

Rep. Jody Hice Will Explain How Pastors' Cultural Voice Can Be Restored

U.S. Rep. Jody Hice (R-Ga.) will speak at noon EDT Tuesday at Family Research Council headquarters in Washington, D.C., about the importance of the Free Speech Fairness Act, a bill he co-authored with Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.).

The speech will be live streamed via the FRC website. The organization stressed the importance of the bill in a press release announcing the speech:

The Free Speech Fairness Act is a bill that restores free speech and religious liberty to churches and other nonprofits by allowing them to make political statements, so long as they are 1. made in the ordinary course of the organization's regular and customary activities in carrying out its exempt purpose, and 2. any expenditures related to this are *de minimis*. For example, the bill ensures that a minister can make comments about a political candidate or issue as part of a sermon. Additionally, if a charity normally sends out a monthly newsletter related to its core purpose, the bill allows them to occasionally include comments on political issues, or candidates. They would not, however, be allowed to create an entirely new direct mail campaign solely for political information. The bill does not allow non-profit organizations or churches to engage in political activities outside the normal scope of their tax-exempt work or contribute to political activities or candidates.

This bill is needed because America was built on the principle that free speech and free exercise of religion are unalienable rights. Americans do not give up their right to

speech when they go to work for a church or nonprofit. Yet, that is legal state of affairs under the “Johnson Amendment.” It puts the IRS in the position of judge and jury on comments made by ministers from the pulpit and all speech from nonprofits. Given the IRS’ egregious abuses in recent years, this IRS power is most concerning. The existence of the Johnson amendment has resulted in a silencing of churches and nonprofits. Even without direct action by the IRS, the law creates a chilling effect on speech, especially for religious institutions. Groups like Americans for Separation of Church and State regularly send threatening letters to pastors filled with warnings.

Hice is an ordained Southern Baptist minister with a Master’s degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as well as a Doctor of Ministry from Luther Rice Seminary. Prior to joining the House of Representatives from Georgia’s 10th Congressional District, he was a talk radio host.

He was among the 33 pastors to participate in the first-ever Pulpit Freedom Sunday in 2008, which protests the so-called “Johnson Amendment.”

FRC President Tony Perkins has also been urging Christians to contact their elected representatives to convince them to support the measure, which President Donald Trump has said he would sign into law. In a recent email to supporters, Perkins wrote:

Imagine if radicals rewrote the U.S. Constitution to guarantee free speech except for churches and ministries?

Imagine if the IRS had the power to financially cripple pastors, churches and ministries for speaking out on spiritually important issues just because they touched “politics”?

Imagine if America’s pastors were silenced on vital issues affecting the spiritual health of their congregations and

communities because of threats of IRS audits and loss of tax exemptions?

Sadly, you don't have to imagine. All these things are true ...

Ministers today are afraid to speak out for fear of IRS agents punishing their churches or ministries by using the notorious "Johnson Amendment" in the U.S. Tax Code. This 1954 statute allows the IRS to barge in and potentially punish pastors, churches, and nonprofit ministries if they speak out on issues related to candidates and elections.

Click [here](#) to register for the livestream of Hice's speech.
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