



Session Report

Please know you may design the structure of this report to better suit the session. It's important to capture the key outcomes and solutions proposed for the future.

Session Title: Lessons from an Insurrection: Corporate Political Giving and Combating Corruption in a Post-January 6th World

Date & Time: Thursday, 08.12.2022, 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm GMT -5

Report prepared by: Angela Li, Research Associate, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Moderated by: Debra Perlin, Policy Director, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Panellists:

- Ciara Torres-Spelliscy - Professor of Law, Stetson University
- Richard Eidlin - National Policy Director, Business for America
- Robert Maguire - Research Director, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
- Angela Li - Research Associate, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
- Justine Ellis - Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
- Debra Perlin - Policy Director, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Share the thematic focus of the session, its purpose and corruption risks?

The assault on the U.S. Capitol building in January 2021 sent reverberations across the globe and ushered in a new political era. Although coverage of the events frequently focused on the assailants who tried to disrupt the peaceful transfer of power, there is a wider story to tell as it relates to the role of corporations. In the days following the insurrection, numerous corporations pledged to suspend political giving to the

Sedition Caucus, the 147 members of Congress who voted not to certify the results of the 2020 U.S. presidential election and who helped spread the disinformation that fueled the violent attack. However, in the ensuing weeks, some companies resumed giving to the Sedition Caucus, an apparent misalignment between their publicly stated values and political spending.

As companies face increased scrutiny associated with their political giving and how it might impact civil unrest, the need to reform our campaign finance system has become urgent. The corporate response to January 6th provides us with an unprecedented lens through which to view the ways that corporations and industry groups decide who to donate to, even when those contributions undermine the long-term health of the American democracy from which these companies benefit. There is no better illustration of the corrosive impact of money in American politics than corporate contributions in the wake of the January 6 insurrection. It illustrates the systemic corruption that requires members of Congress to seek contributions from industries they oversee, while companies feel they have to pay to play.

This is not the kind of individual corruption that comes with bags of cash and promises of kickbacks. Rather, it is systemic, legalized corruption that plays out largely in public, where wealthy donors are given access and influence to powerful lawmakers in return for political money.

Summary of panellists' contributions & discussion points (please be as detailed as possible)

Ciara Torres-Spelliscy - Professor of Law, Stetson University spoke about the connection between January 6 and corruption. Drawing from research from her forthcoming book, she discussed having a “litmus test” for democracy within a U.S. context.

Richard Eidlin - National Policy Director, Business for America provided helpful insight to the perspective of the business community and corporations regarding corporate political activities. He discussed that the misalignment between a company’s political contributions and its publicly stated values may be due to lack of coordination between different departments in that company.

Robert Maguire - Research Director, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) drew on his decade-long experience as a campaign finance expert to provide context to corporate commitments and contributions in the wake of January 6. He also put forth overarching questions about the US campaign finance system at large, reminding the audience to consider whether corporations should be making political contributions at all.

Angela Li - Research Associate, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) discussed the research methodology of CREW’s sedition tracker and how CREW keeps the public updated on corporate commitments and actions relating to

January 6. She also spoke on specific misalignments between corporate statements and political activities in issues of voting rights and racial justice.

Justine Ellis - Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) added a social science perspective to the panel, calling attention to the behavioral and relational dynamics of multi-sectoral engagement on the intersection of democracy, corporate accountability, and systemic corruption. She suggested that more work needs to be done to strengthen the connection in public imagination between the events of January 6 and the theme of corruption. Drawing from her coalition work in pro-democracy coalition spaces, she also discussed the barriers to conversation between activists and the private sector.

Main outcomes of session (include quotes/highlights and interesting questions from the floor)

The main takeaways included:

- The need to align corporate values with their political activities
- The risks associated with corporate political irresponsibility are too great for democracy and corporations themselves
- The importance of bridging the gap between corporations and their consumers.

Audience questions included:

- Corporate giving constitutes the “supply” side of money in politics. What about the “demand” side — the fact that politicians are forced to constantly fundraise for their elections?
- What are the ethics of a certain political party propping up candidates from the rival party who are perceived to be weak during primary elections?

Key recommendations for the future and concrete follow-up actions

- Corporations should be consistent in withholding support from political leaders who undermined democracy by voting against certifying the 2020 election and who continue to undermine democracy in other ways at both the state and federal level
- Advocate for the passage of voting rights legislation and campaign finance reform that will protect the right to vote, make it more difficult to undermine elections, and shift the balance of power away from wealthy donors
- Pledge to be fully transparent about political contributions. Provide the public with a full accounting not only of donations made to PACs and other political organizations, but also to 501(c)(4) social welfare organizations and 501(c)(6) trade associations that can and do spend heavily in elections, often without disclosing any of their donors. Or consider terminating corporate PACs altogether and giving up on political contributions
- Become a leader in the business community not only through example, but also by proactively persuading other businesses of the long-term benefits of defending

democracy, including urging others to end support of politicians who have undermined democracy and to take the other important steps outlined here

What can be done to create opportunities for scaling up the solutions discussed in the session? And by whom?

For the above solutions to be scaled up, there must be an engaged community of activists, corporations, policymakers, and civil society groups who work together to push forward those objectives.

Is there a specific call to action to key stakeholders, such as governments, businesses, funders, civil society, young people, journalists or any other stakeholder that should be noted? Please specify if relevant.

Corporations must align their values with their political spending and be leaders in upholding democracy. The public and civil society groups must be proactive and consistent in pressuring corporations and the government to take action and pursue reforms. Journalists must report on developments in US campaign finance with tenacity.

Rapporteur's name and date submitted

Angela Li, 09.12.2022