

Sample op-ed

Each year, millions of Americans contribute money to political campaigns and causes that they support. But millions more contribute to political causes without even knowing it: the shareholders of large corporations.

In January 2010, the Supreme Court overturned a century of precedent to rule that corporations can spend unlimited amounts of money from their treasuries to support or oppose candidates for office. But the ruling came with no requirement that corporations to disclose their political spending, either to the public or to the companies' own shareholders. As a result, the 2010 elections were flooded with corporate money, much of it funneled through outside groups that weren't required to disclose which corporations were financing them. The interests of CEOs won out, while smaller shareholders were for the most part left in the dark about which candidates their dollars went to fund.

Almost half of Americans own stock. I / EXAMPLE COMPANY shareholders am/are among them. EXAMPLE OF COMPANY (national or state, depending on aim of op-ed) OR example of company that writer owns stock in. Imagine contributing ten or twenty dollars to a candidate you support strongly, without knowing that your invested retirement fund is part of a million dollar expenditure by a company to defeat that candidate. This type of unknowing political action is unfair to you as the shareholder.

There are several ways to make sure that shareholders are no longer unwitting donors to political campaigns. Rep. Michael Capuano' soon to be re-introduced Shareholder Protection Act, which would require corporations to disclose their political spending plans to shareholders and let those shareholders take an up or down vote on those plans. And similar legislation is being proposed in our home state, STATE, where Rep XX has introduced INFO ON STATE BILL.

But even while these important laws are moving forward, shareholders can organize and press for corporations to voluntarily adopt shareholder protection measures. These corporations might look to the experience of Target as an example. Last summer, Target gave \$500,000 to a group supporting a Minnesota Republican gubernatorial candidate who was strongly against gay rights. Target, which bills itself as a progressive and gay-friendly corporation faced enormous backlash from shareholders and consumers when the donation became public. In response to the backlash, the company has now revised its political spending policy, vowing to disclose all contributions and seek more feedback from its board of directors.

Now that corporations have been given the right to freely spend shareholder investments in elections, shareholders should be able to have a say in how that money is spent. Shareholder empowerment is an important and common-sense way of ensuring that shareholders retain trust in the companies we hold stock in, and that Americans retain trust in the integrity of our elections.