



AT&T shareholders fight back

[AT&T shareholders fight back - Popular Information](#)

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Popular Information has repeatedly documented how AT&T's political spending conflicts with the company's stated values.

For example, AT&T publicly claims to be [an ardent supporter of voting rights](#). AT&T posted a four-minute video on its corporate website, "AT&T Employees Honor Those Who Fought for the Right to Vote," documenting a trip to Selma, Alabama, to honor John Lewis and others that fought for voting rights.

In July 2020, a [corporate blog post](#) stated that AT&T "acknowledges its distinct responsibility to be part of the solution to achieve equitable justice." The post again cites the life of Congressman John Lewis — someone who put his life on the line in defense of voting rights — as an inspiration.

But, from 2018 to 2021, AT&T donated [at least \\$574,500](#) to the politicians behind Texas' voter suppression legislation. Over the same time period, AT&T donated [at least \\$99,700](#) to the Georgia politicians behind that state's new law to restrict voting. In 2021, AT&T donated [\\$150,000 to the Republican State Leadership Committee](#), which is pushing legislation in numerous states to restrict voting.

AT&T also claims to champion women's equality. In [AT&T's 2020 Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Report](#), CEO John Stankey said one

of the company's "core values" was "gender equity and the empowerment of women."

“ Standing for equality is one of AT&T's core values and we are committed to ensuring all our employees are respected for who they are and the diverse viewpoints they bring to the table. Our support for UN Women and their mission to advance gender equity and the empowerment of women and girls is a reflection of our belief that a diverse and inclusive business environment makes us stronger as individuals and as a company.”

JOHN STANKEY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AT&T

But, from 2018 to 2021, AT&T [donated \\$301,000](#) to the sponsors of Texas' draconian abortion ban. After the bill was signed into law, AT&T donated [\\$50,000 directly from its corporate treasury](#) to the Texas Senate Republican Caucus (all 18 Texas Senate Republicans voted in favor of the ban) and \$30,000 to House Speaker Dade Phelan (R), who marshaled Texas' abortion ban through the House.

AT&T claims to support LGBTQ rights, asserting that it “[recognizes, embraces, and stands with LGTBQ+ people.](#)”



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But since 2020, AT&T has donated [more than \\$86,000](#) to Florida politicians behind the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, including \$80,000 to Governor Ron DeSantis (R). Since 2019, AT&T has donated [over a million dollars](#) to anti-LGBTQ federal lawmakers with a zero rating from the Human Rights Campaign.

Some AT&T shareholders have had enough. A [shareholder resolution](#) has been introduced calling on AT&T to "publish a report, at reasonable expense, analyzing the congruence of the Company's political and electioneering expenditures during the preceding year against publicly stated company values and policies, listing and explaining any instances of incongruent expenditures, and stating whether the Company has made, or plans to make, changes in contributions or communications to candidates as a result of identified incongruencies."

The resolution states that "AT&T's politically focused expenditures appear to be misaligned with its public statements on Company values, views, and operational practices." It will be considered during the May 19, 2022 shareholder meeting. Although the resolutions are non-binding, a vote in favor puts significant pressure on the board to act. If the board ignores a popular shareholder resolution, the shareholders can eventually vote to replace them.

The resolution was introduced by As You Sow, a non-profit organization, on behalf of the Myra K Young Roth IRA. In the [memo](#) outlining the case to support the resolution, As You Sow states that the inconsistency between AT&T's stated values and its political spending poses a "significant risk to corporate reputation, brand, and market share" by leaving AT&T "vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy or indifference."

Previous efforts by As You Sow to pressure companies have been successful. The pharmaceutical company Amgen, for example, has [agreed](#) to produce a "political congruence" report comparing its stated values with its political giving. The report is expected in October. AT&T, however, is putting up a fight.

How AT&T is trying to convince shareholders to reject the resolution

In a filing with the SEC, known as a [DEF 14A](#), AT&T encourages shareholders to vote against As You Sow's resolution. But many of the arguments AT&T marshals are highly misleading.

AT&T's lead argument is that the resolution is unnecessary because "AT&T has earned the highest possible score—100%—from the 2021 CPA-Zicklin Index." The [CPA-Zicklin Index](#) is produced by the Center for Political Accountability (CPA). Bruce Freed, the Executive Director of CPA, told Popular Information that AT&T is misrepresenting the meaning of the report. Freed explained that the CPA-Zicklin index measures "policies and practices" around the *disclosure* of political spending. It "does not make a value judgment on [AT&T's] political spending or alignment" with AT&T's stated values.

CPA itself has been critical of AT&T's empty rhetoric. In a February 2022 CPA report, [Hollow Policies](#), CPA notes that AT&T claims to be committed to combating climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, in the 2020 cycle, AT&T has donated \$250,000 to the Republican Attorneys General Association (RAGA). The RAGA supports candidates that are fighting to overturn policies to reduce emissions.

In opposition to the resolution, AT&T also makes the following claims:

We believe our core business objectives and political giving align with our values. When AT&T decides to weigh in on specific legislation, we take positions that are consistent with the Company's already-stated values and business priorities. For example, two-thirds of PAC contribution recipients supported the Dream Act, the Equality Act, and the Paris climate change accords, consistent with AT&T's values regarding safeguarding human rights and protecting our environment.

This is, at best, a sleight of hand. AT&T is arguing that because it supports the Dream Act, it directs most federal contributions to

members of Congress that support the Dream Act. And that is evidence that its values and political giving are aligned. But that isn't true.

In 2020, according to a Popular Information analysis of FEC records, slightly more than half of the members of Congress that received funding from AT&T's PAC *opposed* the Dream Act. In 2021, however, about two-thirds of the members that received funding from AT&T's PAC supported the Dream Act. But that was simply a reflection of AT&T's ([now abandoned](#)) pledge to suspend donations to members of Congress that voted to overturn the 2020 election. In 2022, AT&T's PAC has supported 33 members of Congress that oppose the Dream Act and 18 members that support it.

AT&T is attempting to use the anomaly of 2021 to paint an inaccurate picture of its political giving. AT&T did not respond to Popular Information's request for comment.