

J&J latest company to quit republican policy group

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Johnson & Johnson became the latest company to end its membership in the American Legislative Exchange. Photographer: Brent Lewin/Bloomberg

Johnson & Johnson (JNJ) (JNJ) became the latest company to end its membership in the American Legislative Exchange Council, a Washington-based public policy group under fire for championing voter identification and "Stand Your Ground" gun laws.

"We have been in dialogue with the American Legislative Exchange Council for some time, and while we acknowledge ALEC's recent decision to focus only on innovation and growth-supporting policies, we have decided to suspend our participation and membership," said a statement provided by Carol Goodrich, a spokeswoman for the New Brunswick, New Jersey-based company.

In April, ALEC announced it was disbanding a task force that dealt with voter-ID and gun rights measures and would focus exclusively on economic issues.

The group's move to steer clear of non-economic issues hasn't stemmed a corporate walk-out, as Johnson & Johnson joins Wal-Mart Stores Inc. (WMT) (WMT), McDonald's Corp. (MCD) (MCD), and The Coca-Cola Co. (KO) (KO) in leaving the organization.

Johnson & Johnson had been targeted by ColorofChange, a New York-based civil rights group, which ran radio ads and generated phone calls to corporate members of ALEC urging them to quit the group. ColorofChange made the announcement today that Johnson & Johnson had left ALEC.

'Extreme Agenda'

"As Americans learn more about ALEC's extreme agenda, companies understand that their brands suffer through association with a group that has weakened our democracy and made it harder to earn a living wage," said Rashad Robinson, ColorofChange's executive director.

Kaitlyn Buss, ALEC's spokeswoman, criticized ColorofChange's efforts in a statement.

"As we announced in April, ALEC is solely focused on free-market solutions that create jobs and improve the economy," she said. "Americans of all political stripes should be deeply troubled by the kind of tactics employed by ColorofChange designed to spread fear and shut

down debate. Ultimately, they will not succeed because our limited government ideals are far from the caricature the liberal extremists have attempted to paint.”

Working through ALEC, corporate representatives have helped state lawmakers draft various bills, which are then introduced before state legislatures.

Voting Laws Opposition

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus have opposed ALEC-backed efforts to enact voter-ID laws, saying they suppress minority participation in elections.

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University has said 25 percent of voting-age blacks, 16 percent of voting-age Hispanics and 15 percent of voting-age Americans in households earning less than \$35,000 lack the sort of approved identification required by the laws.

ALEC also championed the so-called “Stand Your Ground” laws that allow individuals to use deadly force if they feel threatened. George Zimmerman, a community watch volunteer who shot and killed unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida earlier this year, has claimed self-defense under such a law. He is charged with second-degree murder.

That case drew attention to ALEC and its adversaries began pressuring corporations to quit the group. An annual corporate membership in ALEC costs \$25,000 or more.

Washington-based Common Cause, a public policy advocacy group, has asked the Internal Revenue Service whether ALEC is entitled to its tax-exempt status, insisting instead that it is a lobbying organization.

Fonte: Bloomberg Businessweek, 12 June 2012. Disponível em:
<<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-06-12/johnson-and-johnson-latest-to-quit-republican-policy-group>>. Acesso em: 12 June 2012.