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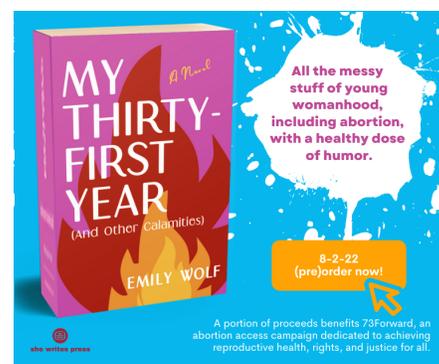
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The Dark Money Behind Abortion Bans

7/20/2022 by KAREN DEWITT

Are big corporations really pro-women? Their massive contributions to anti-abortion state lawmakers prove otherwise.



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Most major corporations these days claim to have a core commitment to women's rights.

- Amazon says the company promotes “gender equality and empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and communities.”
- AT&T says its core values include “gender equity and the empowerment of women.”
- Coca-Cola says there is “overwhelming evidence that achieving equality and empowerment for women has broad ripple effects that are good for society.”
- CVS claims to be working “to support the unique health needs of women at every age.”

Some companies even declare their support for abortion rights: Amazon, which touts its commitment to equity in the workplace, has said it will pay travel expenses for “non-life-threatening medical treatments including abortions ... [if] not available within 100 miles of an employee’s home.”

But behind the scenes, many corporations are propping up lawmakers behind some of the most extreme anti-women legislation of our time. Their political donations not only go directly to these politicians—the money also flows just as deliberately, but less easy to detect, [through a maze](#) of organizations, political action committees (PACs), trade associations and dark money vehicles that hide both the recipient and the source of the funds.

Deniability

Judd Legum, who researches and writes [Popular Information](#), an online independent newsletter, has done ground-breaking investigations into corporations’ political donations when what the companies say doesn’t match what they do. The surprise is

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just how many corporate name brands integral to our daily lives—AT&T (your mobile phone or home internet), Exxon (fuel for your car)—have donated millions of dollars to leading anti-abortion lawmakers across the country.

In a May report, Legum cataloged a complete list of double-dealers since 2016: AT&T, Amazon, Citi, CVS, Coca-Cola, Google, Walmart and Verizon all had contributed significant funds to political organizations supporting extremist anti-abortion politicians. This, despite their public statements supporting women's rights.

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Despite public support for women's rights, since 2016 these corporations have donated massive amounts to Republican organizations that fund anti-abortion senators, governors and state legislators in the U.S.

Significant corporate donations to Republican politicians make their way through the Republican State Leadership Committee

(RSLC), which, according to its website, works to “recruit, train and elect Republicans to multiple down ballot, state level offices”—as well as through the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), the State Government Leadership Foundation (SGLF) and the Republican Governors Association (RGA).

The RGA’s function is to elect and support Republican governors, while the SGLF does research and provides policies for Republican officeholders. These two entities brought in a record \$10.1 million during the first quarter of this year.

According to Popular Information, since 2016, contributions by 13 major corporations totaled \$15.2 million to the NRSC, RGA and RSLC, which support anti-abortion candidates running for U.S. Senate, governor and state legislatures, respectively.

- Amazon: \$974,781
- AT&T: nearly \$1.5 million
- Citibank: \$685,000
- Coca-Cola: more than \$2.6 million
- CVS: nearly \$1.4 million
- Google: \$525,702
- Walmart: \$1.1 million

But even these figures underestimate corporate America’s role in ending constitutional protection of abortion rights. They don’t include donations the corporations have given directly to individual candidates—nor do they include donations made through trade associations or dark money channels that don’t have to be disclosed.

AT&T tops the list of publicly traded corporations that have bankrolled sponsors of state-level laws to ban or criminalize abortion. [According to a report by Insider](#), which reviewed state and federal election filings compiled by

FollowTheMoney.org, AT&T contributed nearly \$1.2 million directly to bill sponsors and governors in 13 states in the election cycle immediately prior and subsequent to the passage of the laws.

Extremes

Nowhere is the consequence of corporate contributions clearer than in Florida, Oklahoma and Texas—which have already instituted the nation’s most draconian anti-abortion bans.

In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), who in April signed into law a ban on most abortions after 15 weeks, received \$10.1 million from the Republican Governors Association from 2021 through April 2022.

In Texas, where the governor and legislature enacted S.B. 8, which bans abortion after six weeks (long before most women know they are pregnant) and permits vigilantes to sue anyone who assists a woman in procuring an abortion, more than \$7.6 million has flowed from the RSLC to state legislative races since January 2020, including \$50,000 given directly to one of the Republicans who sponsored passage of the ban, Rep. Stephanie Klick.

Again, this tells only part of the story of corporate support to extremist anti-abortion Republican legislators. AT&T’s PAC donated \$30,000 in December 2021 to Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan (R) after he oversaw passage of S.B. 8, and since 2018 has donated \$301,000 to the sponsors of S.B. 8.

Other major corporate donors to S.B. 8 sponsors:

- Charter Communications: \$313,000
- USAA: \$152,000
- Farmers Insurance: \$120,000

- CVS: \$72,500
- General Motors: \$72,750

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt (R), who in May signed into law the nation's strictest abortion ban, which begins at fertilization, benefited from \$577,000 in TV ads paid for this year by State Solutions, an RGA offshoot.

More recently, state legislators in Oklahoma have proposed a bounty-hunting scheme to encourage the public to sue anyone they believe has aided or provided an abortion. And several Republican lawmakers in Oklahoma opposed Japanese company Panasonic's potential investment in a battery plant because, they said, the company is "woke," and "has taken positions in the past that clearly run counter to our commonly held Oklahoma values."

It's no wonder corporations prefer to present themselves as neutral players in the political arena. Most corporations claim that they don't specifically back legislators with the aim of furthering anti-abortion legislation. They say that they give to both political parties, all part of "just doing business."

"We have never advocated for laws affecting abortion rights, and our employee PACs have never based contribution decisions on a legislator's position on abortion," AT&T spokesperson Kim Hart Johnson told Insider in June. "It is inaccurate to assert that a contribution to an elected official equates to support of the entirety of their policy positions."

Popular Information's Legum says that most corporations "just want access" to politicians. According to an internal communication [obtained by Popular Information](#), the public relations firm Zeno "is privately advising its high-profile corporate clients to avoid commenting on the ... Supreme Court opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade*." (Zeno now claims this guidance was "misconstrued.") Among its many corporate clients are Coca-Cola and AT&T.

But history shows that in a volatile political environment, just doing business could lead to horrible consequences.

In 1933, German corporate money proved decisive for the Nazi party, which had been on the verge of bankruptcy until Adolf Hitler met with two dozen industrialists, including top leaders of Krupp and IG Farben. He assured them that “private industry cannot be maintained in a democracy.”

Imagine if businesses hadn’t backed the Nazis at this critical intersectional period for Germany.

The U.S. is undergoing a similar dynamic as it grapples with conflicts between its democratic principles and a lingering legacy of discrimination based on gender, race, sexual orientation and class.

“We all deserve better from elected officials and from corporations that we count on for the goods and services that we need,” said Amy Weintraub, the program director for reproductive rights at Progress Florida, about the state’s 15-week ban on abortions. “It’s alarming that these corporations are giving money to extremist lawmakers.”

*[This article originally appears in the Summer 2022 issue of Ms. **Become a member today to read more reporting like this in print and through our app.**](#)*

Also in the Summer issue: Corporations’ support of anti-abortion



lawmakers isn't just bad for publicity; it's just plain bad business. Writer [Linda Burstyn](#) explains the many ways state abortion bans hurt companies operating in those states—from making it tougher to attract and retain talent, to reducing family incomes and bringing more poverty to the customer base.

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