

John Deere Shareholder Meeting – Item #6 Statement
Scott Shepard, Free Enterprise Project Coordinator
National Center for Public Policy Research, February 26, 2020

I'm Scott Shepard of the National Center for Public Policy Research and I move the True Diversity Board Proposal, which seeks to increase viewpoint diversity on the company's board of directors.

In today's proxy statement, John Deere reports that in selecting candidates for its board of directors, it

assesses the diversity of its members and nominees as part of an annual performance evaluation by considering, among other factors, diversity in expertise, experience, background, *ethnicity*, and *gender*. We believe a Board composed of members with complementary skills, qualifications, experiences, and attributes is best equipped to meet its responsibilities effectively.¹

The gender composition of the board candidate pool is expressly and graphically noted on the next page of the proxy statement.²

Perhaps as a result of this careful attention to gender and ethnicity in board composition, the Company has also expressly prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender or ethnicity, a fact rightly and proudly noted on the Company's website.³

John Deere still has not, however, expanded its non-discrimination policy to prohibit discrimination against employees on the basis of political or ideological viewpoint or participation. Our organization sought that reform more than half a decade ago. The Company first refused the request. Then, at this meeting in 2015, CEO Samuel Allen promised to reconsider.⁴ As of today, though, nothing has yet been done.

No one should be discriminated against at work, or in seeking employment or promotion. Not on the basis of sex or race or ethnicity – and not on the basis of political affiliation or personal ideals, either. Our country learned that lesson the hard way during the McCarthy era,⁵ but it increasingly forgets it in workplaces and campuses across the country.

¹ John Deere, *Notice of Annual Report and Proxy Statement 2020*, at 6, available at https://materials.proxyvote.com/Approved/244199/20191231/NPS_414837.PDF (last accessed Feb. 21, 2020) (emphasis added).

² See *id.* at 7.

³ See, e.g., John Deere, *Diversity & Inclusion*, available at <https://www.deere.com/en/our-company/john-deere-careers/why-john-deere/diversity/>.

⁴ See, National Center for Public Policy Research, *CEO of Farming Giant John Deere Challenged for Fighting Proposal to Protect Employees' Right to Engage in Private Political and Civic Activities on Their Own Time* (Feb. 26, 2015), available at <https://nationalcenter.org/ncppr/2015/02/26/ceo-of-farming-giant-john-deere-challenged-for-fighting-proposal-to-protect-employees-right-to-engage-in-private-political-and-civic-activities-on-their-own-time/>.

⁵ See, e.g., *HUAC*, HISTORY.COM (last updated June 7, 2019), available at <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/huac> (last accessed Feb. 21, 2020).

Many of the corporations that we have approached with this request engaged with us and made formal changes to their employment policies. More than a dozen firms – including Walmart, General Electric, PepsiCo, and Visa – adopted the proposal. More than five million American workers now have this protection thanks to our efforts. But we can't say the same for John Deere employees. Perhaps if board of director nominees were vetted for ideological diversity as strongly as they are now vetted for gender and ethnic diversity, that result would change. And thus in our proposal we seek disclosure of those characteristics for board nominees.

We believe that boards that incorporate diverse perspectives can lead stronger and wiser companies. That's a win for investors and a win for true diversity. Please join me in voting yes on the True Diversity Board Proposal. Thank you.

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