

June 4, 2014



The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
152 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley:

As President and CEO of the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB), I write to respectfully request that the Committee tread very carefully with any proposed amendment to the United States Constitution, especially one that could be interpreted to limit the First Amendment. In particular, I worry that S.J.RES. 19, "Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States relating to contributions and expenditures intended to affect elections," is convoluted and has the potential to undermine the fundamental rights that have been the basis of our Republic for centuries.

The Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." While I understand that the promoters of S.J.RES. 19 have embraced equality as one of the core principles of their effort, I believe that this proposal will actually be detrimental to liberty and equality, preparing the way for the government to prefer one voice over another – or to suppress one voice under another. In particular, I note that this Constitutional Amendment would uphold the freedom of the press, but does not make the same provision for the first freedom – religious freedom – as well as the freedom of speech, the right to assemble, and the right to petition the government. In essence, this would establish the press as a super-class of speaker (without defining what the press is), but could well leave expression by the rest of Americans at the mercy of the federal government.

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I would respectfully suggest that this political exercise could be starting a dangerous proceeding – one which may well ultimately call into question the basic First Amendment freedoms of all Americans. The text of this proposed Constitutional Amendment is unacceptable, and I urge you to reject any attempt to advance it.

Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry Johnson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jerry A. Johnson, Ph.D.
President & CEO