

Graduate Students Across the Country, from over 50 University Campuses, Plan Walkouts and Rallies to Save Their Education

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Nationwide – Graduate students across the United States are fighting back against the GOP’s proposed tax bill to eliminate a long standing tax exemption for tuition waivers, and are organizing walkouts and rallies at [50 university campuses](#) on Wednesday, November 29.

As the tax bill debate moves into the Senate, graduate students across the US, led by organizers from [Grad Tax Walkout](#), [Save Grad Ed](#), and graduate worker unions, will take to the streets to protest the House of Representatives proposal to eliminate a long standing tax exemption for tuition waivers. Organizers say the House proposal would dramatically increase taxable income, undermine the quality and competitiveness of US graduate programs and make graduate school unaffordable and less accessible to underrepresented communities.

The House passed its tax reform bill on November 16. The tuition waiver provision has received a great deal of attention with strong opposition from graduate students, their unions and universities. Elimination of this tax exemption could increase taxable income by as much as 400 percent for research and teaching assistants (RAs and TAs) at major universities across the US.

"This would be devastating, my taxable income would more than double," said Hannah Khoddam a PhD Candidate in Clinical Science, at the University of Southern California. "This exemption enables graduate students to afford to pursue a Ph.D. while providing high-quality education and research."

The tuition waiver exemption, which has existed for decades, enables universities to recruit the most talented promising academics from across the globe regardless of background or economic means. In exchange for a tuition waiver, which has never been counted as taxable income, and a small stipend, RAs and TAs provide critical service. At Columbia University, for example, TAs teach stand-alone courses and run small discussion and lab sections that enable thousands of undergraduates to access a quality education, while RAs work on a variety of path-breaking research projects that propel the University’s world-renowned research programs and help bring roughly \$1 billion per year in investment through grants and contracts from federal and other agencies.

“This short-sighted proposal would make graduate school unaffordable for all but the wealthy and undermine our universities’ ability to recruit the most talented researchers and teachers from across the globe,” said Colleen Baublitz, a PhD Student in Earth and Environmental Sciences and organizer with the Graduate Workers of Columbia - UAW Local 2110 at Columbia University. “The current leadership in Washington pushing this provision do not value affordable, accessible education or the tremendous social value of science. These are also the same leaders who hope to eliminate our right to form unions that give us a voice in our working conditions and a stronger political voice to advocate against destructive proposals like this one.”

Many out-of-state and international students will be forced out of their programs with uncompleted degrees due to the high taxes. In the Forbes article [“The GOP Tax Plan Will Destroy Graduate Education”](#), contributor Ethan

Seigel has called the tax provision a play to “... destroy higher education, to shift the tax burden onto the most educated rather than the most financially successful, and to disincentivize graduate school as a viable option for the majority of people who'd choose to pursue it otherwise.”

Background on Grad Tax Walkout and Save Higher Ed

On Nov 7, 2017, faced with the possibility of years of wasted money and effort, graduate students at Ohio State University (OSU) called an emergency meeting, gathering over 50 participants with only three hours' notice and formed an action committee called “Save Grad Ed.” In the subsequent days, the committee organized a march of several hundred people on the OSU campus and an occupation of House Representative Pat Tiberi's office. SaveGradEd simultaneously began organizing a national grassroots network of graduate students at universities to fight the tax bill, which initially took root in the Midwest and on the East Coast.

The [#GradTaxWalkout national campaign](#) started on November 15, 2017 following a meeting between students and faculty in the University of Southern California (USC) Clinical Psychology department. The movement began with six graduate students and has amassed to nearly 6,000 participants across the nation.

GradTaxWalkout joined forces with March for Science who supported the group with local organizer information from students all over the country, as well as the infrastructure to help other schools register their own walkouts/rallies. SaveGradEd and GradTaxWalkout joined forces with the support of March for Science to spread the word about this national movement, and rally against the proposed tax plan. A national Photo Campaign was initiated to illustrate the impact graduate student workers have on society.

Together the organizations are planning on nationwide walkout and rallies on Wednesday, November 29th to protest the tax bill. Event activities will include organizing phone banks to call representatives, grade-ins and blasting social media with Photo Campaigns. SaveGradEd and GradTaxWalkout also recognizes the GOP tax plan as not just an attack on higher education but on working people as a whole, giving huge tax breaks to the wealthy at the expense of students and low-wage workers. SaveGradEd and GradTaxWalkout demands not just that the tax plan be killed, but that a tax on the wealthy be instituted to fund education and state that this nationwide action is only the beginning of their efforts to fight for higher education. In addition, SaveGradEd and GradTaxWalkout call on labor and activist organizations to join the movement to fight and defeat Trump's tax plan.

SaveGradEd: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

GradTaxWalkout: [Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

