

Coca-Cola Shareholder Meeting Statement – Item # 5
David Almasi, Vice President
The National Center for Public Policy Research
April 26, 2017

I'm David Almasi of the National Center for Public Policy Research. I move proposal number five.

Last spring, Coca-Cola joined with other corporations in vilifying religious freedom. As Georgia politicians debated whether to adopt a religious freedom bill known as "The Free Exercise Protection Act," perhaps the bill's biggest opponent was Georgia Prospers – a business coalition of which Coca-Cola is one of the most prominent members. Georgia Prospers lobbied against the bill, and they boasted when Governor Nathan Deal vetoed it. I'm sorry to say, however, that much of the group's work was extremely dishonest, and I truly doubt it aligns with Coca-Cola's values. In its lobbying campaign, Georgia Prospers claimed the bill "legalized discrimination."¹ That's a sensational lie.

The federal government and 31 states have heightened religious freedom laws. These laws say that the government should not interfere with an individual's religious freedom unless doing so is necessary to reach an important government goal. They also say that if the government can reach its goal in a way that does not abridge religious freedom, it should choose the alternative method. That's it. The federal "Religious Freedom Restoration Act" was co-authored by Senator Ted Kennedy and signed into law by President Bill Clinton. Georgia's bill imitated these other laws.

Religious freedom has been a part of American jurisprudence since our nation's founding. So, it's fair to ask: why is Coca-Cola voicing objection to this basic civil right now?

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 such 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.

In response to our proposal, the company claims that it "is committed to respecting human rights" and that it applies "that commitment consistently around the world." That's odd since Coca-Cola operates in many nations where homosexuality is outlawed. Furthermore, women have almost no rights in some of these places.

Our proposal simply asks management to prepare a report identifying Coca-Cola's criteria for operating in regions with significant and systemic human rights violations. If the company is worried about basic religious freedom laws in Georgia, then we must question why the company

still operates in regions with actual discrimination and human rights atrocities. Please join me in supporting proposal five.

*Contact: Judy Kent at (703) 759-7476 or cell (703) 477-7476 or jkent@nationalcenter.org
National Center for Public Policy Research
20 F Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001
www.nationalcenter.org • www.conservativeblog.org • @NationalCenter*

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/businesses-applaud-veto-of-anti-lgbt-measure-in-georgia/>