

★ TOP NEWS

TRUMP'S ANTI-DEI STANCE HAS ILLINOIS COMPANIES TIGHT-LIPPED OR REVERSING DIVERSITY POLICIES

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Some Illinois companies are pulling back on their diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, as President Donald Trump continues his push to eliminate such programs from the federal government.

Chicago-based fast-food chain McDonald's was the latest company to announce plans to roll back DEI efforts, saying in early January that it would end representation goals, pause external surveys and rebrand its diversity team as the Global Inclusion Team. It joined Moline-based John Deere, which said in a July 2024 post on X that it will no longer support "social or culture awareness events" and will audit its training materials "to ensure the absence of socially motivated messages."

In the past year, other large companies such as Disney, Google, Target, Walmart, Amazon, Meta and Ford Motor Co. have scaled back or halted their DEI commitments. That's in addition to Boeing, Lowe's, Harley Davidson, Tractor Supply Co. and Jack Daniels.

Amid this landscape, the Sun-Times reviewed the DEI strategies of 15 major Illinois-based public companies to see if their DEI policies have changed. A review of each company found many still referenced a DEI strategy on their websites or in their latest annual reports. But it also found that some changed their policies within the last month.

Of the 15 companies, only Exelon Corp. confirmed its commitment to DEI initiatives, while five of the companies declined to comment and nine did not respond to requests for comment.



The McDonald's at 5200 S. Lake Park Ave. in Hyde Park. TYLER PASCIAK LARIVIERE/SUN-TIMES

The 15 companies reviewed include:

- ◆ Allstate Corp., insurance firm headquartered in Northbrook
- ◆ Archer Daniels Midland Co., agricultural supply chain manager and processor based in Chicago
- ◆ Baxter International, Deerfield-based medical product maker
- ◆ Conagra Brands, consumer packaged goods food company in Chicago

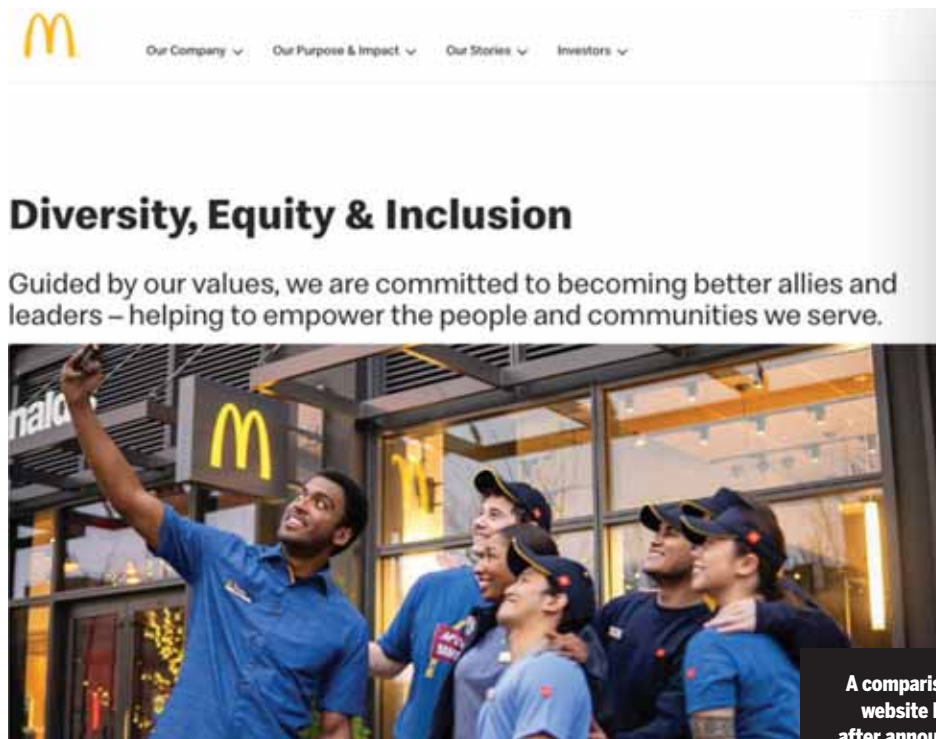
- ◆ Exelon Corp., utility company in Chicago
- ◆ Grubhub, Chicago-based food delivery business
- ◆ Hyatt Hotels Corp., hospitality firm based in Chicago
- ◆ JLL, real estate services company in Chicago
- ◆ Kraft Heinz, Chicago-based food and beverage maker
- ◆ Mondelez International, food company in Chicago

- ◆ Portillo's, restaurant chain based in Oak Brook
- ◆ State Farm, Bloomington-based insurer
- ◆ United Airlines, based in Chicago
- ◆ US Foods, food distributor in Rosemont
- ◆ Walgreens Boots Alliance, pharmacy retailer in Chicago

While DEI plans have been used to reduce employment discrimina-

tion, opponents have increasingly used the term to describe an unfair hiring advantage for so-called unqualified people of color, though studies have shown hiring gaps for minorities persist. There's also been a wave of intense conservative backlash and lawsuits against companies with DEI initiatives.

And some companies, including in Illinois, are giving in by changing the name of their DEI initiatives



or scaling back, while others stay quiet about their commitments. Yet DEI experts and advocates say fear of public pushback and litigation are furthering inequity instead of eliminating it.

Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul, who is among a cohort of attorneys general pushing back, has publicly called on companies to maintain their DEI initiatives.

"I have no problem with companies reviewing their policies to make sure that they're not violative of antidiscrimination laws," Raoul said. "But I will be critical of people who run away from the nomenclature, because I think that's weak. And I will be critical of people who totally abandon efforts to be inclusive."

Despite companies' efforts to employ and promote more women over the past decade, they are still underrepresented across all positions, according to the 2024 Women in the Workplace study by McKinsey & Co. and LeanIn.Org. Women make up 29% of C-suite positions, with women of color accounting for 7%, according to the report, which surveyed approximately 15,000 employees and 280 HR leaders at 281 U.S. organizations that collectively employ more than 10 million.

And at the rate of progress over the last 10 years, it would take nearly 50 years for the percentage

of women in senior leadership to reflect their percentage of the U.S. population.

Businesses need to address "weak spots" in their pipelines by promoting women at equal rates to men and investing in more leadership development for women, according to the report.

Research by the Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance found Asian, Black and Hispanic/Latino workers represent 37% of the U.S. workforce, but the population accounts for 23% of C-suite positions among companies in the S&P 100.

Changing policies

Scholarships or other funding to historically Black colleges and universities is a common part of some companies' DEI strategies. Illinois businesses like Conagra, Baxter International and Hyatt have made such contributions.

McDonald's offered a Hispanic college scholarship program, called HACER. But last month, it said it would no longer require Hispanic/Latino heritage for students who apply to the decades-old program, settling a lawsuit filed by the American Alliance for Equal Rights, which also is suing Bally's over its Chicago minority investment program. The lawsuit against

A comparison of McDonald's website before (left) and after announcing plans to pull back on its DEI initiatives.

INTERNET ARCHIVE: MCDONALD'S

McDonald's said the fast-food giant discriminated against non-Hispanics by not making the scholarship available to everyone.

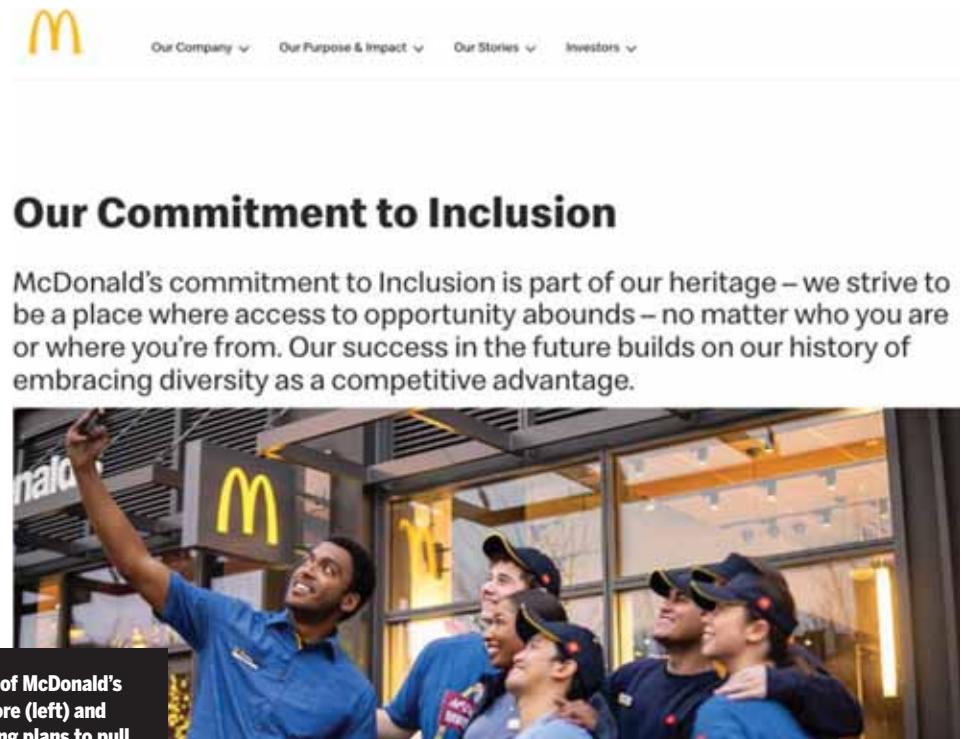
McDonald's declined to comment, referring the Sun-Times to its January announcement on DEI changes.

The Chicago-area branch of the McDonald's Hispanic Owner-Operators Association did not respond to requests for comment. The National Black McDonald's Operators Association told the Sun-Times no



Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul

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one was available for an interview.

While most firms reviewed by the Sun-Times mentioned a commitment to increasing diversity among employees and suppliers, only Mondelez, Walgreens and Kraft Heinz reported representation goals for specific groups, including women and people of color.

In 2021, Kraft Heinz set goals to have 30% of its salaried U.S. employees identify as people of color and 50% of its global management positions to be filled by women by 2025, as part of an effort to have its staff reflect the larger population. At the end of 2023, the company reported that people of color represented 29% of its salaried U.S. employees, up from 27% in 2021, and 43% of global management positions held by women, up from 39% in 2021, according to a review of its annual reports.

Mondelez, Allstate and Hyatt reported goals for achieving a certain percentage or amount spent with minority-owned suppliers. Hyatt said it surpassed its 2025 goal to allocate 10% of its diverse and women-owned supplier spend with Black businesses, hitting 50% as of year-end 2023.

But in the past month, the Sun-Times found companies such as Walgreens, Conagra and Archer Daniels Midland made changes to

their DEI terminology or cut back reporting on their websites and annual reports.

Archer Daniels Midland changed the name of its strategy from "diversity, equity and inclusion" to "culture, engagement and inclusion." It removed language about its "diverse talent slates and interview panels" and "advancement of colleagues from underrepresented backgrounds." It also removed items from a list of DEI commitments such as participation in a coalition focused on "gender balance in global leadership" and partnership with the Jobs for America's Graduates career program.

United cut back its DEI reporting in its 2023 annual report amid criticism from billionaire Elon Musk and America First Legal, a conservative advocacy group founded by Trump aide Stephen Miller. A year earlier, its 2022 report had included goals of having "90% of interview slates include a diverse set of candidates," at least half of its United Aviate Academy graduates be women or people of color and at least half of its technicians in its apprenticeship program be women or people of color.

It's unclear if United has eliminated some initiatives, because a

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