



PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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For Immediate Release

Overwhelming Bi-Partisan Majority Opposes Allowing Churches, Other Nonprofits, to Engage in Political Activity

WASHINGTON, DC: An overwhelming majority of 79% voters oppose the proposal to allow churches and other non-profit organizations to endorse political candidates and provide them money and other support. This includes 71% of Republicans as well as 88% of Democrats and 78% on independents. Most (55%) say it is 'very important' to keep the current law.

The proposal to reverse the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits political activity by tax-exempt organizations, is in the House tax reform bill and in other proposed legislation, including H.R. 172, H.R. 781, and S. 264.

The survey of 2,482 registered voter was conducted by the Program for Public Consultation at the University of Maryland (PPC), and released today by the non-partisan organization Voice of the People.

"Americans are frustrated with the degree of partisan polarization in this country. The idea of churches and universities becoming channels for partisan political activity makes this proposal a non-starter with Republican and Democratic voters alike," comments Steven Kull, director of PPC.

To ensure that respondent understood the issue, they were given a short briefing on the proposal and asked to evaluate three arguments for and three against.

Some of the arguments in favor of the proposal to allow political activity by nonprofits were found convincing by majorities. Fifty-eight percent found convincing the argument that the current restrictions constitute an infringement of the First Amendment right of free expression. Fifty-two percent found convincing the argument that before the 1960s, there was no such restriction and churches were not turned into arms of political parties. The argument that political decisions should be part of religious institutions because they are closely linked to religious values was found convincing by just 46%.

The arguments against the proposal fared much better with all of them being found convincing by very large majorities. Eighty-two percent found convincing the argument that churches and universities should be special places for worship or study and that they could become affiliated with specific parties, promoting rancor and polarization. Seventy-eight percent found convincing the argument that, because there are no limits on donations to tax-exempt organization, this could open up the floodgates for political money to flow through houses of worship and other non-profits. Seventy-three percent were persuaded that giving tax breaks for political donations means that the US Treasury, and thus American taxpayers, will be effectively be paying part of the cost of the donation.

The sample is large enough to enable analysis of attitudes in very Republican and very Democratic districts (based on Cook PVI ratings of the district the respondents live in). There was no significant variation. Seventy-nine percent of respondents in very red districts as well as very blue districts opposed the proposal to reverse the Johnson amendment.

Though numerous Evangelical leaders have come out in favor of allowing churches to engage in political activity, in the survey a 56% of respondents who identify as Evangelical said they oppose the proposal while 43% were in favor. However among Republican Evangelicals a slight majority—52%--favors the idea (46% opposed).

The survey was conducted online from September 7- October 3, 2017 with a national probability-based sample of 2,482 registered voters, provided by Nielsen Scarborough from Nielsen Scarborough's sample of respondents, who were recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of households. The margin of error was +/- 2.0%.

- The slide presentation is available online at http://www.publicconsultation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Johnson_Amendment_Slides1117.pdf
- The questionnaire is available online at http://www.publicconsultation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Johnson_Amendment_Quaire1117.pdf

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