

Goldman Sachs Shareholder Meeting Statement on Proposal 4
Scott Shepard, Director, Free Enterprise Project
National Center for Public Policy Research, April 28, 2022

As is often the case with well-considered shareholder proposals, Goldman’s statement in opposition to our proposal underscores the need for it and establishes why all shareholders should support it.

As an initial matter, the company proudly proclaims that it “do[es] not impose any additional restrictions on [its] charitable giving efforts beyond the application of” what it calls “five key principles.” It then lists those principles, which are so entirely spun from the cotton candy of empty happy-thought as to mean anything or nothing, as the company might wish. This means, then, that the company really makes no coherent efforts to ensure that shareholder money given to charitable or NGO organizations is directed wisely or is spent in a legal, sensible and guided manner.

But this simply won’t do. When Goldman spends shareholder money, it must under its legal fiduciary duty ensure that the money is given to worthy organizations for reasons directly related to the company’s bottom line, and with the oversight and restrictions necessary to ensure that it is used for appropriate purposes that advance objective long-term company value.

These obligations are particularly vital now, when so many organizations, including organizations Goldman significantly supports, have been revealed to be unworthy of any donations, and certainly of unrestricted and unmonitored ones.

Consider, for instance: during last year’s shareholder season, we at the National Center submitted proposals to major corporations like Goldman seeking similar contribution reporting, and mentioned the vast flow of unmonitored money to the Black Lives Matters organization as a ground for potential concern. For our efforts, we were falsely maligned as racists. But now it turns out that the Black Lives Matter organization was shot through with corruption, and that tens or hundreds of millions of dollars of shareholder money is completely unaccounted for, with some having been converted to private use, almost surely illegally.

All shareholder assets matter, and have to be accounted for by corporations, regardless of the personal policy preferences of corporate executives or the momentary trendiness of a recipient. Consider also Goldman’s significant contributions to the Human Rights Campaign. That organization once fought for marriage equality for gays and lesbians, but having achieved that, it has become a factory of mendacity. It lies about the so-called Equality Act, the operative portions of which would not, redundantly, achieve equality already won as HRC pretends, but would destroy girls’ and women’s ability to compete at amateur and professional sports; endanger the most vulnerable women, such as at homeless shelters; and explicitly revoke longstanding statutory religious liberties. Likewise, HRC has led the campaign to lie about the Florida law that forbids teachers from leading discussions about sexuality with 4- to 9-year-old students. Despite HRC’s lies, the bill it has falsely labeled the “don’t say gay bill” itself *never says gay*, or any synonym of gay.

Goldman certainly needs to start limiting its contributions to forbid grantees from pushing to revoke liberties, ruin opportunities for girls and women and lie about social and political developments.

Then consider the Business Roundtable, which Goldman also supports. Despite its pretensions that it has the power to change the law on a whim, the Business Roundtable is just a luncheon club for billionaire CEOs. But CEOs can buy their own lunches; they don't need small shareholders to foot the bill. And the Business Roundtable is behind the campaign to pretend that corporations have either the right or ability to act for "all stakeholders" instead of for shareholders. That pretense is a lie designed explicitly to allow billionaire CEOs to run companies by the lights of their own personal policy preferences rather than for shareholder interests. By contributing to it or belonging to it, then, Goldman fleeces shareholders' pockets in order to thwart shareholder wishes and undermine shareholder value.

That's some pretty impressive self-dealing and bad judgment.

In a similar vein, donations to the World Economic Forum are even more corrupt.

Our company claims that there's no reason for shareholders to know what the company is doing with their – shareholder – money. This is absurd. Given what we already know about how Goldman spends our money, and given its own admission that it doesn't bother to constrain or monitor the use of that money, it has an absolute obligation to tell us where it's going – all of it, not just the part that it's not afraid to admit.

It owes us this disclosure as a fundamental fiduciary duty. And despite its pretenses, and its membership in the Business Roundtable, that fiduciary duty remains firmly in place.

You're welcome, Mr. Solomon, for all of those free lunches and all those free trips to Davos. I guess my thank you note got lost in the mail.

*Contact: Judy Kent at (703) 477-7476 or JKent@nationalcenter.org
and David W. Almasi at (703) 568-4727 or DAlmasi@nationalcenter.org
National Center for Public Policy Research
20 F Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001
www.nationalcenter.org • @NationalCenter • @FreeEntProject*