



**THE  
ILLUSIONISTS**  
**MESSAGING  
PLAYBOOK**

February 2026

## MESSAGING PLAYBOOK: THE ILLUSIONISTS

“The Illusionists” is a campaign that pulls back the curtain on credit union behavior — exposing their misdirection and making it clear that community benefits and tax revenue go up in smoke when big credit unions come to town. This concept lets us expose their sleight of hand in a digestible and memorable way, revealing their trick and holding credit unions accountable.

The Independent Community Bankers of America launched The Illusionists campaign to provide community bankers and state associations with a strong, unified framework for elevating this issue at the local level. We encourage you to leverage this guidance to help best communicate the danger credit union acquisitions of community banks pose in your community. This can be done through advertising, social media, talking points, political outreach, and any other channel you think would be helpful. To support your efforts, we’ve included ready-to-use messaging, sample social media content, and a draft letter to the editor (LTE) that you can customize for your local area and audience.

## MESSAGING FRAMEWORK

### TOPLINE

#### **When Credit Unions Come to Town, They Put on Quite a Show.**

- Big credit unions have perfected their act: while presenting themselves as community champions, they quietly make accountability, tax fairness, and consumer choice disappear.
- Behind their tricks, sleights of hand and artful escapes are loopholes and perks that leave families and communities paying the price.

### MESSAGING PILLAR #1: THE ESCAPE ARTIST

#### **“They wriggle out. Consumers pay the price.”**

- Credit unions dodge oversight and taxes like seasoned escape artists — leaving consumers and communities paying the price.
- Our country’s credit unions do not pay federal taxes and use excess capital to acquire small, community banks at artificially inflated prices.

- ICBA data show credit union acquisitions have nearly tripled, rising from approximately 5 per year in the 2010s to 14 per year in the 2020s, and hitting a record 22 deals in 2024.
- These deals are overwhelmingly driven by the largest players: 82% of community-bank acquisitions since 2010 were executed by credit unions with more than \$1B in assets.
- As a result, there is diminished lending, reduced opportunities for small businesses, and fewer resources for the high-poverty areas that Congress subsidizes credit unions to serve.

## MESSAGING PILLAR #2: THE LOOPHOLE TRICK

### “Watch how the rules vanish.”

- While small businesses and families play by the rules, credit unions slip through tax loopholes without anyone noticing. The cost? Communities lose.
- If the country’s largest credit unions were taxed at the same rate as community banks, they would have contributed \$2.6 billion last year, enough to fund K-12 education for 168,000+ students, Medicaid for 226,000+ low-income adults, or paychecks for 36,000+ public school teachers.

## MESSAGING PILLAR #3: A HARMFUL SLEIGHT OF HAND

### “This isn’t just harmless magic, but deliberate misdirection.”

- With polished messaging and community-friendly branding, credit unions distract from what’s really happening—consumer choices and benefits are suddenly gone.
- In areas where credit unions acquired community banks, mortgage denial rates increased 61%.
- U.S. mortgage denial rates for African American applicants are consistently 10 points higher at credit unions than at banks.
- On the small business front, 79% of communities saw SBA lending decrease after a credit union takeover

## MESSAGING PILLAR #4: SMOKE & MIRRORS

### “Don’t be fooled by their show.”

- Big credit unions put on an act of being community-focused — but behind the curtain, accountability and fairness disappear.

- Credit unions do not have to comply with the Community Reinvestment Act.
- Today, less than 10% of credit unions are located in economically distressed communities, and only 13% are in low- and moderate-income areas combined.
- The CRA drives nearly \$1.9 trillion in housing, economic development, and small business investment.
- When credit unions gobble up CRA complying institutions, communities lose out on these investments.

## DRAFT SOCIAL MEDIA

These draft posts are meant as a starting point. Update the language, tone, and local details to match your voice and audience.

### LINKEDIN & FACEBOOK (NATIONAL)

When credit unions come to town, they put on quite a show.

Big credit unions present themselves as community champions — but behind the curtain, accountability, tax fairness, and consumer choice can disappear.

Credit union takeovers of community banks can:

- Reduce competition and limit access to financial services
- Undermine local lending decisions that communities rely on
- Exploit a tax subsidy that was never intended to fuel acquisitions

Learn more and take action: [\[LINK\]](#)

### LINKEDIN & FACEBOOK (STATE)

In **[STATE]**, community investment shouldn't just disappear thanks to carefully crafted misdirection.

Community banks are held accountable under the Community Reinvestment Act — credit unions are not.

When credit unions acquire community banks, communities risk losing the investments that the CRA helps drive in housing, small business growth, and economic development.

Call or write your member of Congress to stop **[ACQUISITION / LEGISLATION]**.

## X / TWITTER (NATIONAL)

When credit unions come to town, they put on quite a show. Behind the curtain: accountability, tax fairness, & consumer choice disappear.

Learn more + take action: **[LINK]**

## X / TWITTER (STATE)

Big credit unions are expanding in **[STATE]** — and community banks are disappearing.

Smoke & mirrors hide the truth: consumers lose choice and communities lose accountability.