

March 30, 2017

Dear Members of Congress representing Californians,

The California Council of Churches IMPACT and the California Association of Nonprofits (CalNonprofits) strongly oppose proposals by President Trump and some members of Congress that would politicize charitable religious and nonprofits by repealing or weakening current federal tax law protections that draw clear lines between nonprofits and electioneering, sometimes called the Johnson Amendment. President Trump has vowed to “destroy” the Johnson Amendment, and several bills have been introduced in Congress that would weaken or completely repeal these protections.

The [Johnson Amendment](#) (after then-Senator Lyndon Johnson who introduced it) prohibits 501(c)(3) nonprofits, including churches and other congregations, from endorsing or opposing candidates for office and from any other partisan activity. It was passed in 1954 by a Republican Congress and signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a Republican.

Currently, for instance, churches and nonprofits can register voters, but must allow people to register for whichever party (or no party) they wish. We can take positions on propositions, but cannot, for instance, endorse any candidate for any office.

While the [Sacramento Bee notes](#) that some religious conservatives have wanted pastors to be allowed to endorse candidates, polls show that 80% of Americans think it is inappropriate for pastors to endorse candidates from the pulpit.

In the words of the California Council of Churches IMPACT’s Executive Director Rev. Dr. Rick Schlosser: “Moral leadership on issues is fine. It’s also lawful. But engaging in partisanship from the pulpit in the name of a denomination or church renders the church a likely target of campaign cash and political pressure to earn that cash. Independence from partisan alliances is the only sure way to keep the nonprofit’s freedom and authenticity.”

In other words, although the Johnson Amendment might appear to be a restriction on nonprofits and churches, it actually protects them from pressure to support political parties and candidates. A repeal would allow individuals to pass their political contributions through churches and nonprofits and obtain tax deductions for supporting a political party (currently donations to political parties are not tax-deductible). We would be pressured by donors and politicians to abandon nonpartisanship and endorse candidates for political offices. We would lose our legal and actual stance as entities that benefit the public, not someone running for office.

Our CEO Jan Masaoka states: “Churches and nonprofits are trusted in part because we are resolutely nonpartisan. Those who support our work rely on us to use their donations to help our communities, not engage in electioneering. These proposals would benefit politicians and paid political operatives, not the people and communities we exist as nonprofits to serve.”

California's economic and civic wellbeing is enhanced by the contributions of our nonprofits, churches and other congregations. Together the California Council of Churches IMPACT and the California Association of Nonprofits have more than 10,000 members who work to

strengthen the communities that you as elected officials represent. Help protect us from dark money pressures so that we can continue our service to these communities and the people who live in them.

For more information or to discuss this further, please contact Nancy Berlin at CalNonprofits at (213) 500-2274 or Elizabeth Sholes at California Council of Churches IMPACT at (916) 716-4525.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Alan Jones in black ink.

The Rev. Dr. Alan Jones
President, California Council of Churches
Senior Pastor, St. Mark's United Methodist
Church Sacramento

Handwritten signature of Geoff Green in black ink.

Geoff Green
Board Chair, CalNonprofits
Executive Director, Santa Barbara City
College Foundation