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No Profits Without Nonprofits

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When Chambers of Commerce print materials designed to attract new businesses to a city, they often produce "Top 10" lists detailing why their community is ideal for making profit.

These lists tout a relaxed regulatory environment, an expedited licensing process or access to modern transportation hubs as incentives. But these lists also include a who's who of local nonprofits -- access to quality healthcare facilities like hospitals, clinics or rehabilitation centers; cultural institutions like museums, symphony halls, art centers or historic monuments. Knowing employers need trained employees, they highlight higher education facilities like colleges, universities or vocational training centers (more nonprofits).

For potential employees and their families, lists point with pride to outdoor amenities like hiking, biking trails or river walks, nature preserves or the community's clean air and water (again, most often the work of nonprofits). And they frequently mention the abundance and diversity of their communities of faith; the churches, synagogues, temples and mosques (all nonprofits).

In short, the local message is... "Your business will thrive here because we have a dynamic and robust nonprofit sector."

Yet, at the local, state and federal level, short-sighted legislation and budget cuts are being introduced that would cripple the ability of these nonprofit organizations to provide the very services imperative for commerce to thrive.

As America considers its economic future, it's time for both businesses and governments to acknowledge that what our nation's 1.4 million charities produce is anything but "non" profit. Their work provides the foundation upon which all profit is generated. Without their "social profit," communities would be unsuitable for business.

Nonprofits are, and have always been, essential to every community's financial health. They must now be included in any plan to rebuild the economy.

In the next twelve months, in cities and states across America, candidates for office will be holding town hall meetings, participating in debates and vying for votes. Each will promise to strengthen the local or national economy. They will point to plans to create jobs and attract business. But if their vision or platforms do not include detailed plans for how they would partner with the nonprofit community to strengthen the economy, then they shouldn't be considered worth considering.

Nonprofits are 10% of most cities' workforce and generate a similar portion of the local economy. Through grants or government contracts they, like Boeing or Lockheed Martin, bring significant outside investment into every community to create jobs, generate taxes and spur the economy through their and their employee's daily commerce.

Any candidate who cannot provide detailed plans for how they would channel that economic and entrepreneurial energy isn't worth a vote.

And from now on, America's 14 million nonprofit employees and 90 million volunteers, all private citizens who vote, will be working together using Twitter and Facebook to support candidates who show respect for our combined role in the economy and who present a plan that includes us. In fact, joined by nonprofit colleagues from across the country, we're launching CForward -- a 501c4 advocacy organization and political action committee that will champion the economic role of nonprofits and help elect candidates who look to us as partners in growing the economy.

For decades, nonprofits have watched as businesses openly support candidates who champion their issues. Starting in 2012, nonprofits will do the same. Not for the sake of our businesses, although our work merits that right. Rather, it is for the sake of the communities we serve, the causes we champion and the country we love.

America needs leaders who don't clutch to the antiquated notion that businesses drive the economy while charities do good deeds. Our country needs to elect a new generation of leaders who view government, businesses and nonprofits as equal and essential partners. If we are to rebuild the American economy, we will have to work together as never before. America's nonprofits stand ready to support candidates with bold vision that acknowledges our energy, ingenuity and proven ability to keep America's economy growing.