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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

CHRIS CAMPBELL, STAFF DIRECTOR
JOSHUA SHEINKMAN, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

May 3, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Orrin Hatch
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman, Senate Homeland Security and
Government Affairs Committee
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin Brady
Chairman, Ways and Means Committee
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman, House Oversight and
Government Reform Committee
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Chairman Hatch, Chairman Johnson, Chairman Brady, and Chairman Chaffetz:

We write today to strongly urge that you not act to politicize our nation's charities in tax reform or any other legislation. In recent weeks our offices have received requests from nearly 4,500 charitable organizations including 100 faith groups expressing their strong opposition to any proposal that would politicize and undermine the charitable, nonprofit, and philanthropic community by repealing or weakening current protections in federal law that prohibit charitable organizations from endorsing, opposing, or contributing to political campaigns. This letter seeks to echo and amplify these requests from our nation's charities.

Nonpartisanship is the cornerstone of Americans' trust in the charitable sector. For more than 60 years the rules prohibiting political activity by charities have guaranteed the public that their valuable charitable donations will be used for social good, not political electioneering. Feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, ministering to the spirit, and other critical community services provided by the charitable sector are not partisan issues. However, if even a few charitable organizations violate this principle, it would undermine the credibility of our food banks, homeless shelters, religious institutions, and other critical charitable organizations in our communities. Moreover, a repeal of these safeguards would force legitimate charities to compete with special interest political groups for limited charitable donations.

America's charities also serve as partners to federal and state governments, efficiently delivering social services to communities via competitive grants. According to the most recent data, charities receive approximately \$137 billion annually from government agencies to help fund their important missions.

The prohibition against political campaign activity by charities ensures grant recipients are free from political conflicts of interest. These grant programs and the services provided by charitable organizations in our communities are too important to risk by subjecting them to partisan campaign politics.

Proposals to weaken the prohibition on political campaign activity by charities will effectively lead to the elimination of our nation's campaign finance laws. Using charitable causes as shell companies to evade campaign finance transparency and contribution limits would increase the flow of dark money in politics. At the same time, it would force taxpayers to foot the bill for special interests. Hardworking Americans simply should not be required to subsidize the political spending for our country's powerful few.

As Congress looks toward tax reform and other legislation this year, we hope you will keep in mind the credibility and independence of the charities that serve our communities. As such, we strongly request you not act to undermine that independence or the critical programs these charities provide.

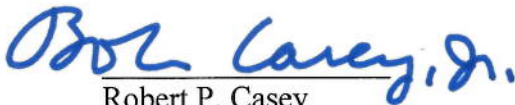
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey
United States Senator