make public investments, it should be whether we can afford not to.”

Sister Emily TeKolste, a grassroots organizer with the NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, commented: “First, decades of tax cuts for the wealthiest in our nation created the deficit. Now, Washington groups use the deficit as a reliable excuse to oppose programs and policies that help those on the margins, particularly Black, brown, Native American, immigrant, and disabled communities. This is unacceptable. We know there is enough to go around if we choose to build an economy rooted in solidarity—an economy that works for all of us.”

Morgan Stahr, co-Executive Director of Blue Future, shared: “Deficit Squawkers come out of hiding any time we try to invest in the youth of this country. From public education, to student debt, to employment opportunities, groups like the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and Heritage Foundation and their right-wing friends make it harder for young people to succeed. By only speaking up when Congress tries to give young people the tools to succeed—and not when congress is giving out giant tax cuts to the rich—it’s clear they don’t care about any fiscal future but their billionaire donor’s balance sheet.”

Co-Executive Director of LibGen Jeremie Greer added: "The spending we've done to confront this crisis has mitigated a lot of harm for a lot of people of color. Imagine what we can do if we keep going. In the end, money is a public good that belongs to the people, and our government and our economy should work for us.”

About Stop Deficit Squawks
The campaign to Stop Deficit Squawks is a coalition of more than a dozen progressive advocacy groups pushing back against the false notion that manufactured fears about deficits and debt should take precedence over real investments in jobs, families and infrastructure. Coalition members cover a range of issues in the progressive sphere, but are united in the belief that it’s time to invest in the everyday people who make up our economy – not just big corporations and the wealthy.

The growing coalition’s members include:

Action Center on Race and the Economy
Blue Future
Center for LGBTQ Economic Advancement & Research
Center for Popular Democracy
Demos
ExtendPUA
Friends of the Earth
Groundwork Collaborative
Health Care for America Now
Indivisible
Insight Center for Community Economic Development
Invest in America
Liberation in a Generation
Network Lobby
Patriotic Millionaires
People’s Action
Social Security Works
Strong Economy for All Coalition
Tax March

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