



# Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Write Here! Write Now! March 2018

**ISSUE: Maintain Separation of Church and State: Urge Senators to Protect Johnson Amendment -- and Say No to Partisan Politics in Churches**

[www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org) click on Advocacy for Issue Action Information

[advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org) 703-786-5206 or 202-600-9132

**Time period: Send PDF/emails to [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org) by Monday, March 12, 2018 12:00pm ET**

## Instructions for Writing Your Letter

- **Focus on the topic** - The independence and integrity of houses of worship are at risk as Congress attempts to repeal or weaken the law (Johnson Amendment) that regulates what tax-exempt organizations can do in the political arena. This could happen as soon as March 23 as part of the must-pass omnibus spending bill to fund the federal government for the rest of this 2018 fiscal year.
- **Be original and speak from the heart.** If possible describe a personal experience or story, or include 1-2 talking points (on page 2), **in your own words**, to support the main message.
- **Include a clear and specific action request.** "I urge you to..."
- Include your name and **complete mailing address** - proves that you are a constituent.
- **Send us your letters we deliver them:** If you are sending your own, or if you are offering a WHWN at your congregation, **PDF or scan, and email** by 12 noon on Monday, March 12 to [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org). **In the subject line write: Johnson Amendment Letters from (insert your state/congregation).** Do not put individual letters in a sealed envelope.

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## Sample Letter

Today's date

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_, [name of your senator; please write to both]

I am a Unitarian Universalist from [optional: name of congregation and location].

I support the separation of church and state as a constitutional principle that protects the freedom of religion. I don't want churches used as tools of political candidates and those seeking political power.

I urge you to support the current law that prohibits all tax-exempt organizations, including houses of worship, from endorsing and opposing political candidates. Reject attempts to attach a rider to the omnibus spending bill that would repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment.

*[Insert personal experience, story, or pick 1-2 talking points (page 2), in your own words, to support the main message.]*

*[Insert personal wrap up sentence such as "Thank you for your consideration of my [concerns/story]. I look forward to your response. etc.]*

Sincerely,  
YOUR NAME and **COMPLETE ADDRESS**

(See other side for Background, Talking Points and Key Messages)

## Background & UU Grounding

**Background:** [The Johnson Amendment](#) regulates what tax-exempt organizations can do in the political arena and has been instrumental in maintaining “separation of church and state” and the nonprofit charitable sector as a platform of nonpartisan civic engagement.

Repeal of the Johnson Amendment is a [top priority of the Trump Administration](#), GOP Congressional leaders and [religious conservatives](#), and was [nearly included in the 2017 tax bill](#). The Johnson Amendment is threatened now by spending bills and extraneous riders to other legislation seeking to completely repeal or substantially weaken this longstanding protection in the law. This could happen as soon as March 23 as part of the must-pass omnibus spending bill to fund the federal government for the rest of this 2018 fiscal year.

The reason for the restriction is simple -- 501(c) 3 organizations are subsidized by taxpayers for their charitable, religious and educational work, not partisan political activity. Clergy are not allowed to endorse candidates from the pulpit. But they can conduct non-partisan voter education activities and organize voter registration drives. Clergy are free to preach on social and political issues of concern.

**UU Grounding:** Since 1961, the [Unitarian Universalist Association](#) has passed more than a dozen resolutions/statements pertaining to the separation of church and state. The UUA and UUSJ have signed on to interfaith letters in support of this important principle.

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### Key Message, Facts and Talking Points

#### Key Messages:

Maintain separation of church and state and say no to partisan politics in houses of worship.

#### Facts and Talking Points:

- **For decades the Johnson Amendment has ensured separation of church and state.** We need this protection to avoid houses of worship from becoming politicized.
- **Losing this protection in an attempt to promote religious freedom and free speech would only benefit politicians.** It could erase public trust in houses of worship and charities.
- **Clergy can already speak out and preach on political or social issues, take positions on issues of concern, encourage people to vote.** Overturning the Johnson Amendment will only add to partisanship and tax-deductible vehicles for those seeking political power.
- **Changing the law is extremely unpopular.** Polls conducted last year found that more than 70% of voters want to keep the Johnson Amendment in place. And 62% of Republicans and 56% of white evangelical Protestants also support current law.

**(See other side for writing instructions and sample letter)**