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Populist conservatives feel abandoned in rift against Big Tech companies

Ryan Lovelace

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The clash between conservatives and Big Tech has revealed a rift separating those who feel victimized by the social media giants and free-market thinkers who have long guided the political right.

The populist right says institutions such as the American Enterprise Institute think tank and conservative stalwarts such as Sen. Mike Lee of Utah have abandoned them on tech companies' aggression, but critics say those claims cannot be further from the truth.

After Google threatened to remove the Federalist, a conservative website, from its advertising platform this month, Federalist co-founder Ben Domenech tweeted that no scholars from AEI, a Washington free-market think tank, or the libertarian Cato Institute came to his defense. He said the think tanks are “wholly owned subsidiaries of Big Tech,” criticism that Sen. Ted Cruz then amplified on Twitter.

“This is a serious problem. Big Tech is like the [Chinese Communist Party]: they both use \$\$ to buy silence, acquiescence, or support,” the Texas Republican tweeted. “Every think tank with integrity should wean themselves [off] both CCP & Big Tech \$\$ so they can have true objectivity & independence.”

AEI told The Washington Times it has a longstanding tradition of not discussing its donors and noted it does not do contract research, which serves to create a firewall between the integrity of their work and those funding it.

“AEI operates independently of any political party and has never held institutional positions,” said spokeswoman Phoebe Keller.

The Cato Institute did not respond to requests for comment. Free-market allies of the two think tanks were less laconic.