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## **Perspectives from the Chair about *Giving USA 2013***

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[The Giving Institute](#)

As the calendar page turned from 2012 to 2013, certain things we as Americans know to be true remained so – the ball had dropped at Times Square the night before, the sky was (mostly) a cold blue over the country – and deducting charitable contributions was an option available to anyone who itemized their tax return.

The estimated \$316.23 billion donated to charitable organizations by American individuals, corporations and foundations in 2012 was based on a long-lasting system, but one that had been uncharacteristically examined under the lens of policy makers looking for options to end a fiscal stalemate.

While it is also true that only one-third of households claim the charitable tax deduction, the other fact is, it is one of those pieces of societal fabric that Americans just know is there and available. An entire infrastructure exists to document what you donate, just in case you want to deduct the value on your annual return.

Whether it's a receipt for household goods dropped off at a nonprofit thrift store, a gift of cash or securities, the system is in place to remind you of what you can do to give back to society as a whole.

But that seismic first shot across the charitable deduction bow wasn't the earth's tectonic plates shifting and then settling back in place for the next 100 years or so. Here now, in mid-2013, we know that Washington has not given up consideration of massive changes in how our philanthropic system works, and those of us who observe, and should observe, such conversations need to be cognizant of the implications.

Just the winds of potential change resulted in behavioral shifts among some donors last year. There were pledges made early or deferred due to tax implications. We must be ready for these possibilities, whichever aspect of philanthropy matters to us, as donors, nonprofit leaders or consultants – or all three.

I do not wish to be alarmist with my words, but I do believe in facing reality in whatever form it might take. Policy and decision makers need to hear what the future of philanthropic giving in America would look like under different scenarios, and must be prepared to defend them. The understanding that altering how philanthropy gets funded

in America could change government's role in budgeting for critical services also needs to be made clear.

The leadership of Giving Institute and Giving USA Foundation have made their united position known through testimony submitted to the Congressional committee studying our current tax code. We are ready to continue talking, and invite our readership to join us.

It could be interesting to wake up on that calendar change date in 2014 and see what has occurred through not being silent.