

I've previously expressed some skeptical views about the so-called think tanks that play such a significant role in Beltway policy debates. (See [this post](#)) *The New Republic* has an interesting [story](#) about the increasing dependence of think tanks on big money. Here is the crux:

*Nowadays if donors don't like the results they get, they are increasingly inclined to move their money to more compliant think tanks, or to more expressly political operations. "Think tanks are competing with consulting firms, law firms, Super PACS, lobbyists and advocacy groups," says James McGann, director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania. "That puts pressure on think tanks to be more responsive to donors." The new buzz term among private and public donors is "high impact philanthropy," McCann says.*

*"Think tanks have become more like PR and lobbying shops than research organizations," says Steve Clemons, a former executive vice president at the New America Foundation. "That they're lesser regulated than lobbyists makes them especially attractive to some funders."*

By the way, the story suggests that this is true of think tanks across the political perspective. The corrupting influence of financial support is often subtle, and I'm sure that think tanks still try to maintain some degree of independence. But if the TNR article is to be believed, there is less and less space for this independence — the reins are being held more tightly. Perhaps it's not surprising that think tank products have become increasingly indistinguishable from political advocacy.