

THE EPOCH TIMES

Think Tank Wants to Set ‘New Direction’ for Conservatives After Midterms—But Who Funds Them?

Nathan Worcester

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As Republicans weave competing narratives over the “red wave” that wasn’t, one relatively new think tank has hit the ground running in an effort to set the agenda for a somewhat stronger GOP.

American Compass, a think tank founded in 2020 by former Mitt Romney presidential campaign aide Oren Cass, released on Nov. 9 “New Direction: Conservative Principles & Policies for the 118th Congress.”

“American Compass is the think tank developing a conservative economic agenda to supplant a blind faith in free markets with a focus on the interests of workers, their families and communities, and the nation,” its website states.

Its concrete proposals include workforce training grants as an alternative to college.

Another proposal, authored by Cass and American Compass research director Wells King, would replace the existing child tax credit with a Family Income Supplemental Credit. Under that system, the government would deliver monthly payments to working families with children.

The group’s brief envisions the proposal as the basis of a new social compact, one grounded in support for families that struggle to afford children even while employed.

It says it doesn’t want to create a universal child allowance, applicable even if recipients aren’t working: “Severing all connection to productive economic contribution violates the basic principle of reciprocity at the heart of a durable social compact.”

Yet, it also notes that it would not end Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or associated programs that non-working families can use.

As an apostle of “post-Trump” conservatism, American Compass’s Cass has enjoyed friendly (in relative terms) press from left-liberal publications like The New Yorker and Vox. The New Yorker called him a “thinker” who has problems with “both Trump and the Republican establishment.”

After the GOP’s mixed midterm showing, blamed on Trump by some factions within the party, he took to Twitter to argue the merits of his own project as a Trump alternative:

“While Trump spurred a working-class realignment, he does not offer a formula for conservatives to capitalize on it. Successfully assembling a new coalition requires coherent economic principles and a concrete agenda, not just a rejection of what came before.”

Rising Influence of ‘American School’

American Compass may not be as familiar to conservatives as the Heritage Foundation or the Cato Institute.

Yet, its influence in Washington is growing—though to what extent remains an open question.

The American Workforce Act, a bill introduced in September by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), does look like American Compass’s workforce training grant proposal. Cotton’s [press release on the bill](#) even quoted Cass’s praise for it.

Although American Compass has stressed its impact on other bills in the 117th Congress, Congressional Republican staff who spoke with The Epoch Times downplayed that stated influence to some extent, while noting their friendliness to the group.

A spokesperson for Rubio, for example, did not want to connect Rubio’s new version of the [TEAM Act](#) to American Compass’s Worker Voice and Representation proposal.

“We did have good feedback from American Compass throughout the drafting process, so it is fair to say they had some input,” the spokesperson added in a Nov. 11 email.

Less nebulous is the American Compass speaker list. Its events have featured the likes of Senator-elect J.D. Vance (R-Ohio), House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.), Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), and Cass’s former boss Romney, now the junior senator from Utah.

Like others on the New Right, the group looks back to the nineteenth-century American School for a conservative economic alternative to the low-tax, free-trade Reaganism that has dominated the Republican Party since the 1980s.

Emerging from the Federalist views of Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, and guided at various times by the statesmen Henry Clay, John Quincy Adams, and Abraham Lincoln, the American School was committed to tariffs and/or subsidies for industry, robust funding for physical infrastructure, and a powerful national bank.

Priority areas in American Compass’s “New Direction” include “Decoupling from China,” “Governing Big Tech,” and “Reshoring Industry”—all themes reasonably consistent with the old American School and with the Republican Party that Trump has reshaped.

Other topics close to the heart of Trump’s base are less prominent, though not absent.

The word “immigration” appears just once in the group’s 2021 [annual report](#). (Cass [has written](#) about immigration for The American Compass in the past.)

Funding from Omidyar Network and Hewlett Foundation

American Compass's funding includes \$700,000 from the Omidyar Network, through its "Reimagining Capitalism" project. Other "Reimagining Capitalism" recipients include the social justice group Community Change Action (\$2.3 million), liberal magazine The American Prospect (\$150,000), and the Aspen Institute (\$155,000), which The Economist once described as a "mountain retreat for the liberal elite."

The Omidyar Network was created by Pierre Omidyar, French-born billionaire founder of eBay and well-known donor to left-wing and liberal causes.

Omidyar Network money is linked not only to American Compass but also to Vox and to Condé Nast, the latter being the parent company of The New Yorker. (The Nast funding went to the publication Teen Vogue, for a contest challenging the magazine's young audience to "redefine economic success in our society.")

Another organization, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, granted American Compass \$625,000 in funding in 2021.

A December 2020 grantmaking document from that foundation describes its interest in American Compass, as part of a wider effort to replace neoliberalism:

"On the right, a new organization we are supporting with seed funding called American Compass is asking many of the same questions we are. Though for the moment change in conservative circles is coming more from individuals than institutions."

"We have, accordingly, begun supporting promising conservative thinkers like Oren Cass, Julius Krein, and Samuel Hammond, and we are actively scouting others. Over time, we hope and expect to see more heterodox thinking on the right as well as the left."

American Compass did not respond to The Epoch Times' questions about its funding by press time.

Unsurprisingly, American Compass's "New Direction" has already met with a positive response from the economic populist wing of the New Right.

Sohrab Ahmari, the founder and editor of Compact Magazine, wrote on Twitter that "the GOP could do far worse than to embrace this blueprint."