Nonpartisanship protects the integrity and independence of charitable nonprofits, houses of worship, and foundations. The tax law, sometimes called the Johnson Amendment, shields the entire 501(c)(3) community from the rancor of partisan politics and enables individuals of all beliefs to come together to solve community problems free from partisan divisions. The broad charitable nonprofit and foundation communities are united in calling on Congress to oppose any effort to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment.

The Issue: Proposals in Congress would repeal or significantly weaken the final clause of Section 501(c)(3) (known as the Johnson Amendment), which provides that in exchange for tax-exempt status and the ability to receive tax-deductible contributions, a charitable nonprofit, religious organization, or foundation may “not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.” For 60+ years, that provision has been a valuable protection that keeps charitable nonprofits, religious institutions, and foundations focused on their missions rather than diverting their time, money, and other resources to engage in partisan electioneering.

The Consequences: If enacted, the legislative proposals would politicize charitable nonprofits, houses of worship, and foundations, plunging them into the caustic partisanship that bedevils our country. It would hurt the public and damage the capacity of organizations in a wide variety of ways, including this sampling:

- Erosion of public trust as organizations become known as Democratic charities or Republican charities.
- Insistence on endorsements by candidates and their operatives when “no” no longer means no.
- Donors “buying” endorsements from charitable nonprofits for favored candidates for public office.
- Diversion of resources from mission as pressure is applied to 501(c)(3) organizations to redirect charitable resources (money, staff time, facilities, member lists – as well as their brand value) to partisan political campaigns.
- Pressure on nonprofits when foundations endorse candidates and let donees know.
- Board turmoil when members or donors insist on endorsement of family members, business colleagues, friends. Politics supplant mission!

The Proposed Change Is Not Needed: Nonprofits – and their individual leaders – already have tremendous free speech protection under existing law. Charitable nonprofits, houses of worship, and foundations, are allowed to advocate on policy issues relevant to their missions and the people they serve. Religious leaders can legally preach on moral and policy issues such as abortion, immigration, social justice, and religious liberty. In their personal capacity, nonprofit board members, volunteers, and staff – including clergy – can freely speak out on partisan issues, make campaign contributions, and even run for office. They just cannot carry out these partisan, election-related activities on behalf of the 501(c)(3) organizations with which they are associated.

What the Public Thinks: The vast majority of Americans and charitable nonprofits, houses of worship, and foundations firmly believe that 501(c)(3) organizations should remain dedicated solely to the public good and should stay away from raw partisan politics:

- A poll conducted in March 2017 found that nearly three out of four American voters (72 percent) want to keep current rules protecting 501(c)(3) organizations from partisan political activity. A separate survey conducted in February by the National Association of Evangelicals found that 89 percent of pastors oppose the idea of clergy mixing partisan politics and religion by endorsing candidates from the pulpit. These results are consistent with numerous polls conducted over several years.
- Almost 100 national and state religious and denominational organizations wrote in a letter to Congress stressing: “People of faith do not want partisan political fights infiltrating their houses of worship. Houses of worship are spaces for members of religious communities to come together, not be divided along political lines; faith ought to be a source of connection and community, not division and discord.”
- The Community Letter in Support of Nonprofit Nonpartisanship, signed by more than 4,700 charitable, religious, and philanthropic organizations from all 50 states, strongly opposes proposals to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. (To see the organizations that signed, visit www.GiveVoice.org.)

For more information, contact Danielle Clore, danielle@kynonprofits.org.

* * *

Proud member
KENTUCKY VIEWS

The obstruction to Keystone harmed environment

President Trump did something good for the environment last week. He approved the Keystone XL pipeline.

Many environmentalists will take exception to that, but I won't. The environmental movement has done more harm than good. Its pipeline place symbolism ahead of reality.

The pipeline will extend 1,776 miles from Alberta, Canada, to an existing pipeline hub in Nebraska. This ink will transport 900,000 barrels of crude oil a day from Canada to heavy-oil refineries on the Gulf Coast.

Environmentalists oppose the project largely because of the source of the Canadian crude. It comes from "oil sands," Enbridge Inc. calls it "heavy crude." They assert that these non-conventional extraction methods produce up to 17 percent more greenhouse gases that traditional oil production. They argue that building the pipeline will result in further development of the oil sands.

Former President Barack Obama's own State Department rejected the idea in two separate assessments, including most recently in 2015. Specifically the agency found that the Canadian oil sands will continue to be developed regardless of whether Keystone is built.

The delay of the pipeline meant more of the product was moved by rail — a method that is both dangerous and inefficient relative to pipeline transport. Loading the oil onto thousands of trains and hauling it thousands of miles obviously has its own significant environmental footprint and a needless one at that.

A recent study published in the Canadian National Energy Board's "The Impact of the Keystone XL Pipeline on the Environment" shows that the delay of the pipeline has had a significant impact on the overall carbon footprint.

Oil sands are the major source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada. They are also the major contributor to climate change in Canada. By delaying the pipeline, the study shows, the country is increasing its carbon footprint.

Obama tied the Keystone project to red tape for virtually every bit of his presidency. In addition to lost Keystone sales, the move angered labor unions whose members are hosts to the pipeline. It was a significant issue with unions and many members joined the Democratic ticket and voted for Trump in 2016.

It is hard to parse how the environmental movement reconciles its anti-pipeline stand with the many devastating and disruptive spills that occurred in Canada and the U.S., not to mention diesel emissions from the thousands of trains that haul oil, while Keystoners are aware of the harm the oil sands pipeline can do. Is it justifiable for the environmental movement to ignore the impact of pipeline spills on waterways and wildlife?

The current opposition to the pipeline is not based on the merits of the project. It is based on fear and misinformation. It is a perversion of the environmental movement.

The first amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right to free speech. It is our duty as citizens to use this right to speak out against harmful policies. If we do not use our voice, we are complicit in the harm that results from our silence.

In conclusion, the Keystone XL pipeline is a necessary part of our energy future. It will help reduce our dependence on foreign oil and provide a reliable source of energy for our nation. It is time to support this project and move forward with confidence in its benefits.

GUEST COLUMN

Politicians should look elsewhere for endorsements campaign contributions

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. For more than 60 years, the Johnson Amendment has successfully protected the charities serving you, me and our communities as a safe place free to advance our missions without the revenue of partisan politics.

The law was proposed by Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson and signed into law by President Eisenhower in 1964, prohibiting churches and other charitable nonprofit foundations from endorsing political candidates.

In Congress and the Trump administration are working to weaken or remove the protections in this law. This change would allow donors to endorse political candidates from the pulpit, but we support the protection.

It is essential to protect the integrity of the charitable sector by removing political disadvantages that could result in decreased giving, diminished support for the causes we care about, and ultimately for the good of our communities.

It is time for politicians to look elsewhere for campaign contributions.

Danielle Care

OPINION

Being hurt is better than being irrelevant

By now, Kentucky basketball fans have had time to process being on the losing end of another tournament shot.

There were many factors that contributed to the loss, but one stands out: the lack of a local hero to lean on when it counts. In Kentucky, we have had our share of heroines, but none of them have the same level of drive and dedication as the players who have made it to the Final Four.

In 1992, Kentucky basketball fans were elated when the Wildcats reached the national championship game. This time around, the feeling is quite different. Even though the Wildcats are the favorite to win, the pressure is real.

For many fans, the pressure is real. They want to see the team succeed, but they also understand that success can be fleeting. They know that Kentucky basketball can be a rollercoaster ride, with highs and lows.

Small Victories

Jesse Jones

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to free speech, which includes the right to support political candidates. This right is essential to a healthy democracy.

It is critical that this right be protected and not weakened by the current administration. The Johnson Amendment is a necessary safeguard against the misuse of charitable donations for political purposes.

We must support this law and push for its preservation.

Danielle Care

MAIL: 210 E. 6th St., Suite 210, Lexington, KY 40507
DANIELLE.CARE@PRESIDENTIALPOLICY.ORG
PHONE: 859.625.2055
FAX: 859.625.2035

OPINION PAGE

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017 | PAGE 14

© 2017 By The Lexington Herald-Leader. All rights reserved.
Reproduction of any part of this newspaper without permission is prohibited.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to free speech, which includes the right to support political candidates. This right is essential to a healthy democracy.

It is critical that this right be protected and not weakened by the current administration. The Johnson Amendment is a necessary safeguard against the misuse of charitable donations for political purposes.

We must support this law and push for its preservation.

Danielle Care

MAIL: 210 E. 6th St., Suite 210, Lexington, KY 40507
DANIELLE.CARE@PRESIDENTIALPOLICY.ORG
PHONE: 859.625.2055
FAX: 859.625.2035

OPINION PAGE

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017 | PAGE 14

© 2017 By The Lexington Herald-Leader. All rights reserved.
Reproduction of any part of this newspaper without permission is prohibited.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right to free speech, which includes the right to support political candidates. This right is essential to a healthy democracy.

It is critical that this right be protected and not weakened by the current administration. The Johnson Amendment is a necessary safeguard against the misuse of charitable donations for political purposes.

We must support this law and push for its preservation.

Danielle Care

MAIL: 210 E. 6th St., Suite 210, Lexington, KY 40507
DANIELLE.CARE@PRESIDENTIALPOLICY.ORG
PHONE: 859.625.2055
FAX: 859.625.2035

OPINION PAGE

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017 | PAGE 14

© 2017 By The Lexington Herald-Leader. All rights reserved.
Reproduction of any part of this newspaper without permission is prohibited.