

The Washington Post

Lawmakers who objected to election results have been cut off from 20 of their 30 biggest corporate PAC donors

U.S. executives continue to grapple with political bloodshed and its ripple effects on the corporate landscape

[These companies have pulled funding for election-objecting Republican lawmakers - The Washington Post](#)

By [Douglas MacMillan](#) and [Jena McGregor](#)
Jan. 19, 2021 at 11:18 a.m. EST

The 147 Republican lawmakers who opposed certification of the presidential election this month have lost the support of many of their largest corporate backers — but not all of them.

The Washington Post contacted the 30 companies that gave the most money to election-objecting lawmakers' campaigns through political action committees. Two-thirds, or 20 of the firms, said they have pledged to suspend some or all payments from their PACs. Meanwhile, 10 companies said only that they would review their political giving or did not commit to take any action as a result of this month's events.

The split between company responses shows how U.S. executives are still grappling with the recent political bloodshed and its ripple effects across the corporate landscape. The attempted insurrection at the Capitol on Jan. 6 led to calls for companies and wealthy donors to disavow support for lawmakers who continue to propagate dangerous myths about the election and has prompted a broader rethinking of the role of PAC giving among the nation's top companies.

The dollar amounts given by corporate PACs tend to be relatively small: They can legally give each candidate's campaign only up to \$5,000 per election. "They spend more money on paper clips in the corporate office," said Doug Schuler, a professor of business and public policy at Rice University.

But the donations can help ensure companies access to key policymakers overseeing their industries. “If they’re sitting on the right committee, you give them money,” Schuler said. “It’s kind of expected.”

At the same time, these donations attach corporate benefactors to politicians in visible ways that can affect their image in the eyes of customers and employees. “You have the reputation risk, you have the business risk and you have legal risk from political spending,” said Bruce Freed, president of the nonprofit [Center for Political Accountability](#), which scores companies on how transparent they are about political giving.

The 30 corporate PACs that donated the most money to the [147 election objectors](#) gave them a total of \$37 million from 2015 to 2020, according to [data](#) from the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan group that tracks campaign finance and lobbying records. Of that amount, nearly \$26 million came from companies that now say they have suspended donations. About \$11 million came from companies that have not committed to any changes to PAC contributions.

Some of the strongest repudiations of the Republican lawmakers came from AT&T, Comcast, Honeywell, PricewaterhouseCoopers, General Electric, KPMG and Verizon. These firms all said they would suspend donations to members of Congress who voted against certifying Joe Biden as president.

Many of these companies sell goods and services directly to consumers, and probably thought that taking no action would be a risk to their reputation, Freed said. On the flip side, some companies that have not pledged any specific action are contractors for the U.S. government, and could be more worried about jeopardizing relationships in Washington.

Jeff Davis, spokesman for defense contractor General Dynamics, said in an email that the company has “not made any announcements on this but I will let you know right away if we do.” General Dynamics gave \$1.1 million to election objectors over the past five years.

Other defense contractors, including Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon, said they have paused all political contributions.

Koch Industries, Home Depot, ExxonMobil, FedEx Corp, USAA, Cox Enterprises and BNSF all said they are evaluating their political giving in light of recent events. However, they have not committed to suspending donations to any candidate or making any specific changes.

Avery Boggs, a spokesman for telecom giant Charter Communications, said in an email, “I’ll let you know if we issue a statement.” Charter gave \$830,000 to election objectors over the past six years, according the Center for Responsive Politics.

American Crystal Sugar Co., an agricultural cooperative, has “not made any decisions with regard to contributions from its political action committee,” Kevin Price, vice president of government affairs said in an email. The cooperative donated \$1.5 million to election objectors through its PAC since 2015.

Experts on corporate disclosures are skeptical that the recent round of statements amount to significant changes on the part of companies. PAC donations represent a small portion of candidates’ overall political fundraising and don’t account for other ways corporations can give to candidates, including through trade associations, issue-based groups and the donations of individual executives.

None of the 30 companies contacted by The Post would clarify whether they had committed to limiting their donations to party committees, leadership PACs and other campaigns that can in turn give to these lawmakers. It also isn’t clear whether executives will also suspend their personal giving.

With a transfer of power and a shift at the end of the campaign cycle, companies are not expected to give as much to Republicans right now anyway, said Brian Richter, assistant professor of business at the University of Texas at Austin's McCombs School.

"It’s really not as costly to the companies because there’s always a rebalancing of party giving when Congress and the president changes anyway,” Richter said.

Companies may actually welcome a rationale for saying no to campaign contributions, Richter added. He said he’s surprised that more companies didn’t say they’d suspend giving to all political candidates, rather than just those who objected to election results. The wave of corporate activism, Richter said, “gives them an excuse to say ‘no.’ That’s something a lot of firms have wanted for a long time.”