

Newark Star-Ledger

# Are you supporting Trump with that underwear purchase? | Editorial

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AP

We all deserve to know. (AP Photo | Carolyn Kaster)

By **Star-Ledger Editorial Board**

What is Netflix doing with its money – covertly supporting Donald Trump?

We have the same question about the other companies we all patronize. Whose causes are they donating to? Wouldn't you want to know?

Many are still hiding this information from you, and their own shareholders, according to the latest report by [Center for Political Accountability \(CPA\)](#), a nonpartisan group that's spent years tracking the issue.

If you buy toys from Mattel, fly Delta, use TripAdvisor, Twitter or wear Hanes undies, you have no idea whose interests you're helping to bankroll. These companies are among the least transparent in America about their political spending, CPA found.

It's understandable that executives [are leery of the backlashes](#) we saw against SoulCycle, Nathan's hot dogs, New Balance, Louis Vuitton and other brands seen as supporting Trump – or those like Nike, perceived as part of the resistance.

A company is a private party making a legal donation, so it's not automatic that the public has a right to this information, even if we want it.

But transparency is our last remaining hope against an America dominated by oligarchs. The fight about containing political money has been lost, thanks mostly to Supreme Court decisions like *Citizens United*. Their money is already contaminating our politics.

The least we can do now is force companies to publicly acknowledge it. Even the Supreme Court invited Congress to force disclosure of this spending.

Yet one of the many popular bills stuck in Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's legislative Neverland would require publicly-traded companies to reveal political spending to shareholders, and by extension, the public. It's a cause [Sen. Robert Menendez \(D-NJ\)](#) and other Democrats have long pushed.

Republicans block it every time, even though most GOP voters want more disclosure. Perhaps, after the massive tax cuts they doled out to corporations, these lawmakers hope to be rewarded in their own re-election efforts.

This much is clear: We won't get more sunshine until Democrats are back in control. And in the meantime, they don't have clean hands on this, either. We've seen shameless behavior by our own governor, as a dark money group linked to him refused to reveal its donors, and did so only recently.

Unions are guilty of it, too. The teacher's union, our state's biggest political spender, doesn't divulge which races it's throwing money into. It has to reveal direct donations to candidates, but not dark money spending.

Still, Bruce Freed of CPA makes a strong case, [in a report called "Collision Course,"](#) that it's in the best interest of companies to be voluntarily transparent about their political spending.

Having a policy makes executives less vulnerable to pressure from politicians. They could point to a rule that they must abide by certain values or remain politically neutral. And shareholders could protect themselves against unforeseen backlashes.

Companies risk reputational damage, employee uprisings and boycotts if their professed values don't match their political spending, and they get called out.

Like AT&T, shamed over its donation to Trump's inaugural committee and its hiring of his disgraced lawyer, Michael Cohen, in an effort to influence federal policy. The corporate giant has since become a trendsetter in disclosure of political spending, Freed says.

And it's not just about one politician. It's about issues like gun safety and climate change. Google, Bank of America and Coca-Cola all represented themselves as climate defenders, only to be caught donating to a GOP group seeking to undo limits on carbon pollution.

Companies with very progressive diversity policies might be discovered to be backing politicians who engage in racial gerrymandering or voter suppression tactics. They run a real risk of being attacked for hypocrisy.

Other potential liabilities have to be disclosed to people who own a share of the company. Why not political spending? After all, it's their money.

And, ultimately, ours.

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