



Keep Politics Out of Philanthropy

The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers supports the continued full enforcement of current law that prohibits 501(c)(3) charitable organizations from endorsing, opposing or contributing to political candidates and engaging in partisan campaign activities—also known as the “Johnson Amendment.” We are troubled by recent proposals in Washington to weaken or repeal this longstanding protection in the federal tax code.

The Forum represents more than 50 regional and national philanthropy-serving organizations that collectively comprise more than 7,000 charitable foundations and other grantmaking organizations across the country. These philanthropic institutions, along with all other 501(c)(3) charitable organizations, have operated as nonpartisan organizations for more than 60 years. This has enabled them to occupy a trusted and essential space in our civil society.

Private foundations, while barred from most lobbying activities, are free to engage in public debates, promote public education efforts, and fund a wide range of issue-focused activities. Charitable nonprofits, including religious congregations, are free to speak on important matters of the day and advocate on public policy issues and legislation relevant to their mission and important to their clients, members or communities.

But speaking out and engaging in advocacy on issues is an entirely different matter than endorsing political candidates or funding political campaigns. 501(c)(3) organizations should remain above the political fray, advocating and informing leaders but not engaging in political activity. Allowing charities to endorse and support political candidates is tantamount to allowing politicians to use the public’s goodwill towards the charitable sector as a vehicle to advance their own partisan political agendas. This would have the effect of politicizing and thereby erasing the public’s high trust in charities, painting them as partisan organizations rather than the nonpartisan community problem solvers that they are.

We urge all policymakers to reject any proposal to insert partisan politics into our sector, which will ultimately undermine the public trust in charities and will make it much more difficult for them to do their important charitable work in our communities.

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