

DeSantis's corporate donors under fire for 'hypocrisy' over Black History Month

Companies such as Amazon, Disney and Walmart funded Florida governor who has imposed curbs on teaching about race in schools

[DeSantis's corporate donors under fire for 'hypocrisy' over Black History Month | Ron DeSantis | The Guardian](#)

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Political activists in Florida have condemned the “hypocrisy” of large corporations that use Black History Month to denounce racism while donating hundreds of thousands dollars to the state’s rightwing governor, [Ron DeSantis](#).

Amazon, AT&T, Comcast, Disney and Walmart are among the companies that publicly proclaim their commitment to anti-racist values, especially after the 2020 police murder of George Floyd, an African American man in Minneapolis.

But research by the [Center for Political Accountability](#), a non-profit organisation that tracks corporate political spending, shows that these same businesses donated directly and indirectly to the 2022 re-election campaign of DeSantis, who has imposed limits on how race and racism can be taught in Florida schools.

“These corporations can say that they stand with the Black community but then also fund the governor and his work around dismantling Black history,” said Jasmine Burney-Clark, founder of [Equal Ground](#), a progressive group based in Orlando, Florida. “It’s a huge level of hypocrisy.”

Corporations have increasingly taken a stand on social and racial justice issues in recent years and often see Black History Month as an ideal opportunity to promote themselves. Many express solidarity on social media or tout

programs within the company to highlight the contributions of Black employees.

Amazon, AT&T, Coca-Cola, Comcast, DoorDash, General Motors and Walmart have all made public statements in celebration of Black History Month. Google posted online on 1 February: “Learn how Google is recognizing and celebrating Black voices, joy and success this Black History Month.”

But the Center for Political Accountability found that each of these companies donated significant sums of money to political groups that prominently supported DeSantis.

Disney [writes on its Resorts website](#): “During Black History Month in February, the Disney Parks Blog will celebrate Black stories and highlight special experiences at Disneyland Resort and Walt Disney World Resort.”

Yet early in the election cycle – and before its relationship with DeSantis fully soured – Disney contributed \$50,000 to his re-election campaign and \$125,000 to the Republican party of Florida, which supported his campaign and inauguration.

Charter Communications, a telecommunication firm, regularly celebrates [Black History Month](#) on its corporate site. It also gave \$200,000 to Friends of Ron DeSantis, a political action committee supporting his re-election, as well as \$125,000 to the Republican party of Florida and \$205,000 to the Republican Governors Association – both huge donors to DeSantis.

Duke Energy [tweeted on 1 February](#): “Sharene Pierce, Chief D&I Officer, reflects on influential figures who left an impression on her life. While #BlackHistoryMonth is a time to celebrate the impact of African Americans, our commitment to fostering a culture of diversity, equity & inclusion is year round.” The company also gave \$2m to the Republican party of Florida, which has embraced DeSantis’s crackdown on “woke” policies on race, gender and public health.

DeSantis has sought to position himself on the frontlines of American “culture wars”, as he [considers a 2024 bid](#) for the White House and tries to outflank former president Donald Trump, the only official well-known candidate so far.

Earlier this month, the second-term governor announced plans to block state colleges from having programs on diversity, equity and inclusion as well as critical race theory, or CRT, which examines the ways in which racism was

embedded into American law and other modern institutions, maintaining the dominance of white people.

The DeSantis administration also blocked a new advanced placement course on African American studies from being taught in high schools, saying it violates state law and is historically inaccurate. In the new framework, topics including Black Lives Matter, reparations and queer theory are not part of the exam.

And last year, DeSantis signed the “Stop Woke Act” that [restricts certain race-based conversations](#) and analysis in schools and businesses. The law bars instruction that defines people as necessarily oppressed or privileged based on their race.

The governor has imposed sweeping restrictions on books in public schools, forcing some teachers to remove books from their libraries or use paper to cover up their shelves. They face felony charges if unsanctioned books are present in their classrooms.

The implications reach far beyond Florida. At least 25 states have considered legislation or other steps to limit how race can be taught, according to [an analysis by Education Week](#). Eight states have banned or limited the teaching of critical race theory or similar concepts through laws or administrative actions.

Burney-Clark said: “This man is attempting to be president of the United States. We could draw the line right now; these corporations had the true capacity and not the performative capacity to do that.”

Last year, Disney, under pressure from consumers and its own staff, took a stand against Florida’s “don’t say gay” law, which bars instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade as well as lessons deemed not age-appropriate. DeSantis sought retribution, and last week, Florida Republicans [approved proposals to strip](#) the company of its self-governing status in Walt Disney World’s Reedy Creek Improvement District.

But Burney-Clark urged companies not to be intimidated. “Disney, unfortunately, is going through a difficult time but has the power and capacity to be doing more than they’re actually doing.

“I don’t think that they should worry about the threat of losing support or favor with the governor. They should be focused on the consumers who have

built these publicly held corporations to where they currently are right now with the scale that they have.”

The Center for Political Accountability, based in Washington, has been engaging companies about a model code of conduct that would give them control over spending and protect them from the type of threat that Disney and others are facing.

Bruce Freed, president of the Center, said DeSantis is attracting money for two reasons. “One, because he’s the governor of Florida up for re-election and he’s the dominant figure in the state so you have the whole issue of giving for access.

“Secondly, he is a potential presidential candidate and so you have companies looking to build relationships. But today that’s fraught with much greater risk because of the sharp polarisation that we have and the positions that he has taken that in quite a few instances conflict with company policy positions.”

That could be a problem. Studies show that consumers are more willing to boycott brands, and would-be employees are more likely to reject opportunities at companies that do not align with their values.

Jeanne Hanna, the Center’s research director, said: “Companies are trying to engage in politics as usual but consumers and employees and shareholders are recognizing the change in the cultural norms around companies and political engagement. They want to see companies taking proactive stances to back up their values with action and then who they engage with when it comes to politics.”