The Honorable Greg P. Walden
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Walden:

The undersigned organizations strongly oppose proposals that would politicize the charitable nonprofit and philanthropic community by repealing or weakening current federal tax law protections that prohibit 501(c)(3) organizations from endorsing, opposing, or contributing to political candidates.

Nonpartisanship is a cornerstone principle that has strengthened the public’s trust of the charitable community. In exchange for enjoying tax-exempt status and the ability to receive tax-deductible contributions, 501(c)(3) organizations – charitable nonprofits, including religious congregations, and foundations – agree to not engage in “any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.”

That provision of law protects the integrity and independence of charitable nonprofits and foundations. It shields the entire 501(c)(3) community against the rancor of partisan politics so the charitable community can be a safe haven where individuals of all beliefs come together to solve community problems free from partisan divisions. It screens out doubts and suspicions regarding ulterior partisan motives of charitable organizations, as undoubtedly would occur if even just a few charitable organizations engaged in partisan politics. Nonpartisan credibility is critical to the ability of 501(c)(3) organizations to work with elected officials of all parties at the local, state, and federal levels to address community needs.

Charitable nonprofits, including religious congregations, are free to speak on important matters of the day and advocate on public policy issues and legislation. 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. The relevant language in Section 501(c)(3) merely prohibits partisan campaign intervention, defined to include endorsing or opposing candidates for public office, publishing or distributing statements for or against candidates, or using tax-deductible and other resources to support partisan campaign activities.

We are united in opposing any and all efforts to weaken or repeal this longstanding protection in the federal tax code (sometimes called the Johnson Amendment) that President Eisenhower signed into law in 1954. Weakening the law by allowing leaders of individual 501(c)(3) entities to endorse candidates for public office and engage in some partisan electioneering activities would damage the integrity and effectiveness of all charitable organizations and spawn litigation as innovative partisans seek to expand gray areas in the proposed legislation. Repealing the Johnson Amendment, an approach promoted by the President and some in Congress, would damage the federal Treasury as people take tax deductions for political contributions they could then funnel through charitable nonprofits, undercut fair elections by providing a loophole to avoid campaign contribution disclosure laws, and empower politicians to exert pressure for access to foundation assets and charitable funds for their own partisan campaigns rather than for the public good.
We urge you to join us in opposing efforts to weaken and/or repeal the current law that for six decades has successfully protected the integrity and effectiveness of charitable nonprofits and foundations by keeping them apart from partisan politics.

Respectfully,

Oregon

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Northwest College of the Liberal Arts
Northwest Pilot Project, Inc.
ONABEN
Oregon Food Bank
Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club
Oregon Tilth
OregonASK
ORI Community and Evaluation Services
People for Parks Oregon
Phoenix Finance
Phoenix Rising Transitions
Portland Homeless Family Solutions
Razia Roushan, Inc.
Renewable Northwest
Returning Veterans Project
Rogue Valley Chorale Association
Rogue Valley Youth Choruses
ROSE Community Development
Shangri La Corporation
Silverton Together, Inc.
Society for Syncopated Drumming
Sojourner Education Foundation
Southern Oregon Child and Family Council
SPOON
St. Vincent de Paul Society Tanker 61 Memorial
The Ford Family Foundation
The Learning Commons
The Museum At Warm Springs
The Northwest Catholic Counseling Center
THSC
Tom McCall Legacy Project Transition Projects
United Way of Columbia County
Vernonia Hands on Art Center
Wellsprings Friends School
Western Arts Alliance
Willamette Resources and Educational Network
Write Around Portland
Yamhill CDC d/b/a Community Home
Yamhill Community Action Partnership Food Bank

National Organizations
Abila
Accreditation Council for Psychoanalytic Education, Inc.
AdoptAClassroom.org
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
America Solidaria U.S.
American Alliance of Museums
American Association of Anatomists
American Association of Physics Teachers
American Association of Teachers of German
American Atheists
American Bladder Cancer Society
American Board of Venous & Lymphatic Medicine
American Brass Chamber Music Association
American Conference of Academic Deans
American Heart Association
American Historical Association
American Jewish Committee
American Medical Association Foundation
American Podiatric Medical Association, Inc.
American Red Cross
Americans for the Arts
Americans Promoting Study Abroad
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Baptist Women in Ministry
Barr Foundation
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Brady Campaign and Center to Prevent Gun Violence
Camp Fire
Campion Foundation
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Center for Health, Environment & Justice
Center for Inquiry
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Citizen Schools
CleanSlateNow
Commonwealth Fund
Council on Foundations
Council for Global Equality
Dance USA
Dementia Society, Inc.
Democracy 21
Destination & Travel Foundation
Dietel Partners, LLC
Disability Rights Advocacy Fund
Easter Seals
Ecology Project International
Engineering Conferences International
Episcopal Relief & Development
Feed the Children
Feeding America
Fidesco USA
Food & Water Watch
Ford Foundation
Free Press
Girl Scouts of the USA
Girls Inc.
Global Integrity
Goodwill Industries International, Inc.
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
Greater Nonprofits
GuideStar
Habitat for Humanity International
Harbor Compliance
HawkWatch International
Hindu American Foundation
Histiocytosis Foundation
Horizons National
Human Science Institute
Independent Sector
International Essential Tremor Foundation
International Hearing Dog, Inc.
International Performing Arts for Youth
International Primate Protection League
Issue One
Jessie Ball DuPont Fund
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Federations of North America
Leadership USA
League of American Orchestras
League of Women Voters
Leukemia Research Foundation
Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education
Lumina Foundation
Lymphoma Foundation of America
Migraine Research Foundation
Mentors International
Morino Ventures, LLC
National 4-H Council
National Alliance of Community Economic Development
National Association of Charitable Gift Planners
National Association of Health Data Organizations
National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA)
National Association of Watch and Collectors
National Association for Shoplifting Prevention
NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Center for Fire and Life Safety
National Center on Shaken Baby Syndrome
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
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National Indian Child Welfare Association
National LGBTQ Task Force
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National Runaway Safeline
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