



## SUMMER 2017 CONGRESSIONAL RECESS ISSUE GUIDE

### A Historic Attack on the Separation of Church and State

#### Background:

The Far Right is seeking to change the law so they can use their churches as partisan campaign tools. Just two weeks after taking office in January, President Trump used the National Prayer Breakfast to reiterate his intention to “destroy” the Johnson Amendment. That’s the longstanding law that prohibits tax-exempt nonprofits (like churches) from getting directly involved with political campaigns. In May, Trump followed up on his earlier threat when he issued a “religious liberty” executive order that, in part, attempts to erode the power of the Johnson Amendment. The GOP Congress has also gotten in on the action—not only are we facing Johnson Amendment repeal bills, but they’re also trying to undermine the Johnson Amendment through the appropriations process, and they could bring it up this fall in the legislative fight over their tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy.

The Johnson Amendment is an important safeguard not only for religious liberty but also against an even greater influx of big money in politics.

#### Key Points

- President Trump is lying about the Johnson Amendment when he claims that it is a muzzle preventing pastors from providing spiritual guidance to their congregations. Under the Johnson Amendment, free speech is protected and religious and nonprofit leaders still have the opportunity to educate and advocate for policies that benefit members of their communities.
- The Johnson Amendment’s prohibition of churches (and other nonprofits) supporting or opposing political candidates protects their integrity and allows them to focus on fulfilling their charitable and religious purposes rather than political advocacy.
- Without the Johnson Amendment, we could have a *Citizens United*-level crisis on our hands. Big Money interests would be able to use CHURCHES to flood our elections with cash—and write off their political spending as a tax deduction! That would give wealthy special interests an incentive to funnel money through churches and nonprofits, turning them into partisan political tools.

#### What you can do:

- Lobby your members of Congress in person while they are home for recess!
- Write a letter to the editor!
- Raise awareness in your own community and networks!
- Get the word out on social media!

Find resources to help you do all of that and more at  
[www.pfaw.org/ResistanceRecess](http://www.pfaw.org/ResistanceRecess)