

## Tanden Neera

<https://www.americanprogress.org/about/staff/tanden-neera/bio/>

**President of the Center for American Progress, Counselor to the Center for American Progress Action Fund**

[High-resolution image](#)

**Expertise:** Health care, domestic policy

Neera Tanden is the President of the Center for American Progress and Counselor to the Center for American Progress Action Fund. Tanden has served in both the Obama and Clinton administrations, as well as presidential campaigns and think tanks. Most recently, Tanden served as the Chief Operating Officer for the Center, where she oversaw strategic planning, operations, and fundraising.

Tanden previously served as senior advisor for health reform at the Department of Health and Human Services, working on President Barack Obama's health reform team in the White House. In that role, she developed policies around reform and worked with Congress and stakeholders on particular provisions of the legislation.

Prior to that, Tanden was the director of domestic policy for the Obama-Biden presidential campaign, where she managed all domestic policy proposals. Tanden had also served as policy director for the Hillary Clinton presidential campaign, where she directed all policy work, ranging from domestic policy to the economy to foreign affairs, and managed day-to-day policy announcements. In that role, she also oversaw the debate preparation process for then-Sen. Clinton (D-NY).

Before the presidential campaign, Tanden was Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at CAP. Prior to that, she was one of the first senior staff members at the Center, joining as Senior Vice President for Domestic Policy when CAP first opened its doors. In between, Tanden was legislative director for Sen. Clinton, where she oversaw all policy and legislation in the Senate office. In 2000, she was Hillary Clinton's deputy campaign manager and issues director for her Senate campaign in New York. Tanden also served as associate director for domestic policy in the Clinton White House and senior policy advisor to the first lady.

Tanden has appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press," ABC's "This Week," CBS's "Face the Nation," "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," MSNBC, CNN, and Fox. She was named one of the "Most Influential Women in Washington" by *National Journal* and received the India Abroad Publisher's Award for Excellence in 2011. Tanden was recently included on Elle magazine's "Women in Washington Power List" and recognized as one of *Fortune* magazine's "Most Powerful Women in Politics." She received her bachelor of science from UCLA and her law degree from Yale Law School.

<http://www.rediff.com/news/report/neera-tanden-is-first-indian-american-to-head-major-washington-based-think-tank/20111025.htm>

[Rediff.com](#) » [News](#) » Neera Tanden is first Indian American to head major Washington-based think-tank

**Neera Tanden is first Indian American to head major Washington-based think-tank**

Last updated on: October 25, 2011 19:25 IST

## **Neera Tanden has been named as the first Indian-American head of a major Washington, DC-based think-tank, reports Aziz Haniffa**

Neera Tanden, 41, a former senior Obama administration official and an erstwhile close aide and confidante of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during her days as First Lady, US senator and then during her presidential campaign, will soon take over as president of the Center for American Progress, making her the first-ever Indian American to head up a major Washington, DC-based think-tank.

Tanden, who was a key protagonist in developing President Obama's healthcare reform proposals -- the Affordable Care Act -- during her tenure in the Obama administration, will succeed the founder and president of CAP, John Podesta, President Clinton's former chief of staff and the head of President Obama's transition team.

When Tanden takes over the helm on November 1, Podesta will remain at CAP as non-executive chairman of the board and as a sort of president emeritus of the progressive think-tank with over 250 policy analysts and researchers, many of whom served in the Clinton administration, and which has also served as a reservoir for many Obama administration appointees.

In an interview with [rediff.com](http://rediff.com), Tanden, currently chief operating officer at CAP, said, "My focus will be on creating policy solutions, not just for 2012, but for 2013 and 2020."

She said it was imperative that "progressives need to provide bolder solutions to the nation's problem. Clearly, there is a dissatisfaction with the limited debates in Washington."

Tanden said, "While CAP will remain engaged in the day to day fights, we must also ensure we're developing policy solutions on the nation's most pressing problem -- spurring economic growth now and for years to come, developing a national security strategy that fits the constrained budget we face, ensuring the American dream is alive and well for our children."

"Answering those bigger national challenges is what CAP is best at," she said, and added: "We have never been about just changing the conversation. We want to change the country for the better. And that will be my goad as well as president -- building on John Podesta's tremendous success."

Tanden noted that the "CAP has a unique role in Washington as a force for progressive policies and its impact has been felt on almost every progressive change that has come from Washington, and I am honoured by the faith place in me by the board to continue CAP's record of success."

She acknowledged that the 2012 president election "will be a critical time for the country as it faces a stark choice of two different visions for the country."

"One vision will expand opportunity for all Americans, the other vision will contract it so America becomes more of a place between the haves and have-nots," she said. "It's clear what side will CAP be on."

Tanden reiterated that "while we work on bigger, longer term policy solutions, we will not lose sight of the important fights of the day. We will continue to engage conservative policy-makers -- whether they are presidential candidates or members of congress or advocates -- critiquing their policy solutions and exposing their limited vision for our country."

On her creating history by becoming the first Indian-American and also the first second-generation Indian American born and raised in the US to take the helm of a major think-tank, Tanden acknowledged, "As an Indian American woman, I do not fit the traditional notion of a head of an organisation."

"And that is why, this is also a tribute to how much progress our country has made," she said, and pointed out, "The fact that an Indian woman who was on welfare as a child can rise to this role says less about me and more about America, our policies, the value we place on giving everyone a shot at making a difference."

This was why, Tanden said, "It is so important to me that CAP itself work on ensuring opportunity for all Americans."

When her father left her mother and her when Tanden was just five, they sunk into abject poverty and had to sustain themselves as welfare recipients.

She managed to remain in the public schools in the affluent Boston, Massachusetts, suburb of Bedford, thanks to a programme that offered faster building permits to developers to included low-income housing units in their developments.

Tanden then went on to gain admission to the University of California, Los Angeles, from where she received her bachelor of science degree and then on to Yale Law School from where she received her JD.

Gene Sperling, director of President Obama's National Economic Council said, "She is highly skilled at how to make as big an impact on the direction of progressive policy from outside the government as inside the government."

Before she joined her former boss then Senator Clinton's presidential campaign as her confidante and adviser with the title of policy director, Tanden worked at CAP as a senior vice president for academic affairs.

After Clinton lost her bid for the Democratic nomination to Barack Obama and advised all of her top aides to join the Obama campaign, Tanden jumped on board the Obama campaign bandwagon as domestic policy director and on Obama being elected president, found herself being offered a job to be a top health care adviser in the new administration.

At the time Tanden joined CAP after a year in the Obama administration for a position especially created for her as COO, Podesta, in announcing her appointment, said, "When CAP existed only on paper, Neera had a vision and great instincts for how a serious idea-based institution could play an important role shaping the national debate and the policy that it yielded."

He said, "Her early leadership helped lay the foundation for making CAP the strong institution it is today. But we are not standing still. We are thrilled to have Neera back on board, assuming a central management role, as American Progress enters the next phase of its continuing growth, maturity and evolution."

Aziz Haniffa in Washington, DC

<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/04/nyregion/public-lives-the-wonk-er-woman-behind-mrs-clinton.html>

**NEW YORK TIMES**

**PUBLIC LIVES; The Wonk, er, Woman Behind Mrs. Clinton**

*By JOYCE WADLER*

*Published: October 4, 2000*

•

THERE is, among the grubby temp offices and junk-food cartons of every campaign, the smart kid, a k a the policy wonk, and if you think she's going to go into detail about her job, telling how hard she worked to make sure the candidate knew the stats and the issues, recalling the time she saved the candidate by catching this error or that in a speech, forget it. That would not be smart.

Study, if you will, the examples of proper policy-wonk-speak from Neera Tanden, the policy director and deputy campaign manager for Hillary Rodham Clinton:

"When we first started, I used to do a lot of work getting her up to speed on issues, but she's a really knowledgeable person."

"The debate prep requires a lot more work for her, getting her ready, though I have to say, she knows so much, so much."

"I keep a lot of facts and figures about what's happening in the state, but it's always a humbling experience. She's exceedingly well versed."

How smart is the smart kid in Hillary Clinton's Senate bid?

From all appearances -- including a law degree from Yale -- very.

It was Ms. Tanden, signing on with the exploratory committee in July 1999, who moved to New York from the White House and worked with Mrs. Clinton, researching and developing policies. She was 29.

It was Ms. Tanden -- with, she wants you to know, her staff of six -- who challenged Rick A. Lazio's first major policy proposal, a tax-reduction plan, in August. In two hours Ms. Tanden prepared a detailed financial response. Finding the facts and figures to defend her candidate's position is a large part of her work.

Watching Ms. Tanden in action at the Hillary 2000 headquarters on 34th Street is not permitted.

But you can accompany Ms. Tanden, informal, fast-talking, connected to her cell phone as to a body part, across the street to the restaurant she frequents these days, the cafeteria in Macy's basement. She works 7 days a week, 12 hours a day. Her husband hates her work, Ms. Tanden allows in an unguarded moment. She makes a quick, politic adjustment: he doesn't hate the work; he hates the way she brings the work home, the stress.

Stress is a word you hear a lot from Ms. Tanden. She was speaking to the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison about a job when she signed on with Mrs. Clinton; maybe that would have been less stress, she says.

Does she mind being called a policy wonk? "I'm pretty wonky," she says. "I'm wonky because I know about the Section 1115 waiver, I know they help community health centers. New York State pioneered community health centers. At the White House I felt like I was politically inclined for a policy person; on the campaign I feel I'm more wonky."

Explain the difference.

"A wonky person cares about the policy and how it affects people, regardless of the politics."

As for how the wonk became a wonk, she's got a ready answer:

MS. TANDEN was born in the affluent community of Bedford, Mass. Her parents, who immigrated from India, had an arranged marriage. ("It tells you something about arranged marriages, because they got divorced when I was 5.") Ms. Tanden's mother, on her own with two small children, went on welfare after the divorce. The family received food stamps and, as Ms. Tanden puts it, "we had Section 8 vouchers for our housing."

"The reason I'm so active in politics -- literally the reason I've devoted so much time to politics and public service -- is because of my background," Ms. Tanden says. "I personally feel that if I didn't have the good public schools of Bedford, I wouldn't be the person I am today. My mother was on welfare for a couple of years, then she got a job as a travel agent. Finally, years later, scrimping and saving, she was able to buy a house. I know it sounds totally corny, but she really instilled in me a great deal of, y'know, sort of a desire to serve. The Democratic Party, the policies that the Clintons and Hillary believe in, I feel like a living example of someone who benefited."

Ms. Tanden went to the University of California in Los Angeles and became involved in politics on the Dukakis campaign, where she met her husband, Ben Edwards, an artist. After graduating from Yale Law School in 1996, she worked on the Clinton-Gore presidential campaign in

California. She went to the White House, first in the press department, then as an aide in the domestic policy office. In the wake of the Columbine massacre, she worked closely with Mrs. Clinton on school safety issues. "I think after that she saw I could handle stress."

There is one subject Ms. Tanden insists she never researched for the campaign: Mrs. Clinton's lack of popularity, for a time, among educated women.

"I'm happy it's turned around," Ms. Tanden says. "It's always been surprising to me. If she met everybody, they would have a totally different impression."

She herself has a very fond memory: Mrs. Clinton gave her a wedding shower at the White House.

"My mother was there," Ms. Tanden says. She stumbles over her words a little, emotion making bumps in syntax, even for a wonk. "She, as an immigrant, with me first-generation and working there, she was ecstatic to come to the White House."