

Walmart Shareholder Meeting – Proposal #7
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I'm Justin Danhof of the National Center for Public Policy Research, and I rise to move proposal #7.

Last spring, Walmart joined other corporations in vilifying religious freedom laws. CEO Doug McMillon claimed that Arkansas' efforts to protect its citizens' deeply-held religious beliefs "threaten[...] to undermine the spirit of inclusion present throughout the state of Arkansas and does not reflect the values we proudly uphold."

Religious freedom has been part of American jurisprudence since our nation's founding. So it's fair to ask: why are Walmart and others voicing objection to this basic civil right now?

The federal government and 31 states have heightened religious freedom laws. This is all they do. First, they say that the government should not interfere with an individual's religious freedom unless doing so is necessary to reach an important government goal. Second, they say that if the government can reach its important goal in a way that does not abridge religious freedom, it should choose the other method. That's it. The federal religious freedom restoration law was co-authored by Senator Ted Kennedy and signed into law by President Clinton. Its purpose is to protect religious rights, which are civil rights. The state laws imitate the federal law.

Corporations and the mainstream media have expressed concern that religious freedom laws will lead to discrimination, in part, against homosexuals. There is zero evidence for this concern. These laws only require the government to avoid interfering with religious freedom if it can do so while still achieving important government goals – one of which, in every state of the union, is outlawing discrimination.

While speaking in opposition to longstanding principles protecting religious freedom, Mr. McMillon extolled the virtues of diversity and inclusion. Walmart operates in nations where homosexuality is outlawed. In some of those countries, homosexual acts are punishable by death. Women have almost no rights in some of these places. And try getting a fair trial in many of these nations. What's diverse and inclusive about that?

Our proposal simply asks management to prepare a report identifying Walmart's criteria for operating in regions with significant and systemic human rights violations. If the company is worried that basic religious freedom laws in Arkansas and elsewhere would harm its employees, then we must question why the company operates in regions with actual discrimination and human rights atrocities. Please join me in supporting proposal #7.

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