

# Deregulator

## Go woke or go broke?

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Cooper, corporate shakedowns, and the politicization of everything

I have a green thumb by habit, not by choice. My parents owned a successful retail florist and commercial nursery in Wilkesboro, N.C. I worked there from childhood through my college years.

My youngest sister told me that at one point my father was the second-largest U.S. grower of roses for the wholesale market east of the Mississippi. My folks did well, and some of it rubbed off on me (not the fresh flower arranging part, sadly; that skill stayed with my sisters).

My father also was a lifelong Republican, more in the Ford/Dole/Holshouser/Broyhill school than a backer of those renegade Reaganites. (Though I vaguely recall he had some sympathy for Ronald Reagan's "Stop Nixon" insurgency in '68. Dad was no fan of Tricky Dick.) He was a member or the chairman of the Wilkes County Board of Elections for more than two decades.

But Henderson's Flower Shop and Greenhouses had one hard-and-fast rule about politics. We never displayed campaign literature in the shops, on our vehicles (commercial or personal), or even had much around the house, from what I recall. We didn't discuss politics at work.

Mom and Dad's guidance: We welcome anyone's business and appreciate their patronage. Partisan differences shouldn't affect friendships, and they shouldn't interfere with business. Carnations and roses and chrysanthemums don't grow any faster if the people tending them are Democrats rather than Republicans.

### **Those were the days ...**

In 2021, if you ain't woke you might go broke.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, Attorney General Josh Stein, and Secretary of State Elaine Marshall joined Democratic governors in nine other states, and more than 50 current and former statewide elected leaders, this week in an open letter urging "business leaders and corporate executives" to speak out "against anti-democratic efforts to restrict the freedom to vote."

(A handful of former GOP governors — Arne Carlson of Minnesota, Bill Weld of Massachusetts, and Christine Whitman of New Jersey — rounded out the field. No current elected Republicans signed the letter.)

The letter fails to name any specific corporation, simply referring to earlier efforts by business leaders to "rightly rally to the side of equal rights and racial justice."

The letter is sponsored by States United Democracy Center, a new left-wing nonprofit seeking to scrap state-run elections and backing lawsuits against election reforms in Republican-led states. Hence the group's unabashed support for H.R. 1, the federal "For the People Act."

H.R. 1, which passed the House along partisan lines and is in the Senate, would (for starters) centralize most election management in Washington, D.C. The letter also mentions “more than 360 bills” introduced in 47 states “aimed at restricting voting access.”

I’ve expressed my concerns about H.R. 1. Fortunately, my friend Wally Olson, a Cato Institute legal scholar, just published a thorough takedown of the law. It’s worth your time, but to show you the lack of seriousness behind this legislative debacle, here’s the close:

To put it bluntly, the sponsors of H.R. 1 won’t even drop the parts of their bill that courts *have already declared unconstitutional*. I wonder whether they’re even trying to convince the rest of us.

Meantime, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing Tuesday to conduct an impartial look at these state laws.

Just kidding! The hearing, which lasted four hours, was titled “Jim Crow 2021: The Latest Assault on the Right to Vote.” The hearing, focused on election reforms recently enacted in Georgia, was just as enlightening and productive as its title.

The Democrats’ star witness was Stacey Abrams, who lost the 2018 Georgia governor’s race by 55,000 votes and refused to concede — even though she lost the state by nearly four times the margin Donald Trump lost this past November. Senate Republicans invited Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger, the state’s top elections official who stood up to Trump when it mattered, to discuss the law at the hearing.

But the committee’s Democratic majority refused to let him testify and answer questions.

Wally produced an excellent analysis of the overheated rhetoric surrounding the Georgia law and other state election reforms earlier this month at *The Dispatch*. I agree that the changes are well within the norms of election laws nationally. In some cases, some Republican-run states would keep in place expanded access to the polling places that were implemented during the COVID pandemic; in other words, voting in 2021 and 2022 in these states will be more open than it was in 2019.

Progressive Democrats’ misinformation about the necessity to have the feds take over elections is expected, I suppose, if the idea is regaining or cementing partisan power. But it’s also dispiriting to see continual demands, largely from the left but increasingly on the right, for corporate leaders to toe a partisan line.

Back in Georgia, *The New York Times* reported, Black faith leaders representing more than 1,000 churches called Tuesday for a boycott of Home Depot for failing to oppose the Georgia law.

Bishop Reginald Jackson, who oversees African Methodist Episcopal congregations in the state, said Home Depot, “demonstrated an indifference, a lack of response to the call, not only from clergy, but a call from other groups to speak out in opposition to this legislation.”

From the *Times*:

Mr. Jackson said that the faith leaders were calling for four specific actions from Home Depot: speaking out against the Georgia voting law, publicly opposing similar bills in other states, offering support for the John Lewis Voting Rights Act in Congress, and backing litigation against the Georgia law.

Nice little home-improvement business you have there. Too bad if something happened to it.

If indeed state lawmakers were trying to impose Jim Crow laws (including, say, legalizing lynching, imposing poll taxes, or resegregating public facilities), then I would push businesses and anyone who'd listen to fight these changes.

That's not what's happening, as Wally's *Dispatch* article, among other writings, notes.

Expecting businesses to routinely become political actors invites government into the boardroom, as *The Economist* said in a recent editorial:

[A]s classical liberals, we ... believe that concentrations of power are dangerous. Businesspeople will always lobby for their own advantage, but the closer they get to the government, the more harm they threaten to both the economy and politics. ...

To want to defend voting rights, which are central to democracy, is only natural. But that leads ineluctably to the next test — over support for, say, new federal voting laws, reform of the Supreme Court, and boycotts of China over human-rights abuses in Xinjiang. If CEOs claim that their companies are moral actors, will they be consistent?

They won't, at least in activists' eyes. As a classical liberal, I understand politics plays a role in any democratic society. But it shouldn't be the only actor on the stage. Expecting politics to worm into every aspect of our lives invites division, distrust, and even more political conflict.

As for me, I need to pick up some potting soil.