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## Corporate PACs contributed over a million dollars to lawmakers who opposed abortion rights bill

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By Srijita Datta

July 14, 2022 4:06 pm

Corporate PACs of companies that committed to covering travel expenses related to abortion have contributed more than \$1.62 million in the 2022 election cycle to 139 Republicans and two Democrats who voted against the Women’s Health Protection Act – a Democratic-led bill that would have effectively codified a constitutional right to abortion had it been passed, according to data compiled by OpenSecrets.

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas) were the only Democrats voting against the bill in the Senate and the House respectively. They received a collective total of \$24,000 from the corporate PACs of Johnson and Johnson, JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Intuit, Yelp and Meta.

On Friday, the House is expected to vote on a new version of the Women’s Health Protection Act after previous versions failed to pass the Senate.

In the wake of the Supreme Court’s recent decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, dozens of companies committed to cover travel expenses if their employees are based in states banning the procedure, and if they would require out-of-state travel to access abortion or reproductive care.

The New York Times identified 41 companies that publicly committed to covering travel expenses of their employees as of when the Supreme Court announced its decision. The list includes heavyweights like Microsoft, Meta, JP Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo and Disney, among others.

Those companies also signed on to Don’t Ban Equality coalition which was formed by more than 330 companies in response to the “alarming trends of bans passing in various states in 2019” that sought to restrict access to abortion and comprehensive reproductive healthcare in some instances.

“Simply put, public policies that restrict reproductive health care, including the Supreme Court’s recent decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, go against our values and are bad for business,” the Don’t Ban Equality statement reads. “It impairs our ability to build diverse and inclusive workforce pipelines, recruit top talent across states, and protect the well-being of all the people who keep our businesses thriving day in and out.”

### **Political spending by companies covering travel expenses**

While all 41 companies publicly opposed restrictions on women’s reproductive health care and announced their commitment to covering travel expenses related to abortion, 15 of the companies’ corporate PACs donated to politicians who voted against extending protection for abortion rights to women in every state.

Nearly half of the \$3.1 million these companies collectively contributed to 340 incumbent federal lawmakers went to 141 officeholders who voted against the Women’s Health Protection Act – 211 in the House and 48 in the Senate.

PricewaterhouseCoopers tops the list of 41 companies in terms of PAC giving – with \$410,000 in total contributions to 192 current members of Congress. This includes 18 of them receiving at least \$5,000 each.

Among the opponents, Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) is the top beneficiary of the 41 companies’ corporate PACs – having received \$61,000 from their PACs during the current cycle.

Yet the South Dakota senator has maintained a vehement anti-abortion rights stance and touted his vote against the Women’s Health Protection Act on social media in May.

Thune echoed similar points following the Supreme Court decision, describing it as – “long overdue.”

Rep. Darin LaHood (R-Ill.) received \$49,000 from the corporate PACs and Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.) drew \$45,500. Corporate PACs affiliated with Google and Microsoft contributed the maximum amounts of \$10,000 each to LaHood. Scott’s highest amounts received were \$7,500 from Wells Fargo’s corporate PAC and \$7,000 from Google’s corporate PAC.

PricewaterhouseCoopers’s corporate PAC gave another \$6,000 to Scott and \$7,500 to LaHood.

Scott released a statement calling the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe* “an important step to protect the God-given right to life for millions of Americans by returning the power back to the people and the states, where it belongs.”

A staunch anti-abortion rights advocate, LaHood also applauded the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe* in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* case. In a statement, LaHood claimed Democrats in D.C. and Illinois, the state he represents, spent years trying to undermine and delegitimize the independent judiciary.

LaHood called out Democratic Gov. J. B. Pritzker (D-Ill.) by name in the statement, noting that the Illinois governor “continues to push his radical abortion agenda in Illinois.”

In 2019, Pritzker signed into law the Health and Safety Act, which expanded abortion rights in the state. Following Roe's overturn, Pritzker also urged President Joe Biden (D) to boost federal funding for Illinois and other states where abortion remains legal.

Being in close geographical proximity to five of the 13 states with trigger laws that immediately banned abortions after the Dobbs decision and bordering two of them, Illinois is expected to turn into a magnet for abortion access in the Midwest as the numbers of those seeking alternate options is expected to increase exponentially.

Even before Roe's overturn, thousands of women crossed state lines every year to receive abortions in Illinois. According to the latest numbers released by the state's Department of Public Health, nearly 10,000 women traveled to Illinois to get an abortion in 2020 — roughly a 29% increase from the previous year.

In the event that more large companies opt to cover costs of abortion access for employees, liberal states like Illinois would have to face the brunt of them, experts told OpenSecrets.

### **Complexities of out-of-state travel for abortions**

Google notified its employees that if they live in a state where abortion access is restricted, they are allowed to relocate to any state where abortion is legal without a cited reason. Its parent company, Alphabet Inc., also committed to offering coverage for any out-of-state travel for abortion care to full-time employees enrolled in the company's health plan.

Yet Google's corporate PAC gave \$255,000 in to 141 current officeholders who voted against the Women's Health Protection Act. LaHood, Thune and nine other lawmakers received the maximum contribution of \$5,000 per election.

Microsoft's corporate PAC gave over \$233,000 to 119 lawmakers who voted against the abortion rights bill, giving the maximum donation of \$5,000 to nine of them. The company already covered employees' abortions and gender-affirming care prior to the Supreme Court's ruling, but has now pledged to cover U.S. employees' travel expenses as well.

Microsoft's U.S. public affairs spokesperson declined to comment this time.

Some companies pledged to cover travel expenses for employees with a caveat that it would be possible only to the extent permissible by law. Meta, the parent of Facebook, is among them.

Meta is currently assessing how best to provide the benefit given the current legal complexities, according to the New York Times. A spokesperson declined to comment.

Most of the 13 states with trigger laws designed to take effect immediately after Roe's overturn have severe penalties in place. Mississippi, for instance – home to the original Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case – makes abortions punishable by up to 10 years in prison with limited exceptions. In Utah, doctors who perform abortions can be charged with a second-degree felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Experts question whether companies that offer abortion coverage to employees or compensation for travel related to reproductive healthcare may be at risk of violating state laws if they have businesses in states like Mississippi.

Emily Berman, associate professor at the University of Houston Law Center feels that it is just one in many questions that will arise in the coming months, and one for which there are not any definitive answers.

“Although in part it depends on the law at issue in each state, it is likely to provide a disincentive for companies and organizations in favor of supporting women’s efforts to access reproductive health care in places where it is legal,” Berman told OpenSecrets.

Michelle Banker, director of reproductive rights and health litigation at the National Women’s Law Center, said that while employers need to be aware of risks, they should absolutely not let politicians scare them off.

### **Beyond corporate PAC giving**

The story behind company political spending enabling the attack on abortion is much broader than corporate PAC spending alone, according to Bruce F. Freed, president of Center for Political Accountability.

“Companies today are finding great pressure from employees, customers, consumers and also from investors to have their election-related spending aligned with their policies and core values,” Freed told OpenSecrets, emphasizing that companies are currently under heavy scrutiny and run the risk of being seen as hypocritical.

Freed mentioned that companies’ contributions to 527s, particularly the Republican Attorneys General Association, the Republican State Leadership Committee and the Republican Governors Association, have helped elect the attorneys general who challenged *Roe v. Wade*, as well as state legislatures that enacted laws restricting abortion access.

Gretchen Ely, director of the Ph.D. program at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville’s College of Social Work, told OpenSecrets anti-abortion rights groups have followed a similar trajectory working for decades to put candidates in place that are vehemently anti-abortion – leading up to having a president who got to appoint three justices.

“It was a concerted 50-year effort that culminated in this crazy, perfect storm, which allowed them to turn the court from what used to be a legitimate, lawmaking entity into a court packed with ideological people,” Ely said.

Companies today have to deal with the consequences of political spending and how it affects reproductive health, Freed added, noting “That means that top corporate executives bear responsibility for the decisions to give.”

### **Biden’s abortion-rights stance**

On July 8, President Joe Biden signed an executive order aimed at protecting women's rights to abortion being taken away by the Supreme Court, in response to the landmark ruling that overturned Roe.

Among other things, the executive order aims to safeguard access to reproductive healthcare services, protect patient privacy and grant access to accurate information.

On July 11, the Biden administration released an updated guidance to the executive order clarifying that "emergency services" under the executive order include abortion services.

Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra also released a statement explaining that the new federal law would prevent state laws restricting access to abortion care in emergency situations.

"Health care must be between a patient and their doctor, not a politician," Becerra wrote. "We will continue to leverage all available resources to make sure women can access the life-saving care they need."

Speaking from the White House on July 8, Biden acknowledged that even with executive power, his options to expand abortion access further still remain limited.

Based on the Court's reasoning, the only way to restore women's Constitutional right to choose is by voting, the president said.

"While I wish it had not come to this, this is the fastest route available," Biden said. "To pass a national law codifying Roe, I will sign immediately upon its passage at my desk."