

PROTECT THE JOHNSON AMENDMENT

Current law protects all tax-exempt organizations, including houses of worship, by ensuring they do not endorse or oppose candidates. The law shields these organizations from being transformed into partisan campaign operations or a way to funnel money to political candidates.

Current Law Protects the Integrity and Independence of Houses of Worship

Houses of worship minister to their congregants and communities and speak out on issues of justice and morality, but stay above the fray of campaigns for political office. Changing the law would fundamentally change their character and diminish their distinctive role.

Individuals, corporations, and partisan groups could offer large donations to congregations and then demand they take a position on a candidate, transforming houses of worship into conduits for political activity and expenditures. And after they make an endorsement, houses of worship could feel pressure to refrain from speaking out on issues of the day if that would conflict with a candidate's positions.

Becoming enmeshed in the campaign process could also divide congregants along political lines and set houses of worship against each other.

Houses of Worship Can Already Engage in the Political Process

Under current law, faith leaders and houses of worship can preach or speak out on any political or social issue or on legislation. For example, houses of worship can speak out on political or social issues. For instance, houses of worship can take positions on issues of concern, lobby on legislation and endorse or oppose non-partisan referendum; host candidate forums and distribute answers to candidate questionnaires; and encourage people to vote, including through voter registration drives, and driving people to the polls.

In addition, faith leaders can endorse or even become candidates when they do so in their personal capacity and not on behalf of their congregations.

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Current Law Protects the Integrity of All Tax-Exempt Organizations

The government grants organizations tax-exempt status in order to encourage them to carry out charitable work. Repealing the Johnson Amendment would turn charities into political campaign operations, decreasing the amount of time and resources dedicated to good works and eroding the public's trust in all non-profits.

Our current tax code is designed to incentivize donations to organizations that serve the community. Changing current law would instead incentivize donations to organizations to support political candidates. Current law would instead incentivize donations to organizations to support political candidates.

Current Law Protects Taxpayers

Repeal of the Johnson Amendment would result in taxpayers subsidizing political campaigns rather than nonpartisan charity work.

Current Law Protects the Integrity of Our Election System

Repeal of the Johnson Amendment would allow partisan campaign operatives to anonymously funnel unlimited campaign funds through houses of worship and other tax-exempt organizations, essentially transforming charitable organizations into super PACs.

The Vast Majority of Americans Support Current Law

A poll conducted in March 2017 by Independent Sector¹ found that 72% of voters want to keep the Johnson Amendment in place.

A March 2017 poll by PRRI,² which also looked at religious affiliation of those polled, found "more than seven in ten (71%) Americans oppose allowing churches and places of worship to endorse political candidates while retaining their tax-exempt status, compared to only 22% who favor such a policy." It found that sixty-two percent of Republicans and fifty-six percent of white evangelical Protestants also support current law.

¹ <http://independentsector.org/resource/poll-americans-support-keeping-amendment/>

² <https://www.prrri.org/research/lgbt-transgender-bathroom-discrimination-religious-liberty/>