

Protect Nonprofit Nonpartisanship

Statement issued by The Foraker Group, March 21, 2017

Partisan politics has no place in the important work carried out every day by thousands of charitable Alaska nonprofits. The charitable sector at its core brings people together to advance causes and create change throughout Alaska and our nation. People who believe in an issue – regardless of their culture, background, nationality, political leanings, or any other factor – unite to support a cause through giving, volunteering, and engagement. We come together, often across political party lines, to support the issues and the causes that matter to us. This system works.

Dismantling that system and allowing partisan politics to enter into our mission-based work in the form of supporting or opposing those seeking public office will only make it harder, if not impossible, to meet our collective missions.

Our ability as nonprofit leaders to stay above the political fray is being threatened at the national level through proposed elimination of the so-called Johnson Amendment. Since the 1950s, the Johnson Amendment has existed as a provision in the U.S. tax code to prohibit charitable nonprofits from engaging in political activity, which broadly translates to supporting or opposing candidates running for and those elected to public office. The Johnson Amendment is not just a prohibition for charitable nonprofits – it offers protection for charitable nonprofits, religious congregations and foundations from those who seek political endorsements and donations to campaigns.

As Alaska's Nonprofit Association, we urge all nonprofit leaders in the state to join with The Foraker Group to notify the President and Alaska's Congressional delegation to oppose proposed federal legislation that will politicize charitable nonprofits, religious congregations, and foundations.

The unfortunate reality is that elimination of the Johnson Amendment from the U.S. Tax Code is not theoretical; it is a real possibility, with strong statements from the President and the introduction of legislation in the U.S. Congress. We encourage you to reflect on the negative impact that "politicizing" the charitable nonprofit sector will have on your organizations and the potential impacts it will have on the sector as we know it.

What is at stake is the high level of trust donors, staff, volunteers, and board members have in charitable nonprofits. What is at stake is your ability to effectively partner in pursuit of mission success based on finding community solutions instead of being influenced by political expediency.

In very real terms, the current legislation (S. 264 in the Senate and H.R. 781 and H.R. 172 in the House) would politicize the sector, subjecting nonprofits and foundations to demands for campaign contributions (thereby diverting donors' money away from mission-related work to benefit politicians). Not only would repeal damage public trust in the work of nonprofits, it would threaten the impartiality and independence of our sector and our requirement, as written in statute, to "do good" – both of which are valued by nonprofits. It is important to remember that the voting public

has greater trust in American charities than in political parties or any one politician. (See *United for Charity* from Independent Sector, 2016.)

Imagine a day when the line between politics and charitable work becomes so blurred that charitable nonprofits and religious institutions are actively engaged in encouraging people to vote for or against a particular candidate for public office. We do not want to see this day in Alaska or in our nation.

We feel strongly that the repeal of the Johnson Amendment is completely unnecessary. Nonprofits and their individual staff, board members, and volunteers already have many legal avenues to freely express their views on a wide range of policy issues. Indeed, Foraker encourages charitable nonprofits to discuss and push for positive change in public policy through specific legislation and regulatory activity that is mission-focused – that’s just a natural part of the job of nonprofit boards and executive leaders. However, moving from engaging in advocacy for positive change to endorsing political candidates crosses a boundary that we believe is dangerous and we can’t support.

Join with us, dozens of other state nonprofit associations, the National Council of Nonprofits, BoardSource, the International Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Independent Sector by using your voice to protect nonprofit nonpartisanship for your team, your donors, your mission, and the greater good that you serve.



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