

Tony Perkins: We Must Stop the IRS From Punishing Free Speech

The Republican-led Congress, despite campaigning on a promise to repeal the so-called Johnson Amendment, has yet to send a bill to President Donald Trump to actually do away with the law that allows the IRS to target churches and pastors who speak out and engage politically.

Family Research Council President Tony Perkins sent out an action alert reminder to supporters that explains what is at stake:

Most nonprofit organizations have a purpose. For example, one of FRC's purposes is to advance issues like religious freedom. It follows that as we communicate with people like you about the issues, we should also be able to speak about and endorse political candidates who share our values and purpose. This is the meaning of free speech.

The same is true for other nonprofits, including churches. Whether a person wants his church to endorse or oppose political candidates is a separate question, but it should not be a question about whether or not a church has the constitutional right to do so. That right has essentially been taken away by the so-called Johnson Amendment of 1954.

The Johnson Amendment says that tax-exempt organizations cannot participate in, or intervene in, any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. It was introduced by Lyndon Johnson in 1954 after a tough reelection to the Senate, where a tax-exempt organization worked to defeat him. The measure was passed by being hidden in a larger tax package. In fact, the Johnson Amendment was passed without any debate or hearings about

its implications for churches, charities, and their leaders.

Last month, FRC worked with House Majority Whip Steve Scalise (R-La.), Representative Jody Hice (R-Ga.) and Senator James Lankford (R-Okla.), who introduced the Free Speech Fairness Act of 2017 (H.R. 781. S. 264) to roll back the Johnson Amendment. A nonprofit organization should not lose its tax-exempt status or be threatened with audits because it exercises its constitutional right to speak in favor of political candidates who share the organization's values and mission.

Now that the Free Speech Fairness Act has been introduced, we need you to urge your senators and representative to co-sponsor the bill. Once the Free Speech Fairness Act is passed, pastors' and organizational leaders' constitutional right to free speech will be restored. Urge your senators and representative to co-sponsor this important legislation.
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