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Proxy-season politics

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The riot at the Capitol in January prompted a [reckoning on corporate political donations](#) that will be a prominent feature of [proxy season](#), with many shareholder proposals demanding greater disclosure of company spending.

“Companies are reading the writing on the wall,” Thomas DiNapoli, New York State’s comptroller and trustee for the state’s public pension fund, told DealBook. “Political and social polarization are bad for their business, and they need to decide if political donations are worth the risk.”

“Time will tell if their increased attention to these issues is lip service or if it represents a sincere change in corporate culture,” Mr. DiNapoli said. “At a minimum, investors need disclosure of this spending.” New York’s public pension fund is the third-largest in the U.S. and since 2010 it has filed more than 155 shareholder proposals on political spending, winning more than 40 adoptions or agreements, including from Bank of America, Delta Air Lines and Pepsi. Three of five resolutions it has advanced this year have already been withdrawn, with the companies agreeing to make changes without putting them to a vote. That’s a 60 percent hit rate, and companies that wouldn’t engage before are now at least responsive, a spokesperson for the fund said.

- The fund got CMS Energy, a Michigan public utility, to agree to be more transparent about political spending, DealBook is first to report; [First Energy](#), an Ohio utility, and the multinational brewer [Molson Coors](#) also agreed to more disclosure.

“Companies are now expected to have core values — almost personalities,” said Bruce Freed, the president of the Center for Political

Accountability, a nonprofit that partners with shareholders on proposals. Recent agreements, like the ones brokered by Mr. DiNapoli, are a “strong indication” that corporations are feeling “real pressure,” he said. Nine of 30 companies (including those noted above) have agreed this year to provide more disclosure on political donations. Last year, eight of 40 companies facing similar proposals agreed to act instead of putting the question to shareholders in a vote. The Capitol riot “raised the stakes,” Mr. Freed said, and the pressure on companies [has not relented since](#).