

October 16, 2017

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Cornyn
Majority Whip
S-208, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin Brady
Chairman
House Ways and Means Committee
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Orrin Hatch
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Pastors call for Congress to fix the Johnson Amendment

Dear Congressional Leaders:

As President, CEO, and General Counsel of Alliance Defending Freedom—the largest religious freedom organization in the world—I write on behalf of more than 4,000 religious leaders across the nation to urge your support for the right of pastors to speak freely from their pulpits.

These 4,000 religious leaders stand united by a common cause: keeping the IRS out of their sermons.

For over sixty years, Section 501c(3) of the Tax Code (the “Johnson Amendment”) has forced churches to surrender First Amendment freedoms in exchange for a tax status and empowered federal bureaucrats to dictate what pastors may not say from their pulpits. Simply mentioning *biblical* issues—like the sanctity of life and marriage—too close to an election could risk intrusive IRS audits, incur steep fines, and even jeopardize a church’s tax-exempt status. To make matters worse, atheist advocacy groups send menacing letters to pastors every election cycle, warning these faithful ministers that one false step will land them in the legal crosshairs.

That’s why these 4,000 pastors have called for an end to the Johnson Amendment. And they do not stand alone. A new Lifeway poll of Protestant pastors confirms that:

- **91% of pastors** agree that pastors should have the right to speak freely from the pulpit without fear of being penalized by the government.
- **73% of pastors** agree that Congress should remove the IRS’s power to penalize a church because of the content of its pastor’s sermons.

Religious freedom and the freedom of speech are the bedrock principles upon which our nation was founded. If the “separation of church and state” has any true meaning, it is this: to keep the government from controlling America’s pulpits.

For nearly ten years, Alliance Defending Freedom has advocated for the right of pastors to speak freely from the pulpit. But the IRS has refused to allow a legal challenge to the Johnson Amendment, perpetuating a cycle of censorship, intimidation, and fear. It’s time to end that cycle once and for all.

It’s time for Congress to restore a pastor’s right to free speech.

The Free Speech Fairness Act does just that. This bill stops the IRS from being speech police, and allows pastors to speak—or not speak—as their conscience requires. America’s pastors have asked for this legislative fix, and you have the opportunity to restore their First Amendment freedoms by including this bill in tax reform.

As congressional leaders committed to protecting the First Amendment freedoms of all Americans, I urge you pass the Free Speech Fairness Act.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael P. Farris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael P. Farris, J.D., L.L.M.

ALLIANCE DEFENDING FREEDOM