

MacKay Shields
Proxy Voting Policies and Procedures
February 2026

1. Introduction

MacKay Shields¹ (“MacKay” or the “Firm”) has adopted these “Proxy Voting Policy and Procedures” (the “Policy”) to ensure the Firm’s compliance with Rule 206(4)-6 under the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, as amended (the “Advisers Act”) and other applicable fiduciary obligations. The Policy applies to proxies relating to securities held by clients of MacKay Shields who have delegated the responsibility of voting proxies to the Firm. The Policy is designed to assist Firm employees in meeting their specific responsibilities in this area and to reasonably ensure that proxies are voted in the best interests of the Firm’s clients.

2. Statement of Policy

2.1 It is the policy of MacKay Shields that where the Firm has voting authority, all proxies are to be voted in the best interest of the client without regard to the interests of MacKay Shields or other related parties. Specifically, MacKay Shields shall not subordinate the interests of clients to unrelated objectives, including MacKay Shields’ interests. MacKay Shields shall act with the care, skill, prudence and diligence under the circumstances then prevailing that a prudent person acting in a like capacity and familiar with such matters would use in the conduct of an enterprise of a like character and with like aims. For purposes of the Policy, the “best interests of clients” shall mean, unless otherwise specified by the client, the clients’ best economic interests over the long term as determined by MacKay Shields – that is, the common interest that all MacKay Shields clients share in seeing the value of a common investment increase over time. It is further the policy of the Firm that complete and accurate disclosure concerning its proxy voting policies and procedures and proxy voting records as required by the Advisers Act, be made available to its clients.

2.2 When proxies with respect to securities held by clients of MacKay Shields have not been received by MacKay Shields or its proxy voting service provider, MacKay Shields will make reasonable efforts to obtain missing proxies. MacKay Shields is not responsible for voting proxies it or its proxy voting service provider does not receive.

2.3 MacKay Shields may choose not to vote proxies when it believes that it is appropriate. This may occur, without limitation, under the following circumstances:

- If the effect on the client’s economic interests or the value of the portfolio holding is indeterminable or insignificant;
- If the cost of voting the proxy outweighs the possible benefit to the client; or
- If a jurisdiction imposes share blocking restrictions which prevent the Firm from trading shares.

¹ For purposes of this Policy, MacKay Shields refers to MacKay Shields LLC and NYL Investments UK LLP.

3. Use of Third Party Proxy Voting Service Provider

To discharge its responsibility, MacKay Shields has examined third-party services that assist in the researching and voting of proxies and the development of voting guidelines. After such review, the Firm has selected Institutional Shareholder Services, Inc., (“ISS”), to research voting proposals, analyze the financial implications of voting proposals and vote proxies. MacKay Shields utilizes the research and analytical services, operational implementation, administration, record-keeping and reporting services provided by ISS.

4. Proxy Voting Guidelines

4.1 To the extent that a client has authorized MacKay Shields to vote proxies on its behalf, and except as set forth Sections 6 & 7 of this Policy or at otherwise directed by a client in writing, MacKay has determined to adopt the following proxy voting guidelines:

4.1.a Proxies for non-union clients will generally be voted in accordance with the voting recommendations contained in the applicable ISS non-union domestic or global proxy voting guidelines, as in effect from time to time (“Non-Union Guidelines”). Refer to Exhibit A for the current U.S. Summary Proxy Voting Guidelines.

4.1.b Proxies for union or Taft-Hartley clients will generally be voted in accordance with the voting recommendations contained in the applicable ISS Taft-Hartley domestic or international proxy voting guidelines, as in effect from time to time (“Union Guidelines”). A summary of the current Taft-Hartley U.S. Voting Guidelines and Taft-Hartley International Voting Guidelines are attached as Exhibit B.

4.1.c Notwithstanding Section 4.1.a of this Policy, proxies for non-union clients whose investment strategy directs MacKay Shields to invest primarily in assets that satisfy Environmental, Social and Governance (“ESG”) criteria, as determined by MacKay Shields, in its discretion, will be voted in accordance with the voting recommendations contained in the applicable ISS Sustainability U.S. or International proxy voting guidelines, as in effect from time to time (“Sustainability Guidelines”). Refer to Exhibit C for the current U.S. and International Sustainability Proxy Voting Guidelines.

4.2 For purposes of the Policy, the Non-Union Guidelines, Union Guidelines, and Sustainability Guidelines are collectively referred to as the “Standard Guidelines.”

4.3 A client may choose to use proxy voting guidelines different from the Standard Guidelines (“Custom Guidelines”). Any Custom Guidelines must be furnished by the client to MacKay Shields in writing and MacKay Shields will general vote proxies for any such client in accordance with the applicable Custom Guidelines.

4.4 In the event the Standard Guidelines or any client’s Custom Guidelines do not address how a proxy should be voted or state that the vote is to be determined on a “case-

by-case” basis, the proxy will be voted in accordance with ISS recommendations, subject to Section 6. In the event that ISS has not made a recommendation, MacKay Shields will follow the procedure set forth in Section 7.

4.5 For clients using the Standard Guidelines, the Firm will instruct ISS to cast votes in accordance with the Standard Guidelines. For clients using Custom Guidelines, the Firm will provide ISS with a copy of such Custom Guidelines and will instruct ISS to cast votes in accordance with such Custom Guidelines. ISS will cast votes in accordance with the Standard Guidelines or Custom Guidelines, as the case may be, unless instructed otherwise by MacKay Shields as set forth in Sections 6 and 7. Upon receipt of a specific request from a client pursuant to Section 4.6, the Firm will instruct ISS to cast such client’s proxy in accordance with such request.

4.6 Notwithstanding the foregoing, MacKay Shields will vote a proxy with respect to a particular security held by a client in accordance with such client’s specific request even if it is in a manner inconsistent with the Standard Guidelines or the client’s Custom Guidelines, as the case may be. Any such specific requests must be furnished to MacKay Shields by the client in writing and must be received by MacKay on a timely basis for instructing ISS how to cast the vote.

4.7 In an effort to avoid possible conflicts of interest, MacKay Shields has determined to generally vote proxies based on the Standard Guidelines or a client’s Custom Guidelines, as the case may be. For the avoidance of doubt, however, it is recognized that the Firm’s portfolio management teams have the ultimate responsibility determining how to vote proxies in the best interest of a client voting.

5. Client Account Set-up and Review

5.1 Initially, MacKay Shields must verify whether the client has duly authorized MacKay Shields to vote proxies on its behalf, or if the client has retained the responsibility of voting proxies. The Marketing and Client Services departments, in conjunction with the Legal and/or Compliance Department, will have primary responsibility for making that determination. MacKay’s Compliance Department will be responsible for ensuring that a record of each client’s proxy voting status and, to the extent applicable, the type of proxy voting guidelines is maintained. In its sole discretion, the Firm may decline to accept authority to vote a client’s proxies. Any such refusal shall be in writing.

5.2 In most cases, the delegation of voting authority to MacKay Shields, and the Firm’s use of a third-party proxy voting service provider shall be memorialized in the client’s investment management agreement.

5.3 MacKay Shields shall notify ISS of new client accounts using such form as ISS shall specify from time to time. Designated personnel within the Firm will be responsible for ensuring that each new client’s account for which the Firm has proxy voting authority is established on the appropriate systems and that each such account is properly coded for voting under the appropriate Non-Union Guidelines, Union Guidelines or Custom Guidelines, as the case may be.

6. Overriding Guidelines

A portfolio manager may propose that a particular proxy vote be cast in a manner different from the Standard Guidelines or an ISS voting recommendation, or may propose an abstention from voting, if they believe that to do so, based on all facts and circumstances, is in the best interest of the Firm's clients as a whole. Any portfolio manager who proposes to override the Standard Guidelines or an ISS voting recommendation on a particular vote or to abstain from voting must complete a Proxy Vote Override/Decision Form, which is set forth in Schedule D.

7. Referral of Voting Decision by ISS to MacKay Shields

7.1 In the event that the Standard Guidelines or a client's Custom Guidelines do not address how a proxy should be voted on a specific proposal for an issuer and ISS has not made a recommendation as to how such proxy should be voted, ISS will so advise MacKay Shields. In that event, the Legal and/or Compliance Departments will request that the appropriate portfolio manager makes a voting recommendation and complete a Proxy Vote Override/Decision Form.

7.2 In the event that the Standard Guidelines or a client's Custom Guidelines require a "case-by-case" determination on a particular proxy vote and ISS has not made a recommendation as to how such proxy should be voted, ISS will so advise MacKay Shields. In that event, the Legal and/or Compliance Departments will request that the appropriate portfolio manager make a voting recommendation and complete a Proxy Vote Override/Decision Form.

7.3 In the event that ISS determines that a conflict of interest exists as a result of which ISS is precluded from making a recommendation as to how a proxy should be voted on a specific proposal for an issuer, ISS will so advise MacKay Shields. In that event, the Legal and/or Compliance Departments will request that the appropriate portfolio manager make a voting recommendation and complete a Proxy Vote Override/Decision Form.

8. Conflicts of Interest

8.1 The Firm's portfolio managers may make proxy voting decisions in connection with (i) overriding the Standard Guidelines or an ISS voting recommendation pursuant to Section 6, or (ii) deciding on a vote pursuant to Section 7. In such event, the portfolio managers have an affirmative duty to disclose to the Legal and/or Compliance Departments any potential conflict of interest known to them that exists between the Firm and the client on whose behalf the proxy is to be voted ("Conflict").

8.2. By way of example, Conflicts may exist in situations where the Firm is called to vote on a proxy involving an issuer or proponent of a proxy proposal regarding the issuer where MacKay Shields or an affiliated person of the Firm also:

- Manages the issuer's or proponent's pension plan;
- Administers the issuer's or proponent's employee benefit plan;

- Provided brokerage, underwriting, insurance or banking services to the issuer or proponent; or
- Manages money for an employee group.

Additional Conflicts may exist, among others, if an executive of the Firm or its control affiliates is a close relative of, or has a personal or business relationship with:

- An executive of the issuer or proponent;
- A director of the issuer or proponent;
- A person who is a candidate to be a director of the issuer;
- A participant in the proxy contest; or
- A proponent of a proxy proposal.

8.3 Whether a relationship creates a Conflict will depend on the facts and circumstances. Even if these parties do not attempt to influence the Firm with respect to voting, the value of the relationship to MacKay Shields or an affiliate can create a Conflict.

8.4 After a Proxy Vote Override/Decision Form is completed pursuant to Sections 6 or 7, such Form, which elicits information as to whether a potential Conflict exists, must be submitted to the Legal and/or Compliance Departments for review. If the Firm's General Counsel ("GC"), Chief Compliance Officer ("CCO") or their designee determines that there is no potential Conflict, the GC, CCO or their designee, may instruct ISS to vote the proxy issue as set forth in the completed Form.

8.5 If the GC, CCO or their designee determines that there exists or may exist a Conflict, he or she will refer the issue to the Compliance Committee for consideration by convening (in person or via telephone) an emergency meeting of the Compliance Committee. For purposes of this Policy, a majority vote of those members present shall resolve any Conflict. The Compliance Committee will consider the facts and circumstances of the pending proxy vote and the potential or actual Conflict and make a determination as to how to vote the proxy – i.e., whether to permit or deny the recommendation of the portfolio manager, or whether to take other action, such as delegating the proxy vote to an independent third party or obtaining voting instructions from clients.

8.6 In considering the proxy vote and potential Conflict, the Compliance Committee may review the following factors, including but not limited to:

- The percentage of outstanding securities of the issuer held on behalf of clients by the Firm.
- The nature of the relationship of the issuer or proponent with the Firm, its affiliates or its executive officers.
- Whether there has been any attempt to directly or indirectly influence the portfolio manager's decision.
- Whether the direction (for or against) of the proposed vote would appear to benefit the Firm or a related party.
- Whether an objective decision to vote in a certain way will still create a strong appearance of a Conflict.

MacKay Shields may not abstain from voting any such proxy for the purpose of avoiding Conflict.

9. Securities Lending

If MacKay Shields portfolio managers or their designees become aware of an upcoming shareholder meeting where there is an important vote to be taken, or become aware of a request for consent of security holders on a material matter affecting the investment, MacKay Shields will consider whether to request that clients call back securities loans, if applicable. In determining whether to request that clients call back securities loans, the relevant portfolio manager(s) shall consider whether the benefit to the client in voting the matter or giving or withholding consent outweighs the benefit to the client in keeping the security on loan. There may be instances when MacKay Shields may not be aware of the upcoming shareholder meeting or request for consent with sufficient time in advance to make such a request, or when MacKay Shields' request that a client call back a securities loan in sufficient time to vote or give or withhold consent may not be successful.

10. Reporting

Upon request, MacKay Shields shall report annually (or more frequently if specifically requested) to its clients on proxy votes cast on their behalf. MacKay Shields will provide any client who makes a written or verbal request with a copy of a report disclosing how MacKay Shields voted securities held in that client's portfolio. The report will generally contain the following information:

- The name of the issuer of the security;
- The security's exchange ticker symbol;
- The security's CUSIP number;
- The shareholder meeting date;
- A brief identification of the matter voted on;
- Whether the matter was proposed by the issuer or by a security holder;
- Whether MacKay Shields cast its vote on the matter on behalf of the client;
- How MacKay Shields voted on behalf of the client; and
- Whether MacKay Shields voted for or against management on behalf of the client.

11. Record-Keeping

All reports and records shall be kept in accordance with these Procedures, the Firm's Maintenance and Retention of Books and Records Policy, the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, and other applicable regulations.

12. Review of Voting and Guidelines

As part of its periodic reviews, MacKay Shields' Compliance Department will conduct an annual review of the prior year's proxy voting as well as the guidelines established for proxy voting. Documentation shall be maintained of this review and a report setting forth the results of the review will be presented annually to the Compliance Committee. In

addition, MacKay Shields' Compliance Department maintains a list of non-voting accounts.

13. How to Request Information On How the Firm Voted Proxies

Clients may, at anytime, request and receive information from MacKay Shields as to how the Firm voted proxies for securities held in their account. Any such proxy information request should be in writing to:

MacKay Shields LLC
clientservicerepresentatives@mackayshields.com
(CC: compliance-db@mackayshields.com)
299 Park Avenue, 32nd Floor
New York, NY 10171
Attention: Head of Client Services

Exhibits:

Exhibit A - U.S. Summary Proxy Voting Guidelines (Standard Guidelines for non-union clients).

Exhibit B (Part I and II) - U.S. Taft-Hartley Proxy Voting Guidelines and International Taft-Hartley Proxy Voting Guidelines (Standard Guidelines for union clients (Taft-Hartley) (US and International))

Exhibit C (Part I and II) - U.S. Sustainability Proxy Voting Guidelines and International Sustainability Proxy Voting Guidelines (Standard Guidelines for ESG investment objective mandates)

Schedule D- Proxy Vote Override/Decision Form

*Access to the ISS Voting Guidelines mentioned above and other ISS Voting Guidelines are available at <https://www.issgovernance.com/policy-gateway/voting-policies/>



UNITED STATES

Proxy Voting Guidelines Benchmark Policy Recommendations

Effective for Meetings on or after February 1, 2026
Published December 9, 2025

Effective for Meetings Published on or after February 25, 2025, Consideration of Certain Diversity Factors in Making Vote Recommendations Is Suspended (see pp. 12-13 for more information).

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Coverage

The U.S. research team provides proxy analyses and voting recommendations for the common shareholder meetings of U.S. - incorporated companies that are publicly-traded on U.S. exchanges, as well as certain OTC companies, if they are held in our institutional investor clients' portfolios. Coverage generally includes corporate actions for common equity holders, such as written consents and bankruptcies. ISS' U.S. coverage includes investment companies (including open-end funds, closed-end funds, exchange-traded funds, and unit investment trusts), limited partnerships ("LPs"), master limited partnerships ("MLPs"), limited liability companies ("LLCs"), and business development companies. ISS reviews its universe of coverage on an annual basis, and the coverage is subject to change based on client need and industry trends.

Foreign-incorporated companies

In addition to U.S.- incorporated, U.S.- listed companies, ISS' U.S. policies are applied to certain foreign-incorporated company analyses. Like the SEC, ISS distinguishes two types of companies that list but are not incorporated in the U.S.:

- U.S. Domestic Issuers – which have a majority of outstanding shares held in the U.S. and meet other criteria, as determined by the SEC, and are subject to the same disclosure and listing standards as U.S. incorporated companies (e.g. they are required to file DEF14A proxy statements) – are generally covered under standard U.S. policy guidelines.
- [Foreign Private Issuers](#) (FPIs) – which are allowed to take exemptions from most disclosure requirements (e.g., they are allowed to file 6-K for their proxy materials) and U.S. listing standards – are generally covered under a combination of policy guidelines:
 - FPI Guidelines (see the [Americas Regional Proxy Voting Guidelines](#)), may apply to companies incorporated in governance havens, and apply certain minimum independence and disclosure standards in the evaluation of key proxy ballot items, such as the election of directors; and/or
 - Guidelines for the market that is responsible for, or most relevant to, the item on the ballot.

U.S. incorporated companies listed only on non-U.S. exchanges are generally covered under the ISS guidelines for the market on which they are traded.

An FPI is generally covered under ISS' approach to FPIs outlined above, even if such FPI voluntarily files a proxy statement and/or other filing normally required of a U.S. Domestic Issuer, so long as the company retains its FPI status.

In all cases – including with respect to other companies with cross-market features that may lead to ballot items related to multiple markets – items that are on the ballot solely due to the requirements of another market (listing, incorporation, or national code) may be evaluated under the policy of the relevant market, regardless of the "assigned" primary market coverage.

1. Board of Directors

Voting on Director Nominees in Uncontested Elections

Four fundamental principles apply when determining votes on director nominees:

Independence: Boards should be sufficiently independent from management (and significant shareholders) to ensure that they are able and motivated to effectively supervise management's performance for the benefit of all shareholders, including in setting and monitoring the execution of corporate strategy, with appropriate use of shareholder capital, and in setting and monitoring executive compensation programs that support that strategy. The chair of the board should ideally be an independent director, and all boards should have an independent leadership position or a similar role in order to help provide appropriate counterbalance to executive management, as well as having sufficiently independent committees that focus on key governance concerns such as audit, compensation, and nomination of directors.

Composition: Companies should ensure that directors add value to the board through their specific skills and expertise and by having sufficient time and commitment to serve effectively. Boards should be of a size appropriate to accommodate diversity, expertise, and independence, while ensuring active and collaborative participation by all members. Boards should be sufficiently diverse to ensure consideration of a wide range of perspectives.

Responsiveness: Directors should respond to investor input, such as that expressed through significant opposition to management proposals, significant support for shareholder proposals (whether binding or non-binding), and tender offers where a majority of shares are tendered.

Accountability: Boards should be sufficiently accountable to shareholders, including through transparency of the company's governance practices and regular board elections, by the provision of sufficient information for shareholders to be able to assess directors and board composition, and through the ability of shareholders to remove directors.

General Recommendation: Generally vote for director nominees, except under the following circumstances (with new nominees¹ considered on case-by-case basis):

Independence

Vote against² or withhold from non-independent directors (Executive Directors and Non-Independent Non-Executive Directors per [ISS' Classification of Directors](#)) when:

- Independent directors comprise 50 percent or less of the board;
- The non-independent director serves on the audit, compensation, or nominating committee;
- The company lacks an audit, compensation, or nominating committee so that the full board functions as that committee; or
- The company lacks a formal nominating committee, even if the board attests that the independent directors fulfill the functions of such a committee.

¹ A "new nominee" is a director who is being presented for election by shareholders for the first time. Recommendations on new nominees who have served for less than one year are made on a case-by-case basis depending on the timing of their appointment and the problematic governance issue in question.

² In general, companies with a plurality vote standard use "Withhold" as the contrary vote option in director elections; companies with a majority vote standard use "Against". However, it will vary by company and the proxy must be checked to determine the valid contrary vote option for the particular company.

ISS Classification of Directors – U.S.

1. **Executive Director**
 - 1.1. Current officer¹ of the company or one of its affiliates².
2. **Non-Independent Non-Executive Director**
 - Board Identification
 - 2.1. Director identified as not independent by the board.
 - Controlling/Significant Shareholder
 - 2.2. Beneficial owner of more than 50 percent of the company's voting power (this may be aggregated if voting power is distributed among more than one member of a group).
 - Current Employment at Company or Related Company
 - 2.3. Non-officer employee of the firm (including employee representatives).
 - 2.4. Officer¹, former officer, or general or limited partner of a joint venture or partnership with the company.
 - Former Employment
 - 2.5. Former CEO of the company.^{3, 4}
 - 2.6. Former non-CEO officer¹ of the company or an affiliate² within the past five years.
 - 2.7. Former officer¹ of an acquired company within the past five years.⁴
 - 2.8. Officer¹ of a former parent or predecessor firm at the time the company was sold or split off within the past five years.
 - 2.9. Former interim officer if the service was longer than 18 months. If the service was between 12 and 18 months an assessment of the interim officer's employment agreement will be made.⁵
 - Family Members
 - 2.10. Immediate family member⁶ of a current or former officer¹ of the company or its affiliates² within the last five years.
 - 2.11. Immediate family member⁶ of a current employee of company or its affiliates² where additional factors raise concern (which may include, but are not limited to, the following: a director related to numerous employees; the company or its affiliates employ relatives of numerous board members; or a non-Section 16 officer in a key strategic role).
 - Professional, Transactional, and Charitable Relationships
 - 2.12. Director who (or whose immediate family member⁶) currently provides professional services⁷ in excess of \$10,000 per year to: the company, an affiliate², or an individual officer of the company or an affiliate; or who is (or whose immediate family member⁶ is) a partner, employee, or controlling shareholder of an organization which provides the services.
 - 2.13. Director who (or whose immediate family member⁶) currently has any material transactional relationship⁸ with the company or its affiliates²; or who is (or whose immediate family member⁶ is) a partner in, or a controlling shareholder or an executive officer of, an organization which has the material transactional relationship⁸ (excluding investments in the company through a private placement).
 - 2.14. Director who (or whose immediate family member⁶) is a trustee, director, or employee of a charitable or non-profit organization that receives material grants or endowments⁸ from the company or its affiliates².
 - Other Relationships
 - 2.15. Party to a voting agreement⁹ to vote in line with management on proposals being brought to shareholder vote.
 - 2.16. Has (or an immediate family member⁶ has) an interlocking relationship as defined by the SEC involving members of the board of directors or its Compensation Committee.¹⁰
 - 2.17. Founder¹¹ of the company but not currently an employee.
 - 2.18. Director with pay comparable to Named Executive Officers.
 - 2.19. Any material¹² relationship with the company.
3. **Independent Director**
 - 3.1. No material¹² connection to the company other than a board seat.

Footnotes:

1. The definition of officer will generally follow that of a “Section 16 officer” (officers subject to Section 16 of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934) and includes the chief executive, operating, financial, legal, technology, and accounting officers of a company (including the president, treasurer, secretary, controller, or any vice president in charge of a principal business unit, division, or policy function). Current interim officers are included in this category. For private companies, the equivalent positions are applicable. A non-employee director serving as an officer due to statutory requirements (e.g. corporate secretary) will generally be classified as a Non-Independent Non-Executive Director under “Any material relationship with the company.” However, if the company provides explicit disclosure that the director is not receiving additional compensation exceeding \$10,000 per year for serving in that capacity, then the director will be classified as an Independent Director.
2. “Affiliate” includes a subsidiary, sibling company, or parent company. ISS uses 50 percent control ownership by the parent company as the standard for applying its affiliate designation. The manager/advisor of an externally managed issuer (EMI) is considered an affiliate.
3. Includes any former CEO of the company prior to the company’s initial public offering (IPO).
4. When there is a former CEO of a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) serving on the board of an acquired company, ISS will generally classify such directors as independent unless determined otherwise taking into account the following factors: the applicable listing standards determination of such director’s independence; any operating ties to the firm; and the existence of any other conflicting relationships or related party transactions.
5. ISS will look at the terms of the interim officer’s employment contract to determine if it contains severance pay, long-term health and pension benefits, or other such standard provisions typically contained in contracts of permanent, non-temporary CEOs. ISS will also consider if a formal search process was under way for a full-time officer at the time.
6. “Immediate family member” follows the SEC’s definition of such and covers spouses, parents, children, step-parents, step-children, siblings, in-laws, and any person (other than a tenant or employee) sharing the household of any director, nominee for director, executive officer, or significant shareholder of the company.
7. Professional services can be characterized as advisory in nature, generally involve access to sensitive company information or to strategic decision-making, and typically have a commission- or fee-based payment structure. Professional services generally include but are not limited to the following: investment banking/financial advisory services, commercial banking (beyond deposit services), investment services, insurance services, accounting/audit services, consulting services, marketing services, legal services, property management services, realtor services, lobbying services, executive search services, and IT consulting services. The following would generally be considered transactional relationships and not professional services: deposit services, IT tech support services, educational services, and construction services. The case of participation in a banking syndicate by a non-lead bank should be considered a transactional (and hence subject to the associated materiality test) rather than a professional relationship. “Of Counsel” relationships are only considered immaterial if the individual does not receive any form of compensation (in excess of \$10,000 per year) from, or is a retired partner of, the firm providing the professional service. The case of a company providing a professional service to one of its directors or to an entity with which one of its directors is affiliated, will be considered a transactional rather than a professional relationship. Insurance services and marketing services are assumed to be professional services unless the company explains why such services are not advisory.
8. A material transactional relationship, including grants to non-profit organizations, exists if the company makes annual payments to, or receives annual payments from, another entity, exceeding the greater of: \$200,000 or 5 percent of the recipient’s gross revenues, for a company that follows NASDAQ listing standards; or the greater of \$1,000,000 or 2 percent of the recipient’s gross revenues, for a company that follows NYSE listing standards. For a company that follows neither of the preceding standards, ISS will apply the NASDAQ-based materiality test. (The recipient is the party receiving the financial proceeds from the transaction).
9. Dissident directors who are parties to a voting agreement pursuant to a settlement or similar arrangement may be classified as Independent Directors if an analysis of the following factors indicates that the voting agreement does not compromise their alignment with all shareholders’ interests: the terms of the agreement; the duration of the standstill provision in the agreement; the limitations and requirements of actions that are agreed upon; if the dissident director nominee(s) is subject to the standstill; and if there any conflicting relationships or related party transactions.
10. Interlocks include: executive officers serving as directors on each other’s compensation or similar committees (or, in the absence of such a committee, on the board); or executive officers sitting on each other’s boards and at least one serves on the other’s compensation or similar committees (or, in the absence of such a committee, on the board).
11. The operating involvement of the founder with the company will be considered; if the founder was never employed by the company, ISS may deem him or her an Independent Director.

12. For purposes of ISS's director independence classification, "material" will be defined as a standard of relationship (financial, personal, or otherwise) that a reasonable person might conclude could potentially influence one's objectivity in the boardroom in a manner that would have a meaningful impact on an individual's ability to satisfy requisite fiduciary standards on behalf of shareholders.

Composition

Attendance at Board and Committee Meetings: Generally vote against or withhold from directors (except nominees who served only part of the fiscal year³) who attend less than 75 percent of the aggregate of their board and committee meetings for the period for which they served, unless an acceptable reason for absences is disclosed in the proxy or another SEC filing. Acceptable reasons for director absences are generally limited to the following:

- Medical issues/illness;
- Family emergencies; and
- Missing only one meeting (when the total of all meetings is three or fewer).

In cases of chronic poor attendance without reasonable justification, in addition to voting against the director(s) with poor attendance, generally vote against or withhold from appropriate members of the nominating/governance committees or the full board.

If the proxy disclosure is unclear and insufficient to determine whether a director attended at least 75 percent of the aggregate of his/her board and committee meetings during his/her period of service, vote against or withhold from the director(s) in question.

Overboarded Directors: Generally vote against or withhold from individual directors who:

- Sit on more than five public company boards; or
- Are CEOs of public companies who sit on the boards of more than two public companies besides their own— withhold only at their outside boards⁴.

NOTE: For shareholder meeting reports published on or after February 25th, 2025, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) has indefinitely halted the consideration of the gender diversity of a company's board when making vote recommendations with respect to the election or re-election of directors at U.S. companies covered by these guidelines under its proprietary ISS U.S. Benchmark policy.

Gender Diversity: Generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) at companies where there are no women on the company's board. An exception will be made if there was at least one woman on the board at the preceding annual meeting and the board makes a firm commitment to return to a gender-diverse status within a year.

NOTE: For shareholder meeting reports published on or after February 25th, 2025, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) has indefinitely halted the consideration of the racial and/or ethnic diversity of a company's board

³ Nominees who served for only part of the fiscal year are generally exempted from the attendance policy.

⁴ Although all of a CEO's subsidiary boards with publicly-traded common stock will be counted as separate boards, ISS will not recommend a withhold vote for the CEO of a parent company board or any of the controlled (>50 percent ownership) subsidiaries of that parent but may do so at subsidiaries that are less than 50 percent controlled and boards outside the parent/subsidiary relationships.

when making vote recommendations with respect to the election or re-election of directors at U.S. companies covered under these guidelines under its proprietary ISS U.S. Benchmark policy.

Racial and/or Ethnic Diversity: For companies in the Russell 3000 or S&P 1500 indices, generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) where the board has no apparent racially or ethnically diverse members⁵. An exception will be made if there was racial and/or ethnic diversity on the board at the preceding annual meeting and the board makes a firm commitment to appoint at least one racial and/or ethnic diverse member within a year.

Responsiveness

Vote case-by-case on individual directors, committee members, or the entire board of directors as appropriate if:

- The board failed to act on a shareholder proposal that received the support of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year or failed to act on a management proposal seeking to ratify an existing charter/bylaw provision that received opposition of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year. Factors that will be considered are:
 - Disclosed outreach efforts by the board to shareholders in the wake of the vote;
 - Rationale provided in the proxy statement for the level of implementation;
 - The subject matter of the proposal;
 - The level of support for and opposition to the resolution in past meetings;
 - Actions taken by the board in response to the majority vote and its engagement with shareholders;
 - The continuation of the underlying issue as a voting item on the ballot (as either shareholder or management proposals); and
 - Other factors as appropriate.
- The board failed to act on takeover offers where the majority of shares are tendered; or
- At the previous board election, any director received more than 50 percent withhold/against votes of the shares cast and the company has failed to address the issue(s) that caused the high withhold/against vote.

Vote case-by-case on Compensation Committee members (or, in exceptional cases, the full board) and/or the say-on-pay proposal when the company's previous say-on-pay received support of less than 70 percent of votes cast.

Factors that will be considered in assessing board responsiveness include:

- Disclosure of engagement efforts with major institutional investors, including the frequency and timing of engagements and the company participants (including whether independent directors participated);
- Disclosure of the specific concerns voiced by dissenting shareholders that led to the say-on-pay opposition; and
- Disclosure of specific and meaningful actions taken to address shareholders' concerns.

If the company discloses meaningful engagement efforts, but in addition states that it was unable to obtain specific feedback, ISS will assess company actions taken in response to the say-on-pay vote as well as the company's explanation as to why such actions are beneficial for shareholders.

Additional factors that may be considered include:

- Whether the issues raised are recurring or isolated;
- The company's ownership structure;

⁵ Aggregate diversity statistics provided by the board will only be considered if specific to racial and/or ethnic diversity.

- Significant corporate activity, such as a recent merger or proxy contest; and
- Any other compensation action or factor considered relevant to assessing board responsiveness.

If the say-on-pay support level was less than 50 percent of votes cast, this would warrant the highest degree of responsiveness, as assessed under the factors noted above.

Vote case-by-case on Compensation Committee members (or, in exceptional cases, the full board) if the board implements an advisory vote on executive compensation on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received the plurality of votes cast.

Accountability

PROBLEMATIC TAKEOVER DEFENSES, CAPITAL STRUCTURE, AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Poison Pills: Generally vote against or withhold from all nominees (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case) if:

- The company has a poison pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature⁶;
- The board makes a material adverse modification to an existing pill, including, but not limited to, extension, renewal, or lowering the trigger, without shareholder approval; or
- The company has a long-term poison pill (with a term of over one year) that was not approved by the public shareholders⁷.

Vote case-by-case on nominees if the board adopts an initial short-term pill⁶ (with a term of one year or less) without shareholder approval, taking into consideration:

- The trigger threshold and other terms of the pill;
- The disclosed rationale for the adoption;
- The context in which the pill was adopted, (e.g., factors such as the company's size and stage of development, sudden changes in its market capitalization, and extraordinary industry-wide or macroeconomic events);
- A commitment to put any renewal to a shareholder vote;
- The company's overall track record on corporate governance and responsiveness to shareholders; and
- Other factors as relevant.

Unequal Voting Rights: Generally vote withhold or against directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case), if the company employs a multi-class capital stock structure with unequal voting rights⁸.

Exceptions to this policy will generally be limited to:

⁶ If a short-term pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature is enacted but expires before the next shareholder vote, ISS will generally still recommend withhold/against nominees at the next shareholder meeting following its adoption.

⁷ Approval prior to, or in connection, with a company's becoming publicly-traded, or in connection with a de-SPAC transaction, is insufficient.

⁸ This generally includes classes of common stock that have additional votes per share than other shares; classes of shares that are not entitled to vote on all the same ballot items or nominees; or stock with time-phased voting rights ("loyalty shares").

- Newly-public companies⁹ with a sunset provision of no more than seven years from the date of going public;
- Limited Partnerships and the Operating Partnership (OP) unit structure of REITs;
- Convertible preferred shares that vote on an “as-converted” basis;
- Situations where the enhanced voting rights are limited in duration and applicability, such as where they are intended to overcome low voting turnout and ensure approval of a specific non-controversial agenda item and “mirrored voting” applies;
- Situations where the super-voting shares represent less than 5% of total voting power and therefore considered to be *de minimis*; or
- The company provides sufficient protections for minority shareholders, such as allowing minority shareholders a regular binding vote on whether the capital structure should be maintained.

Classified Board Structure: The board is classified, and a continuing director responsible for a problematic governance issue at the board/committee level that would warrant a withhold/against vote recommendation is not up for election. All appropriate nominees (except new) may be held accountable.

Removal of Shareholder Discretion on Classified Boards: The company has opted into, or failed to opt out of, state laws requiring a classified board structure.

Problematic Governance Structure: For companies that hold or held their first annual meeting⁹ of public shareholders after Feb. 1, 2015, generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case) if, prior to or in connection with the company's public offering, the company or its board adopted the following bylaw or charter provisions that are considered to be materially adverse to shareholder rights:

- Supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- A classified board structure; or
- Other egregious provisions.

A provision which specifies that the problematic structure(s) will be sunset within seven years of the date of going public will be considered a mitigating factor.

Unless the adverse provision is reversed or removed, vote case-by-case on director nominees in subsequent years.

Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments: Generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case) if the board amends the company's bylaws or charter without shareholder approval in a manner that materially diminishes shareholders' rights or that could adversely impact shareholders, considering the following factors:

- The board's rationale for adopting the bylaw/charter amendment without shareholder ratification;
- Disclosure by the company of any significant engagement with shareholders regarding the amendment;
- The level of impairment of shareholders' rights caused by the board's unilateral amendment to the bylaws/charter;
- The board's track record with regard to unilateral board action on bylaw/charter amendments or other entrenchment provisions;
- The company's ownership structure;
- The company's existing governance provisions;
- The timing of the board's amendment to the bylaws/charter in connection with a significant business development; and

⁹ Includes companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

- Other factors, as deemed appropriate, that may be relevant to determine the impact of the amendment on shareholders.

Unless the adverse amendment is reversed or submitted to a binding shareholder vote, in subsequent years vote case-by-case on director nominees. Generally vote against (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case) if the directors:

- Classified the board;
- Adopted supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- Eliminated shareholders' ability to amend bylaws;
- Adopted a [fee-shifting provision](#); or
- Adopted another provision deemed egregious.

Restricting Binding Shareholder Proposals: Generally vote against or withhold from the members of the governance committee if:

- The company's governing documents impose undue restrictions on shareholders' ability to amend the bylaws. Such restrictions include but are not limited to: outright prohibition on the submission of binding shareholder proposals or share ownership requirements, subject matter restrictions, or time holding requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8. Vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis.

Submission of management proposals to approve or ratify requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8 for the submission of binding bylaw amendments will generally be viewed as an insufficient restoration of shareholders' rights. Generally continue to vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis until shareholders are provided with an unfettered ability to amend the bylaws or a proposal providing for such unfettered right is submitted for shareholder approval.

Director Performance Evaluation: The board lacks mechanisms to promote accountability and oversight, coupled with sustained poor performance relative to peers. Sustained poor performance is measured by one-, three-, and five-year total shareholder returns in the bottom half of a company's four-digit GICS industry group (Russell 3000 companies only). Take into consideration the company's operational metrics and other factors as warranted. Problematic provisions include but are not limited to:

- A classified board structure;
- A supermajority vote requirement;
- Either a plurality vote standard in uncontested director elections, or a majority vote standard in contested elections;
- The inability of shareholders to call special meetings;
- The inability of shareholders to act by written consent;
- A multi-class capital structure; and/or
- A non-shareholder-approved poison pill.

Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions: Vote against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board, where boards ask shareholders to ratify existing charter or bylaw provisions considering the following factors:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and

- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

Problematic Audit-Related Practices

Generally vote against or withhold from the members of the Audit Committee if:

- The non-audit fees paid to the auditor are [excessive](#);
- The company receives an adverse opinion on the company's financial statements from its auditor; or
- There is persuasive evidence that the Audit Committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

Vote case-by-case on members of the Audit Committee and potentially the full board if:

- Poor accounting practices are identified that rise to a level of serious concern, such as: fraud; misapplication of GAAP; and material weaknesses identified in Section 404 disclosures. Examine the severity, breadth, chronological sequence, and duration, as well as the company's efforts at remediation or corrective actions, in determining whether withhold/against votes are warranted.

Problematic Compensation Practices

In the absence of an Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say on Pay) ballot item or in egregious situations, vote against or withhold from the members of the Compensation Committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is an unmitigated misalignment between CEO pay and company performance ([pay for performance](#));
- The company maintains significant [problematic pay practices](#); or
- The board exhibits a significant level of [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders.

Generally vote against or withhold from the Compensation Committee chair, other committee members, or potentially the full board if:

- The company fails to include a Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions, or under the company's declared frequency of say on pay; or
- The company fails to include a Frequency of Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions.

Generally vote against members of the board committee responsible for approving/setting non-employee director compensation if there is a pattern (i.e. two or more consecutive or non-consecutive years/across multiple years) of awarding excessive or otherwise problematic¹⁰ non-employee director compensation without disclosing a compelling rationale or other mitigating factors.

Adverse recommendations may be warranted in the first year for particularly egregious director compensation issues/instances/cases¹⁰.

Problematic Pledging of Company Stock: Vote against the members of the committee that oversees risks related to pledging, or the full board, where a significant level of pledged company stock by executives or directors raises concerns. The following factors will be considered:

- The presence of an anti-pledging policy, disclosed in the proxy statement, that prohibits future pledging activity;
- The magnitude of aggregate pledged shares in terms of total common shares outstanding, market value, and trading volume;
- Disclosure of progress or lack thereof in reducing the magnitude of aggregate pledged shares over time;

¹⁰ May include excessive magnitude, problematic perquisites, performance awards, stock options, or retirement benefits.

- Disclosure in the proxy statement that shares subject to stock ownership and holding requirements do not include pledged company stock; and
- Any other relevant factors.

Climate Accountability

For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, through their operations or value chain¹¹, generally vote against or withhold from the incumbent chair of the responsible committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) in cases where ISS determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to understand, assess, and mitigate risks related to climate change to the company and the larger economy.

Minimum steps to understand and mitigate those risks are considered to be the following. Both minimum criteria will be required to be in alignment with the policy :

- Detailed disclosure of climate-related risks, such as according to the framework established by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), including:
 - Board governance measures;
 - Corporate strategy;
 - Risk management analyses; and
 - Metrics and targets.
- Appropriate GHG emissions reduction targets.

At this time, “appropriate GHG emissions reductions targets” will be medium-term GHG reduction targets or Net Zero-by-2050 GHG reduction targets for a company’s operations (Scope 1) and electricity use (Scope 2). Targets should cover the vast majority of the company’s direct emissions.

Governance Failures

Under extraordinary circumstances, vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board, due to:

- Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight¹², or fiduciary responsibilities at the company;
- Failure to replace management as appropriate; or
- Egregious actions related to a director’s service on other boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company.

Voting on Director Nominees in Contested Elections

Vote-No Campaigns

General Recommendation: In cases where companies are targeted in connection with public “vote-no” campaigns, evaluate director nominees under the existing governance policies for voting on director nominees in uncontested

¹¹ Companies defined as “significant GHG emitters” will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

¹² Examples of failure of risk oversight include but are not limited to: bribery; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies; demonstrably poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant adverse legal judgments or settlement; or hedging of company stock.

elections. Take into consideration the arguments submitted by shareholders and other publicly available information.

Proxy Contests/Proxy Access

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the election of directors in contested elections, considering the following factors:

- Long-term financial performance of the company relative to its industry;
- Management's track record;
- Background to the contested election;
- Nominee qualifications and any compensatory arrangements;
- Strategic plan of dissident slate and quality of the critique against management;
- Likelihood that the proposed goals and objectives can be achieved (both slates); and
- Stock ownership positions.

In the case of candidates nominated pursuant to proxy access, vote case-by-case considering any applicable factors listed above or additional factors which may be relevant, including those that are specific to the company, to the nominee(s) and/or to the nature of the election (such as whether there are more candidates than board seats).

Other Board-Related Proposals

Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking a policy that prohibits named executive officers from engaging in derivative or speculative transactions involving company stock, including hedging, holding stock in a margin account, or pledging stock as collateral for a loan. However, the company's existing policies regarding responsible use of company stock will be considered.

Board Refreshment

Board refreshment is best implemented through an ongoing program of individual director evaluations, conducted annually, to ensure the evolving needs of the board are met and to bring in fresh perspectives, skills, and diversity as needed.

Term/Tenure Limits

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals regarding director term/tenure limits, considering:

- The rationale provided for adoption of the term/tenure limit;
- The robustness of the company's board evaluation process;
- Whether the limit is of sufficient length to allow for a broad range of director tenures;
- Whether the limit would disadvantage independent directors compared to non-independent directors; and

- Whether the board will impose the limit evenly, and not have the ability to waive it in a discriminatory manner.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking for the company to adopt director term/tenure limits, considering:

- The scope of the shareholder proposal; and
- Evidence of problematic issues at the company combined with, or exacerbated by, a lack of board refreshment.

Age Limits

General Recommendation: Generally vote against management and shareholder proposals to limit the tenure of independent directors through mandatory retirement ages. Vote for proposals to remove mandatory age limits.

Board Size

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals seeking to fix the board size or designate a range for the board size.

Vote against proposals that give management the ability to alter the size of the board outside of a specified range without shareholder approval.

Classification/Declassification of the Board

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals to classify (stagger) the board.

Vote for proposals to repeal classified boards and to elect all directors annually.

CEO Succession Planning

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking disclosure on a CEO succession planning policy, considering, at a minimum, the following factors:

- The reasonableness/scope of the request; and
- The company's existing disclosure on its current CEO succession planning process.

Cumulative Voting

General Recommendation: Generally vote against management proposals to eliminate cumulate voting, and for shareholder proposals to restore or provide for cumulative voting, unless:

- The company has proxy access¹³, thereby allowing shareholders to nominate directors to the company's ballot; and
- The company has adopted a majority vote standard, with a carve-out for plurality voting in situations where there are more nominees than seats, and a director resignation policy to address failed elections.

Vote for proposals for cumulative voting at controlled companies (insider voting power > 50%).

Director and Officer Indemnification, Liability Protection, and Exculpation

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals on director and officer indemnification, liability protection, and exculpation¹⁴.

Consider the stated rationale for the proposed change. Also consider, among other factors, the extent to which the proposal would:

- Eliminate directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of care;
- Eliminate directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of loyalty;
- Expand coverage beyond just legal expenses to liability for acts that are more serious violations of fiduciary obligation than mere carelessness; and
- Expand the scope of indemnification to provide for mandatory indemnification of company officials in connection with acts that previously the company was permitted to provide indemnification for, at the discretion of the company's board (*i.e.*, "permissive indemnification"), but that previously the company was not required to indemnify.

Vote for those proposals providing such expanded coverage in cases when a director's or officer's legal defense was unsuccessful if both of the following apply:

- If the individual was found to have acted in good faith and in a manner that the individual reasonably believed was in the best interests of the company; and
- If only the individual's legal expenses would be covered.

Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals that establish or amend director qualifications. Votes should be based on the reasonableness of the criteria and the degree to which they may preclude dissident nominees from joining the board.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder resolutions seeking a director nominee who possesses a particular subject matter expertise, considering:

¹³ A proxy access right that meets the [recommended guidelines](#).

¹⁴ **Indemnification:** the condition of being secured against loss or damage.

Limited liability: a person's financial liability is limited to a fixed sum, or personal financial assets are not at risk if the individual loses a lawsuit that results in financial award/damages to the plaintiff.

Exculpation: to eliminate or limit the personal liability of a director or officer to the corporation or its shareholders for monetary damages for breach of fiduciary duty as a director or officer.

- The company's board committee structure, existing subject matter expertise, and board nomination provisions relative to that of its peers;
- The company's existing board and management oversight mechanisms regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- The company's disclosure and performance relating to the issue for which board oversight is sought and any significant related controversies; and
- The scope and structure of the proposal.

Establish Other Board Committee Proposals

General Recommendation: Generally vote against shareholder proposals to establish a new board committee, as such proposals seek a specific oversight mechanism/structure that potentially limits a company's flexibility to determine an appropriate oversight mechanism for itself. However, the following factors will be considered:

- Existing oversight mechanisms (including current committee structure) regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Level of disclosure regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Company performance related to the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Board committee structure compared to that of other companies in its industry sector; and
- The scope and structure of the proposal.

Filling Vacancies/Removal of Directors

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals that provide that directors may be removed only for cause. Vote for proposals to restore shareholders' ability to remove directors with or without cause.

Vote against proposals that provide that only continuing directors may elect replacements to fill board vacancies.

Vote for proposals that permit shareholders to elect directors to fill board vacancies.

Independent Board Chair

General Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requiring that the board chair position be filled by an independent director, taking into consideration the following:

- The scope and rationale of the proposal;
- The company's current board leadership structure;
- The company's governance structure and practices;
- Company performance; and
- Any other relevant factors that may be applicable.

The following factors will increase the likelihood of a "for" recommendation:

- A majority non-independent board and/or the presence of non-independent directors on key board committees;
- A weak or poorly-defined lead independent director role that fails to serve as an appropriate counterbalance to a combined CEO/chair role;
- The presence of an executive or non-independent chair in addition to the CEO, a recent recombination of the role of CEO and chair, and/or departure from a structure with an independent chair;

- Evidence that the board has failed to oversee and address material risks facing the company;
- A material governance failure, particularly if the board has failed to adequately respond to shareholder concerns or if the board has materially diminished shareholder rights; or
- Evidence that the board has failed to intervene when management's interests are contrary to shareholders' interests.

Majority of Independent Directors/Establishment of Independent Committees

General Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals asking that a majority or more of directors be independent unless the board composition already meets the proposed threshold by ISS' definition of Independent Director (See [ISS' Classification of Directors.](#))

Vote for shareholder proposals asking that board audit, compensation, and/or nominating committees be composed exclusively of independent directors unless they currently meet that standard.

Majority Vote Standard for the Election of Directors

General Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals to adopt a majority of votes cast standard for directors in uncontested elections. Vote against if no carve-out for a plurality vote standard in contested elections is included.

Generally vote for precatory and binding shareholder resolutions requesting that the board change the company's bylaws to stipulate that directors need to be elected with an affirmative majority of votes cast, provided it does not conflict with the state law where the company is incorporated. Binding resolutions need to allow for a carve-out for a plurality vote standard when there are more nominees than board seats.

Companies are strongly encouraged to also adopt a post-election policy (also known as a director resignation policy) that will provide guidelines so that the company will promptly address the situation of a holdover director.

Proxy Access

General Recommendation: Generally vote for management and shareholder proposals for proxy access with the following provisions:

- **Ownership threshold:** maximum requirement not more than three percent (3%) of the voting power;
- **Ownership duration:** maximum requirement not longer than three (3) years of continuous ownership for each member of the nominating group;
- **Aggregation:** minimal or no limits on the number of shareholders permitted to form a nominating group; and
- **Cap:** cap on nominees of generally twenty-five percent (25%) of the board.

Review for reasonableness any other restrictions on the right of proxy access. Generally vote against proposals that are more restrictive than these guidelines.

Require More Nominees than Open Seats

General Recommendation: Vote against shareholder proposals that would require a company to nominate more candidates than the number of open board seats.

Shareholder Engagement Policy (Shareholder Advisory Committee)

General Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting that the board establish an internal mechanism/process, which may include a committee, in order to improve communications between directors and shareholders, unless the company has the following features, as appropriate:

- Established a communication structure that goes beyond the exchange requirements to facilitate the exchange of information between shareholders and members of the board;
- Effectively disclosed information with respect to this structure to its shareholders;
- Company has not ignored majority-supported shareholder proposals, or a majority withhold vote on a director nominee; and
- The company has an independent chair or a lead director, according to [ISS' definition](#). This individual must be made available for periodic consultation and direct communication with major shareholders.

2. Audit-Related

Auditor Indemnification and Limitation of Liability

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the issue of auditor indemnification and limitation of liability. Factors to be assessed include, but are not limited to:

- The terms of the auditor agreement—the degree to which these agreements impact shareholders' rights;
- The motivation and rationale for establishing the agreements;
- The quality of the company's disclosure; and
- The company's historical practices in the audit area.

Vote against or withhold from members of an audit committee in situations where there is persuasive evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

Auditor Ratification

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to ratify auditors unless any of the following apply:

- An auditor has a financial interest in or association with the company, and is therefore not independent;
- There is reason to believe that the independent auditor has rendered an opinion that is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position;
- Poor accounting practices are identified that rise to a serious level of concern, such as fraud or misapplication of GAAP; or
- Fees for non-audit services ("Other" fees) are excessive.

Non-audit fees are excessive if:

- $\text{Non-audit ("other") fees} > \text{audit fees} + \text{audit-related fees} + \text{tax compliance/preparation fees}$

Tax compliance and preparation include the preparation of original and amended tax returns and refund claims, and tax payment planning. All other services in the tax category, such as tax advice, planning, or consulting, should be added to "Other" fees. If the breakout of tax fees cannot be determined, add all tax fees to "Other" fees.

In circumstances where "Other" fees include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events (such as initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergence, and spin-offs) and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees that are an exception to the standard "non-audit fee" category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit/audit-related fees/tax compliance and preparation for purposes of determining whether non-audit fees are excessive.

Shareholder Proposals Limiting Non-Audit Services

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to prohibit or limit their auditors from engaging in non-audit services.

Shareholder Proposals on Audit Firm Rotation

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking for audit firm rotation, taking into account:

- The tenure of the audit firm;
- The length of rotation specified in the proposal;
- Any significant audit-related issues at the company;
- The number of Audit Committee meetings held each year;
- The number of financial experts serving on the committee; and
- Whether the company has a periodic renewal process where the auditor is evaluated for both audit quality and competitive price.

3. Shareholder Rights & Defenses

Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on advance notice proposals, giving support to those proposals which allow shareholders to submit proposals/nominations as close to the meeting date as reasonably possible and within the broadest window possible, recognizing the need to allow sufficient notice for company, regulatory, and shareholder review.

To be reasonable, the company's deadline for shareholder notice of a proposal/nominations must be no earlier than 120 days prior to the anniversary of the previous year's meeting and have a submittal window of no shorter than 30 days from the beginning of the notice period (also known as a 90-120-day window). The submittal window is the period under which shareholders must file their proposals/nominations prior to the deadline.

In general, support additional efforts by companies to ensure full disclosure in regard to a proponent's economic and voting position in the company so long as the informational requirements are reasonable and aimed at providing shareholders with the necessary information to review such proposals.

Amend Bylaws without Shareholder Consent

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals giving the board exclusive authority to amend the bylaws.

Vote case-by-case on proposals giving the board the ability to amend the bylaws in addition to shareholders, taking into account the following:

- Any impediments to shareholders' ability to amend the bylaws (i.e. supermajority voting requirements);
- The company's ownership structure and historical voting turnout;
- Whether the board could amend bylaws adopted by shareholders; and
- Whether shareholders would retain the ability to ratify any board-initiated amendments.

Control Share Acquisition Provisions

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of control share acquisition statutes unless doing so would enable the completion of a takeover that would be detrimental to shareholders.

Vote against proposals to amend the charter to include control share acquisition provisions.

Vote for proposals to restore voting rights to the control shares.

Control share acquisition statutes function by denying shares their voting rights when they contribute to ownership in excess of certain thresholds. Voting rights for those shares exceeding ownership limits may only be restored by approval of either a majority or supermajority of disinterested shares. Thus, control share acquisition statutes effectively require a hostile bidder to put its offer to a shareholder vote or risk voting disenfranchisement if the bidder continues buying up a large block of shares.

Control Share Cash-Out Provisions

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of control share cash-out statutes.

Control share cash-out statutes give dissident shareholders the right to "cash-out" of their position in a company at the expense of the shareholder who has taken a control position. In other words, when an investor crosses a preset threshold level, remaining shareholders are given the right to sell their shares to the acquirer, who must buy them at the highest acquiring price.

Disgorgement Provisions

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of state disgorgement provisions.

Disgorgement provisions require an acquirer or potential acquirer of more than a certain percentage of a company's stock to disgorge, or pay back, to the company any profits realized from the sale of that company's stock purchased 24 months before achieving control status. All sales of company stock by the acquirer occurring within a certain period of time (between 18 months and 24 months) prior to the investor's gaining control status are subject to these recapture-of-profits provisions.

Fair Price Provisions

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to adopt fair price provisions (provisions that stipulate that an acquirer must pay the same price to acquire all shares as it paid to acquire the control shares), evaluating factors such as the vote required to approve the proposed acquisition, the vote required to repeal the fair price provision, and the mechanism for determining the fair price.

Generally vote against fair price provisions with shareholder vote requirements greater than a majority of disinterested shares.

Freeze-Out Provisions

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of state freeze-out provisions. Freeze-out provisions force an investor who surpasses a certain ownership threshold in a company to wait a specified period of time before gaining control of the company.

Greenmail

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to adopt anti-greenmail charter or bylaw amendments or otherwise restrict a company's ability to make greenmail payments.

Vote case-by-case on anti-greenmail proposals when they are bundled with other charter or bylaw amendments.

Greenmail payments are targeted share repurchases by management of company stock from individuals or groups seeking control of the company. Since only the hostile party receives payment, usually at a substantial premium over the market value of its shares, the practice discriminates against all other shareholders.

Shareholder Litigation Rights

Federal Forum Selection Provisions

Federal forum selection provisions require that U.S. federal courts be the sole forum for shareholders to litigate claims arising under federal securities law.

General Recommendation: Generally vote for federal forum selection provisions in the charter or bylaws that specify "the district courts of the United States" as the exclusive forum for federal securities law matters, in the absence of serious concerns about corporate governance or board responsiveness to shareholders.

Vote against provisions that restrict the forum to a particular federal district court; unilateral adoption (without a shareholder vote) of such a provision will generally be considered a one-time failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments](#) policy.

Exclusive Forum Provisions for State Law Matters

Exclusive forum provisions in the charter or bylaws restrict shareholders' ability to bring derivative lawsuits against the company, for claims arising out of state corporate law, to the courts of a particular state (generally the state of incorporation).

General Recommendation: Generally vote for charter or bylaw provisions that specify courts located within the state of Delaware as the exclusive forum for corporate law matters for Delaware corporations, in the absence of serious concerns about corporate governance or board responsiveness to shareholders.

For states other than Delaware, vote case-by-case on exclusive forum provisions, taking into consideration:

- The company's stated rationale for adopting such a provision;
- Disclosure of past harm from duplicative shareholder lawsuits in more than one forum;
- The breadth of application of the charter or bylaw provision, including the types of lawsuits to which it would apply and the definition of key terms; and
- Governance features such as shareholders' ability to repeal the provision at a later date (including the vote standard applied when shareholders attempt to amend the charter or bylaws) and their ability to hold directors accountable through annual director elections and a majority vote standard in uncontested elections.

Generally vote against provisions that specify a state other than the state of incorporation as the exclusive forum for corporate law matters, or that specify a particular local court within the state; unilateral adoption of such a provision will generally be considered a one-time failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments](#) policy.

Fee shifting

Fee-shifting provisions in the charter or bylaws require that a shareholder who sues a company unsuccessfully pay all litigation expenses of the defendant corporation and its directors and officers.

General Recommendation: Generally vote against provisions that mandate fee-shifting whenever plaintiffs are not completely successful on the merits (i.e., including cases where the plaintiffs are partially successful).

Unilateral adoption of a fee-shifting provision will generally be considered an ongoing failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments](#) policy.

Net Operating Loss (NOL) Protective Amendments

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals to adopt a protective amendment for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses (NOL) if the effective term of the protective amendment would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote case-by-case, considering the following factors, for management proposals to adopt an NOL protective amendment that would remain in effect for the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold (NOL protective amendments generally prohibit stock ownership transfers that would result in a new 5-percent holder or increase the stock ownership percentage of an existing 5-percent holder);
- The value of the NOLs;
- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision or commitment to cause expiration of the protective amendment upon exhaustion or expiration of the NOL);
- The company's existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns; and
- Any other factors that may be applicable.

Poison Pills (Shareholder Rights Plans)

Shareholder Proposals to Put Pill to a Vote and/or Adopt a Pill Policy

General Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals requesting that the company submit its poison pill to a shareholder vote or redeem it unless the company has: (1) A shareholder-approved poison pill in place; or (2) The company has adopted a policy concerning the adoption of a pill in the future specifying that the board will only adopt a shareholder rights plan if either:

- Shareholders have approved the adoption of the plan; or
- The board, in its exercise of its fiduciary responsibilities, determines that it is in the best interest of shareholders under the circumstances to adopt a pill without the delay in adoption that would result from seeking stockholder approval (i.e., the "fiduciary out" provision). A poison pill adopted under this fiduciary out will be put to a shareholder ratification vote within 12 months of adoption or expire. If the pill is not approved by a majority of the votes cast on this issue, the plan will immediately terminate.

If the shareholder proposal calls for a time period of less than 12 months for shareholder ratification after adoption, vote for the proposal, but add the caveat that a vote within 12 months would be considered sufficient implementation.

Management Proposals to Ratify a Poison Pill

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals on poison pill ratification, focusing on the features of the shareholder rights plan. Rights plans should contain the following attributes:

- No lower than a 20 percent trigger, flip-in or flip-over;
- A term of no more than three years;
- No deadhand, slowhand, no-hand, or similar feature that limits the ability of a future board to redeem the pill; and
- Shareholder redemption feature (qualifying offer clause); if the board refuses to redeem the pill 90 days after a qualifying offer is announced, 10 percent of the shares may call a special meeting or seek a written consent to vote on rescinding the pill.

In addition, the rationale for adopting the pill should be thoroughly explained by the company. In examining the request for the pill, take into consideration the company's existing governance structure, including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, and any problematic governance concerns.

Management Proposals to Ratify a Pill to Preserve Net Operating Losses (NOLs)

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals to adopt a poison pill for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses (NOL) if the term of the pill would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote case-by-case on management proposals for poison pill ratification, considering the following factors, if the term of the pill would be the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold to transfer (NOL pills generally have a trigger slightly below 5 percent);
- The value of the NOLs;
- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision, or commitment to cause expiration of the pill upon exhaustion or expiration of NOLs);
- The company's existing governance structure, including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns; and
- Any other factors that may be applicable.

Proxy Voting Disclosure, Confidentiality, and Tabulation

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding proxy voting mechanics, taking into consideration whether implementation of the proposal is likely to enhance or protect shareholder rights. Specific issues covered under the policy include, but are not limited to, confidential voting of individual proxies and ballots, confidentiality of running vote tallies, and the treatment of abstentions and/or broker non-votes in the company's vote-counting methodology.

While a variety of factors may be considered in each analysis, the guiding principles are: transparency, consistency, and fairness in the proxy voting process. The factors considered, as applicable to the proposal, may include:

- The scope and structure of the proposal;

- The company's stated confidential voting policy (or other relevant policies) and whether it ensures a "level playing field" by providing shareholder proponents with equal access to vote information prior to the annual meeting;
- The company's vote standard for management and shareholder proposals and whether it ensures consistency and fairness in the proxy voting process and maintains the integrity of vote results;
- Whether the company's disclosure regarding its vote counting method and other relevant voting policies with respect to management and shareholder proposals are consistent and clear;
- Any recent controversies or concerns related to the company's proxy voting mechanics;
- Any unintended consequences resulting from implementation of the proposal; and
- Any other factors that may be relevant.

Ratification Proposals: Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions

General Recommendation: Generally vote against management proposals to ratify provisions of the company's existing charter or bylaws, unless these governance provisions align with best practice.

In addition, voting against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board may be warranted, considering:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

Reimbursing Proxy Solicitation Expenses

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses.

When voting in conjunction with support of a dissident slate, vote for the reimbursement of all appropriate proxy solicitation expenses associated with the election.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling for the reimbursement of reasonable costs incurred in connection with nominating one or more candidates in a contested election where the following apply:

- The election of fewer than 50 percent of the directors to be elected is contested in the election;
- One or more of the dissident's candidates is elected;
- Shareholders are not permitted to cumulate their votes for directors; and
- The election occurred, and the expenses were incurred, after the adoption of this bylaw.

Reincorporation Proposals

General Recommendation: Management or shareholder proposals to change a company's state of incorporation should be evaluated case-by-case, giving consideration to both financial and corporate governance concerns including the following:

- Reasons for reincorporation;
- Comparison of company's governance practices and provisions prior to and following the reincorporation; and
- Comparison of corporation laws of original state and destination state.

Vote for reincorporation when the economic factors outweigh any neutral or negative governance changes.

Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent

General Recommendation: Generally vote against management and shareholder proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to act by written consent.

Generally vote for management and shareholder proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to act by written consent, taking into account the following factors:

- Shareholders' current right to act by written consent;
- The consent threshold;
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language;
- Investor ownership structure; and
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals if, in addition to the considerations above, the company has the following governance and antitakeover provisions:

- An unfettered¹⁵ right for shareholders to call special meetings at a 10 percent threshold;
- A majority vote standard in uncontested director elections;
- No non-shareholder-approved pill; and
- An annually elected board.

Shareholder Ability to Call Special Meetings

General Recommendation: Vote against management or shareholder proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to call special meetings.

Generally vote for management or shareholder proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to call special meetings taking into account the following factors:

- Shareholders' current right to call special meetings;

¹⁵ "Unfettered" means no restrictions on agenda items, no restrictions on the number of shareholders who can group together to reach the 10 percent threshold, and only reasonable limits on when a meeting can be called: no greater than 30 days after the last annual meeting and no greater than 90 prior to the next annual meeting.

- Minimum ownership threshold necessary to call special meetings (10 percent preferred);
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language;
- Investor ownership structure; and
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals.

Stakeholder Provisions

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals that ask the board to consider non-shareholder constituencies or other non-financial effects when evaluating a merger or business combination.

State Antitakeover Statutes

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to opt in or out of state takeover statutes (including fair price provisions, stakeholder laws, poison pill endorsements, severance pay and labor contract provisions, and anti-greenmail provisions).

Supermajority Vote Requirements

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals to require a supermajority shareholder vote.

Vote for management or shareholder proposals to reduce supermajority vote requirements. However, for companies with shareholder(s) who have significant ownership levels, vote case-by-case, taking into account:

- Ownership structure;
- Quorum requirements; and
- Vote requirements.

Virtual Shareholder Meetings

General Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals allowing for the convening of shareholder meetings by electronic means, so long as they do not preclude in-person meetings. Companies are encouraged to disclose the circumstances under which virtual-only¹⁶ meetings would be held, and to allow for comparable rights and opportunities for shareholders to participate electronically as they would have during an in-person meeting.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals concerning virtual-only meetings, considering:

- Scope and rationale of the proposal; and
- Concerns identified with the company's prior meeting practices.

¹⁶ Virtual-only shareholder meeting" refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively using technology without a corresponding in-person meeting.

4. Capital/Restructuring

Capital

Adjustments to Par Value of Common Stock

General Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to reduce the par value of common stock unless the action is being taken to facilitate an anti-takeover device or some other negative corporate governance action.

Vote for management proposals to eliminate par value.

Common Stock Authorization

General Authorization Requests

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of common stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes:

- If share usage (outstanding plus reserved) is less than 50% of the current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to **50%** of current authorized share;
- If share usage is 50% to 100% of the current authorized, vote for an increase of up to **100%** of current authorized shares;
- If share usage is greater than current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to the current share usage; or
- In the case of a stock split, the allowable increase is calculated (per above) based on the post-split adjusted authorization.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if within the above ratios, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- The proposal seeks to increase the number of authorized shares of the class of common stock that has superior voting rights to other share classes;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;
- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); or
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases beyond the above ratios or problematic situations when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In, or subsequent to, the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.

For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

Specific Authorization Requests

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized common shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support. For such transactions, the allowable increase will be the greater of:

- twice the amount needed to support the transactions on the ballot, and
- the allowable increase as calculated for general issuances above.

Dual Class Structure

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals to create a new class of common stock unless:

- The company discloses a compelling rationale for the dual-class capital structure, such as:
- The company's auditor has concluded that there is substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern; or
- The new class of shares will be transitory;
- The new class is intended for financing purposes with minimal or no dilution to current shareholders in both the short term and long term; and
- The new class is not designed to preserve or increase the voting power of an insider or significant shareholder.

Issue Stock for Use with Rights Plan

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals that increase authorized common stock for the explicit purpose of implementing a non-shareholder-approved shareholder rights plan (poison pill).

Preemptive Rights

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that seek preemptive rights, taking into consideration:

- The size of the company;
- The shareholder base; and
- The liquidity of the stock.

Preferred Stock Authorization

General Authorization Requests

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of preferred stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes:

- If share usage (outstanding plus reserved) is less than 50% of the current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to **50%** of current authorized shares;
- If share usage is 50% to 100% of the current authorized, vote for an increase of up to **100%** of current authorized shares;
- If share usage is greater than current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to the current share usage.
- In the case of a stock split, the allowable increase is calculated (per above) based on the post-split adjusted authorization; or
- If no preferred shares are currently issued and outstanding, vote against the request, unless the company discloses a specific use for the shares.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if within the above ratios, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- If the shares requested are blank check preferred shares that can be used for antitakeover purposes;¹⁷
- The company seeks to increase a class of non-convertible preferred shares entitled to more than one vote per share on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders "supervoting shares");
- The company seeks to increase a class of convertible preferred shares entitled to a number of votes greater than the number of common shares into which they are convertible ("supervoting shares") on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders;
- The stated intent of the increase in the general authorization is to allow the company to increase an existing designated class of supervoting preferred shares;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;
- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); and
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases beyond the above ratios or problematic situations when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In, or subsequent to, the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.

For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

¹⁷ To be acceptable, appropriate disclosure would be needed that the shares are "declawed": i.e., representation by the board that it will not, without prior stockholder approval, issue or use the preferred stock for any defensive or anti-takeover purpose or for the purpose of implementing any stockholder rights plan.

Specific Authorization Requests

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized preferred shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support. For such transactions, the allowable increase will be the greater of:

- twice the amount needed to support the transactions on the ballot, and
- the allowable increase as calculated for general issuances above.

Recapitalization Plans

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on recapitalizations (reclassifications of securities), taking into account the following:

- More simplified capital structure;
- Enhanced liquidity;
- Fairness of conversion terms;
- Impact on voting power and dividends;
- Reasons for the reclassification;
- Conflicts of interest; and
- Other alternatives considered.

Reverse Stock Splits

General Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to implement a reverse stock split if:

- The number of authorized shares will be proportionately reduced; or
- The effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with ISS' [Common Stock Authorization](#) policy.

Vote case-by-case on proposals that do not meet either of the above conditions, taking into consideration the following factors:

- Stock exchange notification to the company of a potential delisting;
- Disclosure of substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern without additional financing;
- The company's rationale; or
- Other factors as applicable.

Share Issuance Mandates at U.S. Domestic Issuers Incorporated Outside the U.S.

General Recommendation: For U.S. domestic issuers incorporated outside the U.S. and listed solely on a U.S. exchange, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 20 percent of currently issued common share capital, where not tied to a specific transaction or financing proposal.

For pre-revenue or other early-stage companies that are heavily reliant on periodic equity financing, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 50 percent of currently issued common share capital. The burden of proof will be on the company to establish that it has a need for the higher limit.

Renewal of such mandates should be sought at each year's annual meeting.

Vote case-by-case on share issuances for a specific transaction or financing proposal.

Share Repurchase Programs

General Recommendation: For U.S.-incorporated companies, and foreign-incorporated U.S. Domestic Issuers that are traded solely on U.S. exchanges, vote for management proposals to institute open-market share repurchase plans in which all shareholders may participate on equal terms, or to grant the board authority to conduct open-market repurchases, in the absence of company-specific concerns regarding:

- Greenmail;
- The use of buybacks to inappropriately manipulate incentive compensation metrics;
- Threats to the company's long-term viability; or
- Other company-specific factors as warranted.

Vote case-by-case on proposals to repurchase shares directly from specified shareholders, balancing the stated rationale against the possibility for the repurchase authority to be misused, such as to repurchase shares from insiders at a premium to market price.

Share Repurchase Programs Shareholder Proposals

General Recommendation: Generally vote against shareholder proposals prohibiting executives from selling shares of company stock during periods in which the company has announced that it may or will be repurchasing shares of its stock. Vote for the proposal when there is a pattern of abuse by executives exercising options or selling shares during periods of share buybacks.

Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends

General Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals to increase the common share authorization for stock split or stock dividend, provided that the effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or is less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with ISS' Common Stock Authorization policy.

Tracking Stock

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the creation of tracking stock, weighing the strategic value of the transaction against such factors as:

- Adverse governance changes;
- Excessive increases in authorized capital stock;
- Unfair method of distribution;
- Diminution of voting rights;
- Adverse conversion features;
- Negative impact on stock option plans; and
- Alternatives such as spin-off.

Restructuring

Appraisal Rights

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to restore or provide shareholders with rights of appraisal.

Asset Purchases

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on asset purchase proposals, considering the following factors:

- Purchase price;
- Fairness opinion;
- Financial and strategic benefits;
- How the deal was negotiated;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives for the business; and
- Non-completion risk.

Asset Sales

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on asset sales, considering the following factors:

- Impact on the balance sheet/working capital;
- Potential elimination of diseconomies;
- Anticipated financial and operating benefits;
- Anticipated use of funds;
- Value received for the asset;
- Fairness opinion;
- How the deal was negotiated; and
- Conflicts of interest.

Bundled Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on bundled or “conditional” proxy proposals. In the case of items that are conditioned upon each other, examine the benefits and costs of the packaged items. In instances when the joint effect of the conditioned items is not in shareholders’ best interests, vote against the proposals. If the combined effect is positive, support such proposals.

Conversion of Securities

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding conversion of securities. When evaluating these proposals, the investor should review the dilution to existing shareholders, the conversion price relative to market value, financial issues, control issues, termination penalties, and conflicts of interest.

Vote for the conversion if it is expected that the company will be subject to onerous penalties or will be forced to file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

Corporate Reorganization/Debt Restructuring/Prepackaged Bankruptcy Plans/Reverse Leveraged Buyouts/Wrap Plans

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase common and/or preferred shares and to issue shares as part of a debt restructuring plan, after evaluating:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' positions;
- Terms of the offer - discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion; termination penalties; exit strategy;
- Financial issues - company's financial situation; degree of need for capital; use of proceeds; effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives;
- Control issues - change in management; change in control, guaranteed board and committee seats; standstill provisions; voting agreements; veto power over certain corporate actions; and
- Conflict of interest - arm's length transaction, managerial incentives.

Vote for the debt restructuring if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

Formation of Holding Company

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding the formation of a holding company, taking into consideration the following:

- The reasons for the change;
- Any financial or tax benefits;
- Regulatory benefits;
- Increases in capital structure; and

- Changes to the articles of incorporation or bylaws of the company.

Absent compelling financial reasons to recommend for the transaction, vote against the formation of a holding company if the transaction would include either of the following:

- Increases in common or preferred stock in excess of the allowable maximum (see discussion under “Capital”); or
- Adverse changes in shareholder rights.

Going Private and Going Dark Transactions (LBOs and Minority Squeeze-outs)

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on going private transactions, taking into account the following:

- Offer price/premium;
- Fairness opinion;
- How the deal was negotiated;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives/offers considered; and
- Non-completion risk.

Vote case-by-case on going dark transactions, determining whether the transaction enhances shareholder value by taking into consideration:

- Whether the company has attained benefits from being publicly-traded (examination of trading volume, liquidity, and market research of the stock); and
- Balanced interests of continuing vs. cashed-out shareholders, taking into account the following:
 - Are all shareholders able to participate in the transaction?
 - Will there be a liquid market for remaining shareholders following the transaction?
 - Does the company have strong corporate governance?
 - Will insiders reap the gains of control following the proposed transaction? and
 - Does the state of incorporation have laws requiring continued reporting that may benefit shareholders?

Joint Ventures

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to form joint ventures, taking into account the following:

- Percentage of assets/business contributed;
- Percentage ownership;
- Financial and strategic benefits;
- Governance structure;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives; and
- Non-completion risk.

Liquidations

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on liquidations, taking into account the following:

- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives;
- Appraisal value of assets; and
- The compensation plan for executives managing the liquidation.

Vote for the liquidation if the company will file for bankruptcy if the proposal is not approved.

Mergers and Acquisitions

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on mergers and acquisitions. Review and evaluate the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction, balancing various and sometimes countervailing factors including:

- *Valuation* - Is the value to be received by the target shareholders (or paid by the acquirer) reasonable? While the fairness opinion may provide an initial starting point for assessing valuation reasonableness, emphasis is placed on the offer premium, market reaction, and strategic rationale.
- *Market reaction* - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction should cause closer scrutiny of a deal.
- *Strategic rationale* - Does the deal make sense strategically? From where is the value derived? Cost and revenue synergies should not be overly aggressive or optimistic, but reasonably achievable. Management should also have a favorable track record of successful integration of historical acquisitions.
- *Negotiations and process* - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's-length? Was the process fair and equitable? A fair process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Significant negotiation "wins" can also signify the deal makers' competency. The comprehensiveness of the sales process (e.g., full auction, partial auction, no auction) can also affect shareholder value.
- *Conflicts of interest* - Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders? As the result of potential conflicts, the directors and officers of the company may be more likely to vote to approve a merger than if they did not hold these interests. Consider whether these interests may have influenced these directors and officers to support or recommend the merger. The CIC figure presented in the "ISS Transaction Summary" section of this report is an aggregate figure that can in certain cases be a misleading indicator of the true value transfer from shareholders to insiders. Where such figure appears to be excessive, analyze the underlying assumptions to determine whether a potential conflict exists.
- *Governance* - Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction? If the governance profile is to change for the worse, the burden is on the company to prove that other issues (such as valuation) outweigh any deterioration in governance.

Private Placements/Warrants/Convertible Debentures

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding private placements, warrants, and convertible debentures taking into consideration:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' position: The amount and timing of shareholder ownership dilution should be weighed against the needs and proposed shareholder benefits of the capital infusion. Although newly issued common stock, absent preemptive rights, is typically dilutive to existing shareholders, share price

appreciation is often the necessary event to trigger the exercise of "out of the money" warrants and convertible debt. In these instances from a value standpoint, the negative impact of dilution is mitigated by the increase in the company's stock price that must occur to trigger the dilutive event.

- Terms of the offer (discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion, conversion features, termination penalties, exit strategy):
 - The terms of the offer should be weighed against the alternatives of the company and in light of company's financial condition. Ideally, the conversion price for convertible debt and the exercise price for warrants should be at a premium to the then prevailing stock price at the time of private placement.
 - When evaluating the magnitude of a private placement discount or premium, consider factors that influence the discount or premium, such as, liquidity, due diligence costs, control and monitoring costs, capital scarcity, information asymmetry, and anticipation of future performance.
- Financial issues:
 - The company's financial condition;
 - Degree of need for capital;
 - Use of proceeds;
 - Effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
 - Current and proposed cash burn rate; and
 - Going concern viability and the state of the capital and credit markets.
- Management's efforts to pursue alternatives and whether the company engaged in a process to evaluate alternatives: A fair, unconstrained process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Financing alternatives can include joint ventures, partnership, merger, or sale of part or all of the company.
- Control issues:
 - Change in management;
 - Change in control;
 - Guaranteed board and committee seats;
 - Standstill provisions;
 - Voting agreements;
 - Veto power over certain corporate actions; and
 - Minority versus majority ownership and corresponding minority discount or majority control premium.
- Conflicts of interest:
 - Conflicts of interest should be viewed from the perspective of the company and the investor; and
 - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's length? Are managerial incentives aligned with shareholder interests?
- Market reaction:
 - The market's response to the proposed deal. A negative market reaction is a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.

Vote for the private placement, or for the issuance of warrants and/or convertible debentures in a private placement, if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

Reorganization/Restructuring Plan (Bankruptcy)

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to common shareholders on bankruptcy plans of reorganization, considering the following factors including, but not limited to:

- Estimated value and financial prospects of the reorganized company;
- Percentage ownership of current shareholders in the reorganized company;
- Whether shareholders are adequately represented in the reorganization process (particularly through the existence of an Official Equity Committee);
- The cause(s) of the bankruptcy filing, and the extent to which the plan of reorganization addresses the cause(s);
- Existence of a superior alternative to the plan of reorganization; and
- Governance of the reorganized company.

Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs)

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on SPAC mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

- *Valuation* - Is the value being paid by the SPAC reasonable? SPACs generally lack an independent fairness opinion and the financials on the target may be limited. Compare the conversion price with the intrinsic value of the target company provided in the fairness opinion. Also, evaluate the proportionate value of the combined entity attributable to the SPAC IPO shareholders versus the pre-merger value of SPAC. Additionally, a private company discount may be applied to the target if it is a private entity.
- *Market reaction* - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction may be a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.
- *Deal timing* - A main driver for most transactions is that the SPAC charter typically requires the deal to be complete within 18 to 24 months, or the SPAC is to be liquidated. Evaluate the valuation, market reaction, and potential conflicts of interest for deals that are announced close to the liquidation date.
- *Negotiations and process* - What was the process undertaken to identify potential target companies within specified industry or location specified in charter? Consider the background of the sponsors.
- *Conflicts of interest* - How are sponsors benefiting from the transaction compared to IPO shareholders? Potential conflicts could arise if a fairness opinion is issued by the insiders to qualify the deal rather than a third party or if management is encouraged to pay a higher price for the target because of an 80 percent rule (the charter requires that the fair market value of the target is at least equal to 80 percent of net assets of the SPAC). Also, there may be sense of urgency by the management team of the SPAC to close the deal since its charter typically requires a transaction to be completed within the 18-24-month timeframe.
- *Voting agreements* - Are the sponsors entering into any voting agreements/tender offers with shareholders who are likely to vote against the proposed merger or exercise conversion rights?
- *Governance* - What is the impact of having the SPAC CEO or founder on key committees following the proposed merger?

Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) - Proposals for Extensions

The main purpose of SPACs is to identify and acquire a viable target within a specified timeframe, and failure to achieve this objective within the allotted time calls into question management's ability to execute its primary objective. The end of that timeframe is generally referred to as the termination date.

General Recommendation: Generally support requests to extend the termination date by up to one year from the SPAC's original termination date (inclusive of any built-in extension options, and accounting for prior extension requests).

Other factors that may be considered include: any added incentives, business combination status, other amendment terms, and, if applicable, use of money in the trust fund to pay excise taxes on redeemed shares.

Spin-offs

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on spin-offs, considering:

- Tax and regulatory advantages;
- Planned use of the sale proceeds;
- Valuation of spinoff;
- Fairness opinion;
- Benefits to the parent company;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Managerial incentives;
- Corporate governance changes; and
- Changes in the capital structure.

Value Maximization Shareholder Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals seeking to maximize shareholder value by:

- Hiring a financial advisor to explore strategic alternatives;
- Selling the company; or
- Liquidating the company and distributing the proceeds to shareholders.

These proposals should be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Prolonged poor performance with no turnaround in sight;
- Signs of entrenched board and management (such as the adoption of takeover defenses);
- Strategic plan in place for improving value;
- Likelihood of receiving reasonable value in a sale or dissolution; and
- The company actively exploring its strategic options, including retaining a financial advisor.

5. Compensation

Executive Pay Evaluation

Underlying all evaluations are five global principles that most investors expect corporations to adhere to in designing and administering executive and director compensation programs:

1. Maintain appropriate pay-for-performance alignment, with emphasis on long-term shareholder value: This principle encompasses overall executive pay practices, which must be designed to attract, retain, and appropriately motivate the key employees who drive shareholder value creation over the long term. It will take into consideration, among other factors, the link between pay and performance; the mix between fixed and variable pay; performance goals; and equity-based plan costs;
2. Avoid arrangements that risk “pay for failure”: This principle addresses the appropriateness of long or indefinite contracts, excessive severance packages, and guaranteed compensation;
3. Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee: This principle promotes oversight of executive pay programs by directors with appropriate skills, knowledge, experience, and a sound process for compensation decision-making (*e.g.*, including access to independent expertise and advice when needed);
4. Provide shareholders with clear, comprehensive compensation disclosures: This principle underscores the importance of informative and timely disclosures that enable shareholders to evaluate executive pay practices fully and fairly; and
5. Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors: This principle recognizes the interests of shareholders in ensuring that compensation to outside directors is reasonable and does not compromise their independence and ability to make appropriate judgments in overseeing managers’ pay and performance. At the market level, it may incorporate a variety of generally accepted best practices.

Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation—Management Proposals (Say-on-Pay)

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on ballot items related to executive pay and practices, as well as certain aspects of outside director compensation.

Vote against Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay or “SOP”) if:

- There is an unmitigated misalignment between CEO pay and company performance ([pay for performance](#));
- The company maintains significant [problematic pay practices](#); or
- The board exhibits a significant level of [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders.

Vote against or withhold from the members of the Compensation Committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is no SOP on the ballot, and an against vote on an SOP would otherwise be warranted due to pay-for-performance misalignment, problematic pay practices, or the lack of adequate responsiveness on compensation issues raised previously, or a combination thereof;
- The board fails to respond adequately to a previous SOP proposal that received less than 70 percent support of votes cast;
- The company has recently practiced or approved problematic pay practices, such as option repricing or option backdating; or
- The situation is egregious.

Primary Evaluation Factors for Executive Pay

Pay-for-Performance Evaluation

ISS annually conducts a pay-for-performance analysis to identify strong or satisfactory alignment between pay and performance over a sustained period. With respect to companies in the S&P1500, Russell 3000, or Russell 3000E Indices, this analysis considers the following:

1. Peer Group¹⁸ Alignment:
 - The degree of alignment between the company's annualized TSR rank and the CEO's annualized total pay rank within a peer group, each measured over a five-year period.
 - The rankings of CEO total pay and company financial performance within a peer group, each measured over a five-year period.
 - The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median over one- and three-year periods.
2. Absolute Alignment¹⁹ – the absolute alignment between the trend in CEO pay and company TSR over the prior five fiscal years – i.e., the difference between the trend in annual pay changes and the trend in annualized TSR during the period.

If the above analysis demonstrates significant unsatisfactory long-term pay-for-performance alignment or, in the case of companies outside the Russell indices, a misalignment between pay and performance is otherwise suggested, our analysis may include any of the following qualitative factors, as relevant to an evaluation of how various pay elements may work to encourage or to undermine long-term value creation and alignment with shareholder interests:

- The overall ratio of performance-based compensation to fixed or discretionary pay;
- The ratio of performance- to time-based long-term incentive awards;
- Vesting and/or retention requirements for equity awards that demonstrate a long-term focus;
- The rigor of performance goals;
- The complexity and risks around pay program design;
- The transparency and clarity of disclosure;
- The company's peer group benchmarking practices;
- Financial/operational results, both absolute and relative to peers;
- Special circumstances related to, for example, a new CEO in the prior FY or anomalous equity grant practices (e.g., bi-annual awards);
- Realizable and/or realized pay compared to granted pay; and
- Any other factors deemed relevant.

Problematic Pay Practices

Problematic pay elements are generally evaluated case-by-case considering the context of a company's overall pay program and demonstrated pay-for-performance philosophy. The focus is on executive compensation practices that contravene the global pay principles, including:

- Problematic practices related to non-performance-based compensation elements;
- Incentives that may motivate excessive risk-taking or present a windfall risk; and

¹⁸ The ISS peer group is generally comprised of 14-24 companies that are selected using factors such as market cap, revenue, assets, GICS industry group, and the company selected peers' GICS industry group. ISS' peer selection methodology is detailed in the U.S. Peer Group FAQ.

¹⁹ Russell 3000E Index companies (excluding S&P1500 and Russell 3000 companies) are not subject to the Absolute Alignment analysis.

- Pay decisions that circumvent pay-for-performance, such as options backdating or waiving performance requirements.

The list of examples below highlights certain problematic practices that carry significant weight in this overall consideration and may result in adverse vote recommendations:

- Repricing or replacing of underwater stock options/SARs without prior shareholder approval (including cash buyouts and voluntary surrender of underwater options);
- Extraordinary perquisites or tax gross-ups;
- New or materially amended agreements that provide for:
 - Excessive termination or CIC severance payments (generally exceeding 3 times base salary and average/target/most recent bonus);
 - CIC severance payments without involuntary job loss or substantial diminution of duties ("single" or "modified single" triggers) or in connection with a problematic Good Reason definition;
 - CIC excise tax gross-up entitlements (including "modified" gross-ups); and/or
 - Multi-year guaranteed awards that are not at risk due to rigorous performance conditions;
- Liberal CIC definition combined with any single-trigger CIC benefits;
- Insufficient executive compensation disclosure by externally-managed issuers (EMIs) such that a reasonable assessment of pay programs and practices applicable to the EMI's executives is not possible;
- Severance payments made when the termination is not clearly disclosed as involuntary (for example, a termination without cause or resignation for good reason); and/or
- Any other provision or practice deemed to be egregious and present a significant risk to investors.

The above examples are not an exhaustive list. Please refer to ISS' [U.S. Compensation Policies FAQ](#) document for additional detail on specific pay practices that have been identified as problematic and may lead to negative vote recommendations.

Options Backdating

The following factors should be examined case-by-case to allow for distinctions to be made between “sloppy” plan administration versus deliberate action or fraud:

- Reason and motive for the options backdating issue, such as inadvertent vs. deliberate grant date changes;
- Duration of options backdating;
- Size of restatement due to options backdating;
- Corrective actions taken by the board or compensation committee, such as canceling or re-pricing backdated options, the recouping of option gains on backdated grants; and
- Adoption of a grant policy that prohibits backdating and creates a fixed grant schedule or window period for equity grants in the future.

Compensation Committee Communications and Responsiveness

Consider the following factors case-by-case when evaluating ballot items related to executive pay on the board's responsiveness to investor input and engagement on compensation issues:

- Failure to respond to majority-supported shareholder proposals on executive pay topics; or
- Failure to adequately respond to the company's previous say-on-pay proposal that received low support taking into account the factors identified under the Responsiveness section in the Board of Directors policy with respect to say-on-pay.

Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation ("Say When on Pay")

General Recommendation: Vote for annual advisory votes on compensation, which provide the most consistent and clear communication channel for shareholder concerns about companies' executive pay programs.

Voting on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on say on Golden Parachute proposals, including consideration of existing change-in-control arrangements maintained with named executive officers but also considering new or extended arrangements.

Features that may result in an "against" recommendation include one or more of the following, depending on the number, magnitude, and/or timing of issue(s):

- Single- or modified-single-trigger cash severance;
- Single-trigger acceleration of unvested equity awards;
- Full acceleration of equity awards granted shortly before the change in control;
- Acceleration of performance awards above the target level of performance without compelling rationale;
- Excessive cash severance (generally >3x base salary and bonus);
- Excise tax gross-ups triggered and payable;
- Excessive golden parachute payments (on an absolute basis or as a percentage of transaction equity value); or
- Recent amendments that incorporate any problematic features (such as those above) or recent actions (such as extraordinary equity grants) that may make packages so attractive as to influence merger agreements that may not be in the best interests of shareholders; or
- The company's assertion that a proposed transaction is conditioned on shareholder approval of the golden parachute advisory vote.

Recent amendment(s) that incorporate problematic features will tend to carry more weight on the overall analysis. However, the presence of multiple legacy problematic features will also be closely scrutinized.

In cases where the golden parachute vote is incorporated into a company's advisory vote on compensation (management say-on-pay), ISS will evaluate the say-on-pay proposal in accordance with these guidelines, which may give higher weight to that component of the overall evaluation.

Equity-Based and Other Incentive Plans

Please refer to ISS' [U.S. Equity Compensation Plans FAQ](#) document for additional details on the Equity Plan Scorecard policy.

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on equity plan proposals subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard framework, where positive factors may counterbalance negative factors under three pillars:

I. Plan Cost: The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) in relation to peers and considering both:

- SVT based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants; and
- SVT based only on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants.

II. Plan Features:

- Quality of disclosure around vesting upon a change in control (CIC);
- Discretionary vesting authority;
- Liberal share recycling on various award types;
- Lack of minimum vesting period for grants made under the plan;
- Dividends payable prior to award vesting; and
- Cash-denominated award limits for non-employee directors.

III. Grant Practices:

- The company's three-year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers;
- Vesting requirements in CEO's recent equity grants;
- The estimated duration of the plan;
- The proportion of the CEO's most recent equity grants/awards classified by ISS as performance-based;
- Whether the company maintains a sufficient claw-back policy; and
- Whether the company maintains sufficient post-exercise/vesting share-holding requirements.

Generally vote against the plan proposal if the combination of above factors indicates that the plan is not, overall, in shareholders' interests, or if any of the following egregious factors ("overriding factors") apply:

- Awards may vest in connection with a liberal change-of-control definition;
- The plan would permit repricing or cash buyout of underwater options without shareholder approval (either by expressly permitting it – for NYSE and Nasdaq listed companies – or by not prohibiting it when the company has a history of repricing – for non-listed companies);
- The plan is a vehicle for problematic pay practices or a significant pay-for-performance disconnect under certain circumstances;
- The plan is excessively dilutive to shareholders' holdings;
- The plan contains an evergreen (automatic share replenishment) feature;
- The plan lacks sufficient positive features under the Plan Features pillar; or
- Any other factors that are determined to have a significant negative impact on shareholder interests.

Further Information on certain EPSC Factors:

Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT)

The cost of the equity plans is expressed as Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT), which is measured using a binomial option pricing model that assesses the amount of shareholders' equity flowing out of the company to employees and directors. SVT is expressed as both a dollar amount and as a percentage of market value, and includes the new shares proposed, shares available under existing plans, and shares granted but unexercised (using two measures, in the case of plans subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, as noted above). All award types are valued. For omnibus plans, unless limitations are placed on the most expensive types of awards (for example, full-value awards), the assumption is made that all awards to be granted will be the most expensive types.

For proposals that are not subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, Shareholder Value Transfer is reasonable if it falls below a company-specific benchmark. The benchmark is determined as follows: The top quartile performers in each industry group (using the Global Industry Classification Standard: GICS) are identified. Benchmark SVT levels for each industry are established based on these top performers' historic SVT. Regression analyses are run on each industry group to identify the variables most strongly correlated to SVT. The benchmark industry SVT level is then adjusted upwards or downwards for the specific company by plugging the company-specific performance measures, size, and cash compensation into the industry cap equations to arrive at the company's benchmark.²⁰

Three-Year Value-Adjusted Burn Rate

A "Value-Adjusted Burn Rate" is used for stock plan evaluations. Value-Adjusted Burn Rate benchmarks are calculated as the greater of: (1) an industry-specific threshold based on three-year burn rates within the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P 500) and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) a *de minimis* threshold established separately for each of the S&P 500, the Russell 3000 index less the S&P 500, and the non-Russell 3000 index. Year-over-year burn-rate benchmark changes will be limited to a predetermined range above or below the prior year's burn-rate benchmark.

The Value-Adjusted Burn Rate is calculated as follows:

Value-Adjusted Burn Rate = ((# of options * option's dollar value using a Black-Scholes model) + (# of full-value awards * stock price)) / (Weighted average common shares * stock price).

Egregious Factors

Liberal Change in Control Definition

Generally vote against equity plans if the plan has a liberal definition of change in control and the equity awards could vest upon such liberal definition of change in control, even though an actual change in control may not occur. Examples of such a definition include, but are not limited to, announcement or commencement of a tender offer, provisions for acceleration upon a "potential" takeover, shareholder approval of a merger or other transactions, or similar language.

Repricing Provisions

Vote against plans that expressly permit the repricing or exchange of underwater stock options/stock appreciate rights (SARs) without prior shareholder approval. "Repricing" typically includes the ability to do any of the following:

- Amend the terms of outstanding options or SARs to reduce the exercise price of such outstanding options or SARs;
- Cancel outstanding options or SARs in exchange for options or SARs with an exercise price that is less than the exercise price of the original options or SARs;
- Cancel underwater options in exchange for stock awards; or
- Provide cash buyouts of underwater options.

²⁰ For plans evaluated under the Equity Plan Scorecard policy, the company's SVT benchmark is considered along with other factors.

While the above cover most types of repricing, ISS may view other provisions as akin to repricing depending on the facts and circumstances.

Also, vote against or withhold from members of the Compensation Committee who approved repricing (as defined above or otherwise determined by ISS), without prior shareholder approval, even if such repricings are allowed in their equity plan.

Vote against plans that do not expressly prohibit repricing or cash buyout of underwater options without shareholder approval if the company has a history of repricing/buyouts without shareholder approval, and the applicable listing standards would not preclude them from doing so.

Problematic Pay Practices or Significant Pay-for-Performance Disconnect

If the equity plan on the ballot is a vehicle for [problematic pay practices](#), vote against the plan.

ISS may recommend a vote against the equity plan if the plan is determined to be a vehicle for pay-for-performance misalignment. Considerations in voting against the equity plan may include, but are not limited to:

- Severity of the pay-for-performance misalignment;
- Whether problematic equity grant practices are driving the misalignment; and/or
- Whether equity plan awards have been heavily concentrated to the CEO and/or the other NEOs.

Amending Cash and Equity Plans (including Approval for Tax Deductibility (162(m)))

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on amendments to cash and equity incentive plans.

Generally vote for proposals to amend executive cash, stock, or cash and stock incentive plans if the proposal:

- Addresses administrative features only; or
- Seeks approval for Section 162(m) purposes only, and the plan administering committee consists entirely of independent directors, per [ISS' Classification of Directors](#). Note that if the company is presenting the plan to shareholders for the first time for any reason (including after the company's initial public offering), or if the proposal is bundled with other material plan amendments, then the recommendation will be case-by-case (see below).

Vote against proposals to amend executive cash, stock, or cash and stock incentive plans if the proposal:

- Seeks approval for Section 162(m) purposes only, and the plan administering committee does not consist entirely of independent directors, per [ISS' Classification of Directors](#).

Vote case-by-case on all other proposals to amend cash incentive plans. This includes plans presented to shareholders for the first time after the company's IPO and/or proposals that bundle material amendment(s) other than those for Section 162(m) purposes.

Vote case-by-case on all other proposals to amend equity incentive plans, considering the following:

- If the proposal requests additional shares and/or the amendments include a term extension or addition of full value awards as an award type, the recommendation will be based on the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation as well as an analysis of the overall impact of the amendments;

- If the plan is being presented to shareholders for the first time (including after the company's IPO), whether or not additional shares are being requested, the recommendation will be based on the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation as well as an analysis of the overall impact of any amendments; and
- If there is no request for additional shares and the amendments do not include a term extension or addition of full value awards as an award type, then the recommendation will be based entirely on an analysis of the overall impact of the amendments, and the EPSC evaluation will be shown only for informational purposes.

In the first two case-by-case evaluation scenarios, the EPSC evaluation/score is the more heavily weighted consideration.

Specific Treatment of Certain Award Types in Equity Plan Evaluations

Dividend Equivalent Rights

Options that have Dividend Equivalent Rights (DERs) associated with them will have a higher calculated award value than those without DERs under the binomial model, based on the value of these dividend streams. The higher value will be applied to new shares, shares available under existing plans, and shares awarded but not exercised per the plan specifications. DERS transfer more shareholder equity to employees and non-employee directors and this cost should be captured.

Operating Partnership (OP) Units in Equity Plan Analysis of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)

For Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), include the common shares issuable upon conversion of outstanding Operating Partnership (OP) units in the share count for the purposes of determining: (1) market capitalization in the Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) analysis and (2) shares outstanding in the burn rate analysis.

Other Compensation Plans

401(k) Employee Benefit Plans

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to implement a 401(k) savings plan for employees.

Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to implement an ESOP or increase authorized shares for existing ESOPs, unless the number of shares allocated to the ESOP is excessive (more than five percent of outstanding shares).

Employee Stock Purchase Plans—Qualified Plans

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on qualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for employee stock purchase plans where all of the following apply:

- Purchase price is at least 85 percent of fair market value;
- Offering period is 27 months or less; and
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is 10 percent or less of the outstanding shares.

Vote against qualified employee stock purchase plans where when the plan features do not meet all of the above criteria.

Employee Stock Purchase Plans—Non-Qualified Plans

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on nonqualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for nonqualified employee stock purchase plans with all the following features:

- Broad-based participation;
- Limits on employee contribution, which may be a fixed dollar amount or expressed as a percent of base salary;
- Company matching contribution up to 25 percent of employee's contribution, which is effectively a discount of 20 percent from market value; and
- No discount on the stock price on the date of purchase when there is a company matching contribution.

Vote against nonqualified employee stock purchase plans when the plan features do not meet all of the above criteria. If the matching contribution or effective discount exceeds the above, ISS may evaluate the SVT cost of the plan as part of the assessment.

Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking approval to exchange/reprice options taking into consideration:

- Historic trading patterns--the stock price should not be so volatile that the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term;
- Rationale for the re-pricing--was the stock price decline beyond management's control?;
- Is this a value-for-value exchange?;
- Are surrendered stock options added back to the plan reserve?;
- Timing--repricing should occur at least one year out from any precipitous drop in company's stock price;
- Option vesting--does the new option vest immediately or is there a black-out period?;
- Term of the option--the term should remain the same as that of the replaced option;
- Exercise price--should be set at fair market or a premium to market; and
- Participants--executive officers and directors must be excluded.

If the surrendered options are added back to the equity plans for re-issuance, then also take into consideration the company's total cost of equity plans and its three-year average burn rate.

In addition to the above considerations, evaluate the intent, rationale, and timing of the repricing proposal. The proposal should clearly articulate why the board is choosing to conduct an exchange program at this point in time. Repricing underwater options after a recent precipitous drop in the company's stock price demonstrates poor timing and warrants additional scrutiny. Also, consider the terms of the surrendered options, such as the grant date, exercise price and vesting schedule. Grant dates of surrendered options should be far enough back (two to three years) so as not to suggest that repricings are being done to take advantage of short-term downward price movements. Similarly, the exercise price of surrendered options should be above the 52-week high for the stock price.

Vote for shareholder proposals to put option repricings to a shareholder vote.

Stock Plans in Lieu of Cash

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on plans that provide participants with the option of taking all or a portion of their cash compensation in the form of stock.

Vote for non-employee director-only equity plans that provide a dollar-for-dollar cash-for-stock exchange.

Vote case-by-case on plans which do not provide a dollar-for-dollar cash for stock exchange. In cases where the exchange is not dollar-for-dollar, the request for new or additional shares for such equity program will be considered using the binomial option pricing model. In an effort to capture the total cost of total compensation, ISS will not make any adjustments to carve out the in-lieu-of cash compensation.

Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs

General Recommendation: One-time Transfers: Vote against or withhold from compensation committee members if they fail to submit one-time transfers to shareholders for approval.

Vote case-by-case on one-time transfers. Vote for if:

- Executive officers and non-employee directors are excluded from participating;
- Stock options are purchased by third-party financial institutions at a discount to their fair value using option pricing models such as Black-Scholes or a Binomial Option Valuation or other appropriate financial models; and
- There is a two-year minimum holding period for sale proceeds (cash or stock) for all participants.

Additionally, management should provide a clear explanation of why options are being transferred to a third-party institution and whether the events leading up to a decline in stock price were beyond management's control. A review of the company's historic stock price volatility should indicate if the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term.

Ongoing TSO program: Vote against equity plan proposals if the details of ongoing TSO programs are not provided to shareholders. Since TSOs will be one of the award types under a stock plan, the ongoing TSO program, structure, and mechanics must be disclosed to shareholders. The specific criteria to be considered in evaluating these proposals include, but not limited, to the following:

- Eligibility;
- Vesting;
- Bid-price;

- Term of options;
- Cost of the program and impact of the TSOs on company's total option expense; and
- Option repricing policy.

Amendments to existing plans that allow for introduction of transferability of stock options should make clear that only options granted post-amendment shall be transferable.

Director Compensation

Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking ratification of non-employee director compensation, based on the following factors:

- If the equity plan under which non-employee director grants are made is on the ballot, whether or not it warrants support; and
- An assessment of the following qualitative factors:
 - The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile;
 - The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation;
 - Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements;
 - Equity award vesting schedules;
 - The mix of cash and equity-based compensation;
 - Meaningful limits on director compensation;
 - The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites; and
 - The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

Equity Plans for Non-Employee Directors

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on compensation plans for non-employee directors, based on:

- The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants;
- The company's three-year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers (in certain circumstances); and
- The presence of any egregious plan features (such as an option repricing provision or liberal CIC vesting risk).

On occasion, non-employee director stock plans will exceed the plan cost or burn-rate benchmarks when combined with employee or executive stock plans. In such cases, vote case-by-case on the plan taking into consideration the following qualitative factors:

- The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile;
- The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation;
- Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements;
- Equity award vesting schedules;
- The mix of cash and equity-based compensation;
- Meaningful limits on director compensation;
- The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites; and

- The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

Non-Employee Director Retirement Plans

General Recommendation: Vote against retirement plans for non-employee directors. Vote for shareholder proposals to eliminate retirement plans for non-employee directors.

Shareholder Proposals on Compensation

Bonus Banking/Bonus Banking “Plus”

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals seeking deferral of a portion of annual bonus pay, with ultimate payout linked to sustained results for the performance metrics on which the bonus was earned (whether for the named executive officers or a wider group of employees), taking into account the following factors:

- The company’s past practices regarding equity and cash compensation;
- Whether the company has a holding period or stock ownership requirements in place, such as a meaningful retention ratio (at least 50 percent for full tenure); and
- Whether the company has a rigorous claw-back policy in place.

Compensation Consultants—Disclosure of Board or Company’s Utilization

General Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking disclosure regarding the company, board, or compensation committee’s use of compensation consultants, such as company name, business relationship(s), and fees paid.

Disclosure/Setting Levels or Types of Compensation for Executives and Directors

General Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking additional disclosure of executive and director pay information, provided the information requested is relevant to shareholders' needs, would not put the company at a competitive disadvantage relative to its industry, and is not unduly burdensome to the company.

Generally vote against shareholder proposals seeking to set absolute levels on compensation or otherwise dictate the amount or form of compensation (such as types of compensation elements or specific metrics) to be used for executive or directors.

Generally vote against shareholder proposals that mandate a minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

Vote case-by-case on all other shareholder proposals regarding executive and director pay, taking into account relevant factors, including but not limited to: company performance, pay level and design versus peers, history of

compensation concerns or pay-for-performance disconnect, and/or the scope and prescriptive nature of the proposal.

Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals calling for companies to adopt a policy of obtaining shareholder approval for any future agreements and corporate policies that could oblige the company to make payments or awards following the death of a senior executive in the form of unearned salary or bonuses, accelerated vesting or the continuation in force of unvested equity grants, perquisites and other payments or awards made in lieu of compensation. This would not apply to any benefit programs or equity plan proposals for which the broad-based employee population is eligible.

Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt policies requiring senior executive officers to retain a portion of net shares acquired through compensation plans. The following factors will be taken into account:

- The percentage/ratio of net shares required to be retained;
- The time period required to retain the shares;
- Whether the company has equity retention, holding period, and/or stock ownership requirements in place and the robustness of such requirements;
- Whether the company has any other policies aimed at mitigating risk taking by executives;
- Executives' actual stock ownership and the degree to which it meets or exceeds the proponent's suggested holding period/retention ratio or the company's existing requirements; and
- Problematic pay practices, current and past, which may demonstrate a short-term versus long-term focus.

Pay Disparity

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals calling for an analysis of the pay disparity between corporate executives and other non-executive employees. The following factors will be considered:

- The company's current level of disclosure of its executive compensation setting process, including how the company considers pay disparity;
- If any problematic pay practices or pay-for-performance concerns have been identified at the company; and
- The level of shareholder support for the company's pay programs.

Generally vote against proposals calling for the company to use the pay disparity analysis or pay ratio in a specific way to set or limit executive pay.

Pay for Performance/Performance-Based Awards

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requesting that a significant amount of future long-term incentive compensation awarded to senior executives shall be performance-based and requesting that the board adopt and disclose challenging performance metrics to shareholders, based on the following analytical steps:

- First, vote for shareholder proposals advocating the use of performance-based equity awards, such as performance contingent options or restricted stock, indexed options, or premium-priced options, unless the proposal is overly restrictive or if the company has demonstrated that it is using a “substantial” portion of performance-based awards for its top executives. Standard stock options and performance-accelerated awards do not meet the criteria to be considered as performance-based awards. Further, premium-priced options should have a meaningful premium to be considered performance-based awards; and
- Second, assess the rigor of the company’s performance-based equity program. If the bar set for the performance-based program is too low based on the company’s historical or peer group comparison, generally vote for the proposal. Furthermore, if target performance results in an above target payout, vote for the shareholder proposal due to program’s poor design. If the company does not disclose the performance metric of the performance-based equity program, vote for the shareholder proposal regardless of the outcome of the first step to the test.

In general, vote for the shareholder proposal if the company does not meet both of the above two steps.

Pay for Superior Performance

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the board establish a pay-for-superior performance standard in the company's executive compensation plan for senior executives. These proposals generally include the following principles:

- Set compensation targets for the plan’s annual and long-term incentive pay components at or below the peer group median;
- Deliver a majority of the plan’s target long-term compensation through performance-vested, not simply time-vested, equity awards;
- Provide the strategic rationale and relative weightings of the financial and non-financial performance metrics or criteria used in the annual and performance-vested long-term incentive components of the plan;
- Establish performance targets for each plan financial metric relative to the performance of the company’s peer companies; and
- Limit payment under the annual and performance-vested long-term incentive components of the plan to when the company’s performance on its selected financial performance metrics exceeds peer group median performance.

Consider the following factors in evaluating this proposal:

- What aspects of the company’s annual and long-term equity incentive programs are performance driven?
- If the annual and long-term equity incentive programs are performance driven, are the performance criteria and hurdle rates disclosed to shareholders or are they benchmarked against a disclosed peer group?
- Can shareholders assess the correlation between pay and performance based on the current disclosure? and
- What type of industry and stage of business cycle does the company belong to?

Pre-Arranged Trading Plans (10b5-1 Plans)

General Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling for the addition of certain safeguards in prearranged trading plans (10b5-1 plans) for executives. Safeguards may include:

- Adoption, amendment, or termination of a 10b5-1 Plan must be disclosed in a Form 8-K;
- Amendment or early termination of a 10b5-1 Plan allowed only under extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the board;
- Request that a certain number of days that must elapse between adoption or amendment of a 10b5-1 Plan and initial trading under the plan;
- Reports on Form 4 must identify transactions made pursuant to a 10b5-1 Plan;
- An executive may not trade in company stock outside the 10b5-1 Plan; and
- Trades under a 10b5-1 Plan must be handled by a broker who does not handle other securities transactions for the executive.

Prohibit Outside CEOs from Serving on Compensation Committees

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals seeking a policy to prohibit any outside CEO from serving on a company's compensation committee, unless the company has demonstrated problematic pay practices that raise concerns about the performance and composition of the committee.

Recoupment of Incentive or Stock Compensation in Specified Circumstances

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to recoup incentive cash or stock compensation made to senior executives if it is later determined that the figures upon which incentive compensation is earned turn out to have been in error, or if the senior executive has breached company policy or has engaged in misconduct that may be significantly detrimental to the company's financial position or reputation, or if the senior executive failed to manage or monitor risks that subsequently led to significant financial or reputational harm to the company. Many companies have adopted policies that permit recoupment in cases where an executive's fraud, misconduct, or negligence significantly contributed to a restatement of financial results that led to the awarding of unearned incentive compensation. However, such policies may be narrow given that not all misconduct or negligence may result in significant financial restatements. Misconduct, negligence, or lack of sufficient oversight by senior executives may lead to significant financial loss or reputational damage that may have long-lasting impact.

In considering whether to support such shareholder proposals, ISS will take into consideration the following factors:

- If the company has adopted a formal recoupment policy;
- The rigor of the recoupment policy focusing on how and under what circumstances the company may recoup incentive or stock compensation;
- Whether the company has chronic restatement history or material financial problems;
- Whether the company's policy substantially addresses the concerns raised by the proponent;
- Disclosure of recoupment of incentive or stock compensation from senior executives or lack thereof; and
- Any other relevant factors.

Severance and Golden Parachute Agreements

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requiring that executive severance (including change-in-control related) arrangements or payments be submitted for shareholder ratification.

Factors that will be considered include, but are not limited to:

- The company's severance or change-in-control agreements in place, and the presence of problematic features (such as excessive severance entitlements, single triggers, excise tax gross-ups, etc.);
- Any existing limits on cash severance payouts or policies which require shareholder ratification of severance payments exceeding a certain level;
- Any recent severance-related controversies; and
- Whether the proposal is overly prescriptive, such as requiring shareholder approval of severance that does not exceed market norms.

Share Buyback Impact on Incentive Program Metrics

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting the company exclude the impact of share buybacks from the calculation of incentive program metrics, considering the following factors:

- The frequency and timing of the company's share buybacks;
- The use of per-share metrics in incentive plans;
- The effect of recent buybacks on incentive metric results and payouts; and
- Whether there is any indication of metric result manipulation.

Supplemental Executive Retirement Plans (SERPs)

General Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting to put extraordinary benefits contained in SERP agreements to a shareholder vote unless the company's executive pension plans do not contain excessive benefits beyond what is offered under employee-wide plans.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting to limit the executive benefits provided under the company's supplemental executive retirement plan (SERP) by limiting covered compensation to a senior executive's annual salary or those pay elements covered for the general employee population.

Tax Gross-Up Proposals

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals calling for companies to adopt a policy of not providing tax gross-up payments to executives, except in situations where gross-ups are provided pursuant to a plan, policy, or arrangement applicable to management employees of the company, such as a relocation or expatriate tax equalization policy.

Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment/Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals seeking a policy requiring termination of employment prior to severance payment and/or eliminating accelerated vesting of unvested equity.

The following factors will be considered:

- The company's current treatment of equity upon employment termination and/or in change-in-control situations (i.e., vesting is double triggered and/or pro rata, does it allow for the assumption of equity by acquiring company, the treatment of performance shares, etc.); and
- Current employment agreements, including potential poor pay practices such as gross-ups embedded in those agreements.

Generally vote for proposals seeking a policy that prohibits automatic acceleration of the vesting of equity awards to senior executives upon a voluntary termination of employment or in the event of a change in control (except for pro rata vesting considering the time elapsed and attainment of any related performance goals between the award date and the change in control).

6. Routine/Miscellaneous

Adjourn Meeting

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals to provide management with the authority to adjourn an annual or special meeting absent compelling reasons to support the proposal.

Vote for proposals that relate specifically to soliciting votes for a merger or transaction if supporting that merger or transaction. Vote against proposals if the wording is too vague or if the proposal includes "other business."

Amend Quorum Requirements

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to reduce quorum requirements for shareholder meetings below a majority of the shares outstanding, taking into consideration:

- The new quorum threshold requested;
- The rationale presented for the reduction;
- The market capitalization of the company (size, inclusion in indices);
- The company's ownership structure;
- Previous voter turnout or attempts to achieve quorum;
- Any provisions or commitments to restore quorum to a majority of shares outstanding, should voter turnout improve sufficiently; and
- Other factors as appropriate.

In general, a quorum threshold kept as close to a majority of shares outstanding as is achievable is preferred.

Vote case-by-case on directors who unilaterally lower the quorum requirements below a majority of the shares outstanding, taking into consideration the factors listed above.

Amend Minor Bylaws

General Recommendation: Vote for bylaw or charter changes that are of a housekeeping nature (updates or corrections).

Change Company Name

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals to change the corporate name unless there is compelling evidence that the change would adversely impact shareholder value.

Change Date, Time, or Location of Annual Meeting

General Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to change the date, time, or location of the annual meeting unless the proposed change is unreasonable.

Vote against shareholder proposals to change the date, time, or location of the annual meeting unless the current scheduling or location is unreasonable.

Other Business

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals to approve other business when it appears as a voting item.

7. Social and Environmental Issues

Global Approach – E&S Shareholder Proposals

ISS applies a common approach globally to evaluating social and environmental shareholder proposals, which cover a wide range of topics, including consumer and product safety, environment and energy, labor standards and human rights, workplace and board diversity, and corporate political issues. While a variety of factors goes into each analysis, the overall principle guiding all vote recommendations focuses on how the proposal may enhance or protect shareholder value in either the short or long term.

General Recommendation: Generally vote case-by-case, examining primarily whether implementation of the proposal is likely to enhance or protect shareholder value. The following factors will be considered:

- If the issues presented in the proposal are being appropriately or effectively dealt with through legislation or regulation;
- If the company has already responded in an appropriate and sufficient manner to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive;
- The company's relevant practices compared with any industry standard practices for addressing the issue(s) raised by the proposal;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's practices related to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
- If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether reasonable and sufficient information is currently available to shareholders from the company or from other publicly available sources;
- If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether implementation would reveal proprietary or confidential information that could place the company at a competitive disadvantage; and
- Whether the proposal addresses substantive matters that may impact shareholders' interests, including how the proposal may impact shareholders' rights.

Endorsement of Principles

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals seeking a company's endorsement of principles that support a particular public policy position. Endorsing a set of principles may require a company to take a stand on an issue that is beyond its own control and may limit its flexibility with respect to future developments.

Management and the board should be afforded the flexibility to make decisions on specific public policy positions based on their own assessment of the most beneficial strategies for the company.

Animal Welfare

Animal Welfare Policies

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking a report on a company's animal welfare standards, or animal welfare-related risks, unless:

- The company has already published a set of animal welfare standards and monitors compliance;
- The company's standards are comparable to industry peers; and
- There are no recent significant fines, litigation, or controversies related to the company's and/or its suppliers' treatment of animals.

Animal Testing

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals to phase out the use of animals in product testing, unless:

- The company is conducting animal testing programs that are unnecessary or not required by regulation;
- The company is conducting animal testing when suitable alternatives are commonly accepted and used by industry peers; or
- There are recent, significant fines or litigation related to the company's treatment of animals.

Animal Slaughter

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals requesting the implementation of Controlled Atmosphere Killing (CAK) methods at company and/or supplier operations unless such methods are required by legislation or generally accepted as the industry standard.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting a report on the feasibility of implementing CAK methods at company and/or supplier operations considering the availability of existing research conducted by the company or industry groups on this topic and any fines or litigation related to current animal processing procedures at the company.

Consumer Issues

Genetically Modified Ingredients

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals requesting that a company voluntarily label genetically engineered (GE) ingredients in its products. The labeling of products with GE ingredients is best left to the appropriate regulatory authorities.

Vote case-by-case on proposals asking for a report on the feasibility of labeling products containing GE ingredients, taking into account:

- The potential impact of such labeling on the company's business;

- The quality of the company's disclosure on GE product labeling, related voluntary initiatives, and how this disclosure compares with industry peer disclosure; and
- Company's current disclosure on the feasibility of GE product labeling.

Generally vote against proposals seeking a report on the social, health, and environmental effects of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Studies of this sort are better undertaken by regulators and the scientific community.

Generally vote against proposals to eliminate GE ingredients from the company's products, or proposals asking for reports outlining the steps necessary to eliminate GE ingredients from the company's products. Such decisions are more appropriately made by management with consideration of current regulations.

Reports on Potentially Controversial Business/Financial Practices

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's potentially controversial business or financial practices or products, taking into account:

- Whether the company has adequately disclosed mechanisms in place to prevent abuses;
- Whether the company has adequately disclosed the financial risks of the products/practices in question;
- Whether the company has been subject to violations of related laws or serious controversies; and
- Peer companies' policies/practices in this area.

Pharmaceutical Pricing, Access to Medicines, and Prescription Drug Reimportation

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals requesting that companies implement specific price restraints on pharmaceutical products unless the company fails to adhere to legislative guidelines or industry norms in its product pricing practices.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting that a company report on its product pricing or access to medicine policies, considering:

- The potential for reputational, market, and regulatory risk exposure;
- Existing disclosure of relevant policies;
- Deviation from established industry norms;
- Relevant company initiatives to provide research and/or products to disadvantaged consumers;
- Whether the proposal focuses on specific products or geographic regions;
- The potential burden and scope of the requested report; and
- Recent significant controversies, litigation, or fines at the company.

Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on the financial and legal impact of its prescription drug reimportation policies unless such information is already publicly disclosed.

Generally vote against proposals requesting that companies adopt specific policies to encourage or constrain prescription drug reimportation. Such matters are more appropriately the province of legislative activity and may place the company at a competitive disadvantage relative to its peers.

Product Safety and Toxic/Hazardous Materials

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its policies, initiatives/procedures, and oversight mechanisms related to toxic/hazardous materials or product safety in its supply chain, unless:

- The company already discloses similar information through existing reports such as a supplier code of conduct and/or a sustainability report;
- The company has formally committed to the implementation of a toxic/hazardous materials and/or product safety and supply chain reporting and monitoring program based on industry norms or similar standards within a specified time frame; or
- The company has not been recently involved in relevant significant controversies, fines, or litigation.

Vote case-by-case on resolutions requesting that companies develop a feasibility assessment to phase-out of certain toxic/hazardous materials, or evaluate and disclose the potential financial and legal risks associated with utilizing certain materials, considering:

- The company's current level of disclosure regarding its product safety policies, initiatives, and oversight mechanisms;
- Current regulations in the markets in which the company operates; and
- Recent significant controversies, litigation, or fines stemming from toxic/hazardous materials at the company.

Generally vote against resolutions requiring that a company reformulate its products.

Tobacco-Related Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on resolutions regarding the advertisement of tobacco products, considering:

- Recent related fines, controversies, or significant litigation;
- Whether the company complies with relevant laws and regulations on the marketing of tobacco;
- Whether the company's advertising restrictions deviate from those of industry peers;
- Whether the company entered into the Master Settlement Agreement, which restricts marketing of tobacco to youth; and
- Whether restrictions on marketing to youth extend to foreign countries.

Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding second-hand smoke, considering:

- Whether the company complies with all laws and regulations;
- The degree that voluntary restrictions beyond those mandated by law might hurt the company's competitiveness; and
- The risk of any health-related liabilities.

Generally vote against resolutions to cease production of tobacco-related products, to avoid selling products to tobacco companies, to spin-off tobacco-related businesses, or prohibit investment in tobacco equities. Such business decisions are better left to company management or portfolio managers.

Generally vote against proposals regarding tobacco product warnings. Such decisions are better left to public health authorities.

Climate Change

Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan²¹, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
- Whether the company has sought and received third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
- Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
- Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
- Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
- Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
- Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and
- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report providing its GHG emissions levels and reduction targets and/or its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan, taking into account information such as the following:

- The completeness and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on resolutions requesting that a company disclose information on the climate change related financial, physical, or regulatory risks it faces to its operations and investments or on how the company identifies, measures, and manages such risks, considering:

²¹ Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

- Whether the company provides current, publicly-available information on the climate change-related financial, physical, or regulatory risks it faces to its operations and investments or on the impact that climate change may have on the company;
- Associated company policies and practices addressing climate change related risks and/or opportunities;
- The company's level of disclosure compared to industry peers; and
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's climate change-related performance.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting that a company report on its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from company operations and/or products and operations, considering:

- Whether the company discloses current, publicly-available information on the impacts that GHG emissions may have on the company as well as associated company policies and procedures to address related risks and/or opportunities;
- Whether the company's level of disclosure is comparable to that of industry peers; or
- Whether there are significant, controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's GHG emissions.

Vote case-by-case on proposals that call for the adoption of GHG reduction goals from products and operations, considering: :

- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- The company's current GHG emission policies, oversight mechanisms, and related initiatives;
- Whether the company provides disclosure of year-over-year GHG emissions performance data;
- Whether company disclosure lags behind industry peers; and
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to GHG emissions.

Energy Efficiency

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its energy efficiency policies, unless:

- The company complies with applicable energy efficiency regulations and laws, and discloses its participation in energy efficiency policies and programs, including disclosure of benchmark data, targets, and performance measures; or
- The proponent requests adoption of specific energy efficiency goals within specific timelines.

Renewable Energy

General Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports on the feasibility of developing renewable energy resources unless the report would be duplicative of existing disclosure or irrelevant to the company's line of business.

Generally vote against proposals requesting that the company invest in renewable energy resources. Such decisions are best left to management's evaluation of the feasibility and financial impact that such programs may have on the company.

Generally vote against proposals that call for the adoption of renewable energy goals, taking into account:

- The scope and structure of the proposal;
- The company's current level of disclosure on renewable energy use and GHG emissions; and
- The company's disclosure of policies, practices, and oversight implemented to manage GHG emissions and mitigate climate change risks.

Diversity

Board Diversity

General Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports on a company's efforts to diversify the board, unless:

- The gender and racial minority representation of the company's board is reasonably inclusive in relation to companies of similar size and business; or
- The board already reports on its nominating procedures and gender and racial minority initiatives on the board and within the company.

Vote case-by-case on proposals asking a company to increase the gender and racial minority representation on its board, taking into account:

- The degree of existing gender and racial minority diversity on the company's board and among its executive officers;
- The level of gender and racial minority representation that exists at the company's industry peers;
- The company's established process for addressing gender and racial minority board representation;
- Whether the proposal includes an overly prescriptive request to amend nominating committee charter language;
- The independence of the company's nominating committee;
- Whether the company uses an outside search firm to identify potential director nominees; and
- Whether the company has had recent controversies, fines, or litigation regarding equal employment practices.

Equality of Opportunity

General Recommendation: Generally vote case-by-case on proposals requesting a company disclose its diversity policies or initiatives, or proposals requesting disclosure of a company's comprehensive workforce diversity data, including requests for EEO-1 data. Factors that will be considered are:

- Whether the company publicly discloses equal employment opportunity policies and initiatives;
- Whether the company publicly discloses comprehensive workforce diversity data/EEO-1 report; or
- Whether the company has recent significant workplace discrimination/fair employment violations or litigation.

Generally vote against proposals seeking information on the diversity efforts of suppliers and service providers. Such requests may pose a significant burden on the company.

Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Domestic Partner Benefits

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking to amend a company's EEO statement or diversity policies to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, unless the change would be unduly burdensome.

Generally vote against proposals to extend company benefits to, or eliminate benefits from, domestic partners. Decisions regarding benefits should be left to the discretion of the company.

Gender, Race/Ethnicity Pay Gap

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's pay data by gender or race/ethnicity, or a report on a company's policies and goals to reduce any gender or race/ethnicity pay gaps, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and disclosure related to both its diversity and inclusion policies and practices and its compensation philosophy on fair and equitable compensation practices;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap issues;
- The company's disclosure regarding gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers; and
- Local laws regarding categorization of race and/or ethnicity and definitions of ethnic and/or racial minorities.

Racial Equity and/or Civil Rights Audit Guidelines

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals asking a company to conduct an independent racial equity and/or civil rights audit, taking into account:

- The company's established process or framework for addressing racial inequity and discrimination internally;
- Whether the company adequately discloses workforce diversity and inclusion metrics and goals;
- Whether the company has issued a public statement related to its racial justice efforts in recent years, or has committed to internal policy review;
- Whether the company has engaged with impacted communities, stakeholders, and civil rights experts;
- The company's track record in recent years of racial justice measures and outreach externally; and
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to racial inequity or discrimination.

Environment and Sustainability

Facility and Workplace Safety

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for workplace safety reports, including reports on accident risk reduction efforts, taking into account:

- The company's current level of disclosure of its workplace health and safety performance data, health and safety management policies, initiatives, and oversight mechanisms;
- The nature of the company's business, specifically regarding company and employee exposure to health and safety risks;
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or violations related to workplace health and safety; and
- The company's workplace health and safety performance relative to industry peers.

Vote case-by-case on resolutions requesting that a company report on safety and/or security risks associated with its operations and/or facilities, considering:

- The company's compliance with applicable regulations and guidelines;
- The company's current level of disclosure regarding its security and safety policies, procedures, and compliance monitoring; and
- The existence of recent, significant violations, fines, or controversy regarding the safety and security of the company's operations and/or facilities.

Natural Capital- Related and/or Community Impact Assessment Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on policies and/or the potential (community) social and/or environmental impact of company operations, considering:

- Alignment of current disclosure of applicable company policies, metrics, risk assessment report(s) and risk management procedures with any relevant, broadly accepted reporting frameworks;
- The impact of regulatory non-compliance, litigation, remediation, or reputational loss that may be associated with failure to manage the company's operations in question, including the management of relevant community and stakeholder relations;
- The nature, purpose, and scope of the company's operations in the specific region(s);
- The degree to which company policies and procedures are consistent with industry norms; and
- The scope of the resolution.

Hydraulic Fracturing

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's (natural gas) hydraulic fracturing operations, including measures the company has taken to manage and mitigate the potential community and environmental impacts of those operations, considering:

- The company's current level of disclosure of relevant policies and oversight mechanisms;
- The company's current level of such disclosure relative to its industry peers;
- Potential relevant local, state, or national regulatory developments; and
- Controversies, fines, or litigation related to the company's hydraulic fracturing operations.

Operations in Protected Areas

General Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports on potential environmental damage as a result of company operations in protected regions, unless:

- Operations in the specified regions are not permitted by current laws or regulations;
- The company does not currently have operations or plans to develop operations in these protected regions; or

- The company's disclosure of its operations and environmental policies in these regions is comparable to industry peers.

Recycling

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to report on an existing recycling program, or adopt a new recycling program, taking into account:

- The nature of the company's business;
- The current level of disclosure of the company's existing related programs;
- The timetable and methods of program implementation prescribed by the proposal;
- The company's ability to address the issues raised in the proposal; and
- How the company's recycling programs compare to similar programs of its industry peers.

Sustainability Reporting

General Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its policies, initiatives, and oversight mechanisms related to social, economic, and environmental sustainability, unless:

- The company already discloses similar information through existing reports or policies such as an environment, health, and safety (EHS) report; a comprehensive code of corporate conduct; and/or a diversity report; or
- The company has formally committed to the implementation of a reporting program based on Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines or a similar standard within a specified time frame.

Water Issues

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting a company report on, or adopt a new policy on, water-related risks and concerns, taking into account:

- The company's current disclosure of relevant policies, initiatives, oversight mechanisms, and water usage metrics;
- Whether or not the company's existing water-related policies and practices are consistent with relevant internationally recognized standards and national/local regulations;
- The potential financial impact or risk to the company associated with water-related concerns or issues; and
- Recent, significant company controversies, fines, or litigation regarding water use by the company and its suppliers.

General Corporate Issues

Charitable Contributions

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals restricting a company from making charitable contributions. Charitable contributions are generally useful for assisting worthwhile causes and for creating goodwill in the

community. In the absence of bad faith, self-dealing, or gross negligence, management should determine which, and if, contributions are in the best interests of the company.

Data Security, Privacy, and Internet Issues

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting the disclosure or implementation of data security, privacy, or information access and management policies and procedures, considering:

- The level of disclosure of company policies and procedures relating to data security, privacy, freedom of speech, information access and management, and Internet censorship;
- Engagement in dialogue with governments or relevant groups with respect to data security, privacy, or the free flow of information on the Internet;
- The scope of business involvement and of investment in countries whose governments censor or monitor the Internet and other telecommunications;
- Applicable market-specific laws or regulations that may be imposed on the company; and
- Controversies, fines, or litigation related to data security, privacy, freedom of speech, or Internet censorship.

ESG Compensation-Related Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals seeking a report or additional disclosure on the company's approach, policies, and practices on incorporating environmental and social criteria into its executive compensation strategy, considering:

- The scope and prescriptive nature of the proposal;
- The company's current level of disclosure regarding its environmental and social performance and governance;
- The degree to which the board or compensation committee already discloses information on whether it has considered related E&S criteria; and
- Whether the company has significant controversies or regulatory violations regarding social or environmental issues.

Human Rights, Human Capital Management, and International Operations

Human Rights Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting a report on company or company supplier labor and/or human rights standards and policies, taking into consideration:

- Whether such information is publicly disclosed;
- Whether the company is lagging industry peers; and
- Whether there are recent, significant company controversies, fines, or litigation regarding human rights at the company or its suppliers.

Vote case-by-case on proposals to implement company or company supplier labor and/or human rights standards and policies, considering:

- The scope of the request;
- The degree to which existing relevant policies and practices are disclosed;
- Whether or not existing relevant policies are consistent with internationally recognized standards;
- Deviation from industry sector peer company standards and practices;
- Whether company facilities and those of its suppliers are monitored and how;
- Company participation in fair labor organizations or other internationally recognized human rights initiatives;
- Scope and nature of business conducted in markets known to have higher risk of workplace labor/human rights abuse; and
- Recent, significant company controversies, fines, or litigation regarding human rights at the company or its suppliers.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting that a company conduct an assessment of the human rights risks in its operations or in its supply chain, or report on its human rights risk assessment process, considering:

- The degree to which existing relevant policies and practices are disclosed, including information on the implementation of these policies and any related oversight mechanisms;
- The company's industry and whether the company or its suppliers operate in countries or areas where there is a history of human rights concerns;
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding human rights involving the company or its suppliers, and whether the company has taken remedial steps; and
- Whether the proposal is unduly burdensome or overly prescriptive.

Mandatory Arbitration

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on a company's use of mandatory arbitration on employment-related claims, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims; and
- The company's disclosure of its policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements compared to its peers.

Operations in High-Risk Markets

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on a company's potential financial and reputational risks associated with operations in "high-risk" markets, such as a terrorism-sponsoring state or politically/socially unstable region, taking into account:

- The nature, purpose, and scope of the operations and business involved that could be affected by social or political disruption;
- Current disclosure of applicable risk assessment(s) and risk management procedures;
- Compliance with U.S. sanctions and laws;
- Consideration of other international policies, standards, and laws; and
- Whether the company has been recently involved in recent, significant controversies, fines, or litigation related to its operations in "high-risk" markets.

Outsourcing/Offshoring

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals calling for companies to report on the risks associated with outsourcing/plant closures, considering:

- Controversies surrounding operations in the relevant market(s);
- The value of the requested report to shareholders;
- The company's current level of disclosure of relevant information on outsourcing and plant closure procedures; and
- The company's existing human rights standards relative to industry peers.

Sexual Harassment

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on company actions taken to strengthen policies and oversight to prevent workplace sexual harassment, or a report on risks posed by a company's failure to prevent workplace sexual harassment, taking into account:

- The company's current policies, practices, oversight mechanisms related to preventing workplace sexual harassment;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to workplace sexual harassment issues; and
- The company's disclosure regarding workplace sexual harassment policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers.

Weapons and Military Sales

General Recommendation: Vote against reports on foreign military sales or offsets. Such disclosures may involve sensitive and confidential information. Moreover, companies must comply with government controls and reporting on foreign military sales.

Generally vote against proposals asking a company to cease production or report on the risks associated with the use of depleted uranium munitions or nuclear weapons components and delivery systems, including disengaging from current and proposed contracts. Such contracts are monitored by government agencies, serve multiple military and non-military uses, and withdrawal from these contracts could have a negative impact on the company's business.

Political Activities

Lobbying

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting information on a company's lobbying (including direct, indirect, and grassroots lobbying) activities, policies, or procedures, considering:

- The company's current disclosure of relevant lobbying policies, and management and board oversight;

- The company's disclosure regarding trade associations or other groups that it supports, or is a member of, that engage in lobbying activities; and
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's lobbying-related activities.

Political Contributions

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's political contributions and trade association spending policies and activities, considering:

- The company's policies, and management and board oversight related to its direct political contributions and payments to trade associations or other groups that may be used for political purposes;
- The company's disclosure regarding its support of, and participation in, trade associations or other groups that may make political contributions;
- The company's disclosure of its direct corporate political contributions; and
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation related to the company's political contributions or political activities.

Vote against proposals barring a company from making political contributions. Businesses are affected by legislation at the federal, state, and local level; barring political contributions can put the company at a competitive disadvantage.

Vote against proposals to publish in newspapers and other media a company's political contributions. Such publications could present significant cost to the company without providing commensurate value to shareholders.

Political Expenditures and Lobbying Congruency

General Recommendation: Generally vote case-by-case on proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's alignment of political contributions, lobbying, and electioneering spending with a company's publicly stated values and policies, considering:

- The company's policies, management, board oversight, governance processes, and level of disclosure related to direct political contributions, lobbying activities, and payments to trade associations, political action committees, or other groups that may be used for political purposes;
- The company's disclosure regarding: the reasons for its support of candidates for public offices; the reasons for support of and participation in trade associations or other groups that may make political contributions; and other political activities;
- Any incongruencies identified between a company's direct and indirect political expenditures and its publicly stated values and priorities; and
- Recent significant controversies related to the company's direct and indirect lobbying, political contributions, or political activities.

Generally vote case-by-case on proposals requesting comparison of a company's political spending to objectives that can mitigate material risks for the company, such as limiting global warming.

Political Ties

General Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals asking a company to affirm political nonpartisanship in the workplace, so long as:

- There are no recent, significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's political contributions or trade association spending; and
- The company has procedures in place to ensure that employee contributions to company-sponsored political action committees (PACs) are strictly voluntary and prohibit coercion.

Vote against proposals asking for a list of company executives, directors, consultants, legal counsels, lobbyists, or investment bankers that have prior government service and whether such service had a bearing on the business of the company. Such a list would be burdensome to prepare without providing any meaningful information to shareholders.

8. Mutual Fund Proxies

Election of Directors

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the election of directors and trustees, following the same guidelines for uncontested directors for public company shareholder meetings. However, mutual fund boards do not usually have compensation committees, so do not withhold for the lack of this committee.

Closed End Funds- Unilateral Opt-In to Control Share Acquisition Statutes

General Recommendation: For closed-end management investment companies (CEFs), vote against or withhold from nominating/governance committee members (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) at CEFs that have not provided a compelling rationale for opting-in to a Control Share Acquisition statute, nor submitted a by-law amendment to a shareholder vote.

Converting Closed-end Fund to Open-end Fund

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on conversion proposals, considering the following factors:

- Past performance as a closed-end fund;
- Market in which the fund invests;
- Measures taken by the board to address the discount; and
- Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals.

Proxy Contests

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proxy contests, considering the following factors:

- Past performance relative to its peers;
- Market in which the fund invests;
- Measures taken by the board to address the issues;
- Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals;
- Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents;
- Independence of directors;
- Experience and skills of director candidates;
- Governance profile of the company; and
- Evidence of management entrenchment.

Investment Advisory Agreements

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on investment advisory agreements, considering the following factors:

- Proposed and current fee schedules;
- Fund category/investment objective;
- Performance benchmarks;
- Share price performance as compared with peers;
- Resulting fees relative to peers; and
- Assignments (where the advisor undergoes a change of control).

Approving New Classes or Series of Shares

General Recommendation: Vote for the establishment of new classes or series of shares.

Preferred Stock Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the authorization for or increase in preferred shares, considering the following factors:

- Stated specific financing purpose;
- Possible dilution for common shares; and
- Whether the shares can be used for antitakeover purposes.

1940 Act Policies

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on policies under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness;
- Regulatory developments;
- Current and potential returns; and
- Current and potential risk.

Generally vote for these amendments as long as the proposed changes do not fundamentally alter the investment focus of the fund and do comply with the current SEC interpretation.

Changing a Fundamental Restriction to a Nonfundamental Restriction

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to change a fundamental restriction to a non-fundamental restriction, considering the following factors:

- The fund's target investments;

- The reasons given by the fund for the change; and
- The projected impact of the change on the portfolio.

Change Fundamental Investment Objective to Nonfundamental

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals to change a fund's fundamental investment objective to non-fundamental.

Name Change Proposals

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on name change proposals, considering the following factors:

- Political/economic changes in the target market;
- Consolidation in the target market; and
- Current asset composition.

Change in Fund's Subclassification

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on changes in a fund's sub-classification, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness;
- Current and potential returns;
- Risk of concentration; and
- Consolidation in target industry.

Business Development Companies—Authorization to Sell Shares of Common Stock at a Price below Net Asset Value

General Recommendation: Vote for proposals authorizing the board to issue shares below Net Asset Value (NAV) if:

- The proposal to allow share issuances below NAV has an expiration date no more than one year from the date shareholders approve the underlying proposal, as required under the Investment Company Act of 1940;
- The sale is deemed to be in the best interests of shareholders by (1) a majority of the company's independent directors and (2) a majority of the company's directors who have no financial interest in the issuance; and
- The company has demonstrated responsible past use of share issuances by either:
 - Outperforming peers in its 8-digit GICS group as measured by one- and three-year median TSRs; or
 - Providing disclosure that its past share issuances were priced at levels that resulted in only small or moderate discounts to NAV and economic dilution to existing non-participating shareholders.

Disposition of Assets/Termination/Liquidation

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to dispose of assets, to terminate or liquidate, considering the following factors:

- Strategies employed to salvage the company;
- The fund's past performance; and
- The terms of the liquidation.

Changes to the Charter Document

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on changes to the charter document, considering the following factors:

- The degree of change implied by the proposal;
- The efficiencies that could result;
- The state of incorporation; and
- Regulatory standards and implications.

Vote against any of the following changes:

- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to reorganize or terminate the trust or any of its series;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement for amendments to the new declaration of trust;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to amend the fund's management contract, allowing the contract to be modified by the investment manager and the trust management, as permitted by the 1940 Act;
- Allow the trustees to impose other fees in addition to sales charges on investment in a fund, such as deferred sales charges and redemption fees that may be imposed upon redemption of a fund's shares;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to engage in and terminate subadvisory arrangements; or
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to change the domicile of the fund.

Changing the Domicile of a Fund

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on re-incorporations, considering the following factors:

- Regulations of both states;
- Required fundamental policies of both states; and
- The increased flexibility available.

Authorizing the Board to Hire and Terminate Subadvisers Without Shareholder Approval

General Recommendation: Vote against proposals authorizing the board to hire or terminate subadvisers without shareholder approval if the investment adviser currently employs only one subadviser.

Distribution Agreements

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on distribution agreement proposals, considering the following factors:

- Fees charged to comparably sized funds with similar objectives;
- The proposed distributor's reputation and past performance;
- The competitiveness of the fund in the industry; and
- The terms of the agreement.

Master-Feeder Structure

General Recommendation: Vote for the establishment of a master-feeder structure.

Mergers

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on merger proposals, considering the following factors:

- Resulting fee structure;
- Performance of both funds;
- Continuity of management personnel; and
- Changes in corporate governance and their impact on shareholder rights.

Shareholder Proposals for Mutual Funds

Establish Director Ownership Requirement

General Recommendation: Generally vote against shareholder proposals that mandate a specific minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

Reimburse Shareholder for Expenses Incurred

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses. When supporting the dissidents, vote for the reimbursement of the proxy solicitation expenses.

Terminate the Investment Advisor

General Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to terminate the investment advisor, considering the following factors:

- Performance of the fund's Net Asset Value (NAV);
- The fund's history of shareholder relations; and
- The performance of other funds under the advisor's management.

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INTERNATIONAL

TAFT-HARTLEY PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES

2026 Policy Recommendations

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Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Proxy Voting Policy Statement and Guidelines

This statement sets forth the proxy voting policy of ISS' Taft-Hartley Advisory Services. The Taft-Hartley Proxy Voting Guidelines are designed for investors who take a worker-owner view of long-term corporate value. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has stated that the fiduciary act of managing plan assets that are shares of corporate stock includes the voting of proxies appurtenant to those shares of stock and that trustees may delegate this duty to an investment manager. ERISA section 3(38) defines an investment manager as any fiduciary who is registered as an investment adviser under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940.

ISS is a registered investment adviser under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will make voting recommendations for the proxies of its clients under these guidelines solely considering the guidelines and the interests of plan participants and beneficiaries and for the exclusive purpose of providing benefits to them. The interests of participants and beneficiaries will not be subordinated to unrelated objectives. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services shall act with the care, skill, prudence, and diligence under the circumstances then prevailing that a prudent person acting in a like capacity and familiar with such matters would use in the conduct of an enterprise of a like character and with like aims. ISS' Taft-Hartley Guidelines takes as one frame of reference the AFL-CIO Proxy Voting Guidelines. ISS regularly solicits feedback on the Taft-Hartley Guidelines from its subscribers and revises the guidelines as events warrant in order to remain in conformity with its subscribers' view of responsible corporate governance practices.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services shall analyze each proxy on a case-by-case basis and make its voting recommendations informed by the guidelines set out below. These guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive.

1. Operational Items

Financial Results/Director and Statutory Reports

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for approval of financial statements, report of the board of directors, independent auditor reports, and other statutory reports, unless:

- There are concerns about the accounts presented or audit procedures used;
- The company is not responsive to shareholder questions about specific items that should be publicly disclosed; or
- The company failed to disclose the financial reports in a timely manner.

Discussion

Most companies around the world submit these reports to shareholders for approval, and this is one of the first items on most agenda. The official financial statements and director and auditor reports are valuable documents when evaluating a company's annual performance. The director report usually includes a review of the company's performance during the year, justification of dividend levels and profits or losses, special events such as acquisitions or disposals, and future plans for the company.

The auditor report discloses any irregularities or problems with the company's finances. While a qualified report by itself is not sufficient reason to oppose this resolution, it raises cautionary flags of which shareholders should be aware. Most auditor reports are unqualified, meaning that in the auditor's opinion, the company's financial statements have been prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

When evaluating a company's financial statements, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services looks at debt/equity levels on the balance sheet, historical sales and earnings performance, dividend history and payout ratios, and the company's own performance relative to similar companies in its industry. Unless there are major concerns about the accuracy of the financial statements or the director or auditor reports, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally approves of this item.

Appointment of Auditors and Auditor Fees

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for the reelection of auditors and proposals authorizing the board to fix auditor fees, unless:

- The name of the proposed auditors has not been published;
- There are serious concerns about the effectiveness of the auditors;
- The lead audit partner(s) has been linked with a significant auditing controversy;
- There is reason to believe that the auditor has rendered an opinion, which is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position;
- The lead audit partner(s) has previously served the company in an executive capacity or can otherwise be considered affiliated with the company;
- The breakdown of audit or non-audit fees is not disclosed or provided in a timely manner (in markets where such information is routinely available);
- The auditors have been changed without explanation;
- The profile of the new audit firm being appointed is not disclosed or not available in the public domain; or
- Fees for non-audit/consulting services exceed a quarter of total fees paid to the auditor or any stricter limit set in local best practice recommendations or law; or

Vote against auditor remuneration proposals if a company's non-audit fees are excessive and auditor remuneration is presented as a separate voting item.

In circumstances where fees for non-audit services include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events: initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergencies, and spin-offs; and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees which are an exception to the standard "non-audit fee" category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit fees.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will apply its U.S. policy at U.S. firms incorporated in offshore tax and governance havens that do not qualify for disclosure exemptions, and vote against the reelection of auditors where auditor tenure exceeds seven years.

Discussion

Most major public companies around the world use one of the major international auditing firms to conduct their audits. As such, concerns about the quality and objectivity of the audit are minimal, and the reappointment of the auditor is usually viewed as a routine matter. Audit fees tend to be highly competitive and vary little between companies. However, if a company proposes a new auditor or an auditor resigns and does not seek reelection, companies should offer an explanation to shareholders. If shareholders request an explanation for a change in auditor and the company or retiring auditor fails to provide one, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against the election of a new auditor. If an explanation is otherwise unavailable, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against this item.

Many countries also require the appointment of censors or special auditors who ensure that the board and management are in compliance with the company's articles. The censors' role is purely advisory in nature. Proposals to appoint censors are routine, as the censors usually act as a secondary auditor for special audit requirements.

The practice of auditors contributing non-audit services to companies is problematic, as illuminated by the accounting scandals around the world. When an auditor is paid more in consulting fees than for auditing, the company/auditor relationship is left open to conflicts of interest. Because accounting scandals evaporate shareholder value, any proposal to ratify auditors is examined for potential conflicts of interest, with particular attention to the fees paid to the auditor. When fees from non-audit services become significant without any clear safeguards against conflicts of interest, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose the auditor's reappointment.

Appointment of Internal Statutory Auditors

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for the appointment or reelection of statutory auditors, unless:

- There are serious concerns about the statutory reports presented or the audit procedures used;
- Questions exist concerning any of the statutory auditors being appointed; or
- The auditors have previously served the company in an executive capacity or can otherwise be considered affiliated with the company.

Discussion

The appointment of internal statutory auditors is a routine request for companies in Latin America, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Japan, and Russia. The statutory auditing board is usually composed of three to five members, including a group chair and two alternate members, all of whom are expected to be independent. In addition to the regular duty of verifying corporate accounts, the auditor board is responsible for supervising management and ensuring compliance with the law and articles of association. The auditors must perform an audit of the accounts every three months and present to shareholders a report on the balance sheet at the AGM. For most countries, the auditors are elected annually and may seek reelection. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports the appointment of statutory auditors unless there are serious concerns about the reports presented or questions about an auditor's qualifications.

Allocation of Income

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for approval of the allocation of income, unless:

- The dividend payout ratio has been consistently below 30 percent without adequate explanation; or
- The payout is excessive given the company's financial position.

Discussion

Many countries require shareholders to approve the allocation of income generated during the year. These proposals usually, but not always, contain an allocation to dividends. When determining the acceptability of this proposal, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services focuses primarily on the payout ratio. Payouts of less than 30 percent or more than 100 percent are a trigger for further analysis. The minimum level of 30 percent is based on a review of international practice. Payouts of more than 100 percent are a signal that the company is dipping into reserves to make the payment.

Further analysis of payout ratios should include the following: an examination of historical payouts to determine if there is a long-term pattern of low payouts; exceptional events that may have artificially modified earnings for the year; the condition of a company's balance sheet; comparisons with similar companies both domestically and internationally; and the classification of the company as growth or mature.

Justifications for extreme payouts must be reviewed carefully. If the company has an adequate explanation for a certain payout, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports the income allocation as proposed. However, if a company has a pattern of low payouts, fails to adequately justify the retention of capital, and is not experiencing above-average growth, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose the proposal. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will also vote against the payout if a company appears to be maintaining an excessive payout that may affect its long-term health.

Although dividend payouts are still the predominant form of distribution of capital to shareholders, share buybacks have become more popular in some markets, such as Denmark. In these cases, companies have introduced policies to return capital to shareholders by way of share repurchases instead of through the payment of dividends. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services votes on proposals to omit the payment of a dividend in favor of a share buyback on a case-by-case basis by looking at factors such as whether repurchased shares will be cancelled or may be reissued, tax consequences for shareholders, liquidity of the shares, share price movements and the solvency ratio of the company.

Stock (Scrip) Dividend Alternative and Dividend Reinvestment Plans

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for most stock (scrip) dividend proposals.
- Vote against proposals that do not allow for a cash option unless management demonstrates that the cash option is harmful to shareholder value.

Discussion

Stock dividend alternatives, also referred to in some markets as “scrip” dividend alternatives or dividend reinvestment plans (DRIPs), offer shareholders the option of receiving their dividend payment in the form of fully paid ordinary shares and are common proposals worldwide. While dividend payments in the form of shares in lieu of cash do not immediately add to shareholder value, they allow companies to retain cash and to strengthen the position and commitment of long-term shareholders. While Taft-Hartley Advisory Services is generally supportive of such plans, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes stock dividend proposals that do not allow a cash option unless management shows that the cash outflow is detrimental to the company’s health and to long-term shareholder value.

Amendments to Articles of Association

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Votes on amendments to the articles of association are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion

Requests to amend a company’s articles of association are usually motivated by changes in the company’s legal and regulatory environment, although evolution of general business practice can also prompt amendments to articles. Such proposals are especially common whenever stock exchange listing rules are revised, new legislation is passed, or a court case exposes the need to close loopholes.

Amendments to articles range from minor spelling changes to the adoption of an entirely new set of articles. While the majority of such requests are of a technical and administrative nature, minor changes in wording can have a significant impact on corporate governance. As such, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services carefully scrutinizes any changes to a company’s articles.

From a company’s perspective, it is often more efficient to adopt a new set of articles than to introduce numerous amendments. However, bundling changes that treat different provisions of the articles into one voting item prevents shareholders from separating items of concern from routine changes. By leaving a shareholder with an all-or-nothing choice, bundling allows companies to include negative provisions along with positive or neutral changes.

When reviewing new or revised articles, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services classifies each change according to its potential impact on shareholder value and then weighs the package as a whole. The presence of one strongly negative change may warrant a recommendation against the resolution. In assigning these classifications, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services is not concerned with the nature of the article being amended but rather focuses on whether the proposed change improves or worsens the existing provision.

The final criterion on which Taft-Hartley Advisory Services bases its decision is whether failure to pass a resolution would cause an immediate loss of shareholder value. In such cases, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports even a bundled resolution that includes negative changes.

Amendments to Articles to Allow Virtual Meetings

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals allowing for the convening of hybrid¹ shareholder meetings.

Vote case-by-case on proposals concerning virtual-only meetings², considering:

- Whether the company has committed to ensuring shareholders will have the same rights participating electronically as they would have for an in-person meeting³;
- Assurance that a virtual-only meeting will only be convened in the case of extraordinary circumstances that necessitate restrictions on physical attendance;
- The use of past authorizations to hold virtual-only meetings and the accompanying rationale for doing so;
- In-person or hybrid meetings are not precluded; and
- Local laws and regulations concerning the convening of virtual meetings.

Discussion

While there is recognition of the potential benefits of enabling participation at shareholder meetings via electronic means, investors have raised concerns about moves to completely eliminate physical shareholder meetings, arguing that virtual meetings may hinder meaningful exchanges between management and shareholders and enable management to avoid uncomfortable questions.

Change in Company Fiscal Term

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for resolutions to change a company's fiscal term unless a company's motivation for the change is to postpone its annual general meeting (AGM).

Discussion

Companies routinely seek shareholder approval to change their fiscal year end. This is a decision best left to management. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes this resolution only if the company is changing its year-end to postpone its AGM. Most countries require companies to hold their AGM within a certain period of time after the close of the fiscal year. If a company is embroiled in a controversy, it might seek approval to amend its fiscal year end at an EGM to avoid controversial issues at an AGM. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes the change in year-end in these cases.

¹ The term "hybrid shareholder meeting" refers to an in-person, or physical, meeting in which shareholders are permitted to participate online.

² The phrase "virtual-only shareholder meeting" refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively through the use of online technology without a corresponding in-person meeting.

³ The phrase "in-person meeting" refers to a meeting in which participating shareholders and board members meet in a specified physical location together. At an in-person meeting, shareholders and board members are physically present, enabling direct, in-person interaction.

Lower Disclosure Threshold for Stock Ownership

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against resolutions to lower the stock ownership disclosure threshold below 5 percent unless specific reasons exist to implement a lower threshold.

Discussion

Required shareholder disclosure levels vary around the world. Some countries, such as Canada, require the disclosure of any stakes 10 percent or higher, while other countries require lower disclosure levels. For example, the United Kingdom requires disclosure of stakes of three percent or greater. In some countries, shareholders may be asked from time to time to reduce the disclosure requirement at a specific company. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will support such initiatives as they encourage greater disclosure by the company's largest shareholders. However, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against reductions that are unduly restrictive or could act as a pretext for an anti-takeover device.

Transact Other Business

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against other business when it appears as a voting item.

Discussion

This item provides a forum for questions and any other resolutions that may be brought up at the meeting. In most countries this item is a non-voting formality (not requiring a shareholder vote), but companies in certain countries do include other business as a voting item. Because shareholders who vote by proxy cannot know what issues will be raised under this item, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services cannot approve this request when asked for a vote. While Taft-Hartley Advisory Services recognizes that in most cases this item is a formality or includes discussion that will have no impact on shareholders, shareholders cannot risk the negative consequences of voting in advance on an item for which information has not been disclosed.

2. Board of Directors

Director and Supervisory Board Member Elections

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for management nominees in the election of directors, unless:

- Adequate disclosure has not been provided in a timely manner prior to the meeting;
- There are clear concerns about the past performance of the company or the board, including;
 - Questionable finances or restatements;
 - Questionable transactions with conflicts of interest;
- The board fails to meet minimum corporate governance standards, including board independence standards.
- There is a lack of independence on the board and/or its key committees;
- There are concerns that long board tenures could compromise the independence and objectivity of board members. Non-executive board members with long-tenures may be classified as non-independent, despite being considered independent by the company;
- There are any records of abuses against minority shareholder interests;
- The board takes actions that are not in shareholders' best interests (excessive executive compensation, adopting anti-takeover devices, failure to respond to shareholder concerns/wishes, or demonstrating a "lack of duty or care");
- The company has failed to disclose the audit fees and/or non-audit fees in the latest fiscal year;
- Non-audit fees (Other Fees) paid to the external audit firm exceed audit and audit-related fees; or
- The board has been insensitive to labor interests, human rights, supplier codes of conduct, or has engaged in other corporate activities that affect the reputation of the company in the global market.

Generally vote for employee and/or labor representatives.

In markets where detailed information is generally provided, votes against or withhold votes on individual nominees, key committee members or the entire board can be triggered by one or more of the following concerns:

- Lack of a majority independent board;
- Attendance of director nominees at board and key committee meetings of less than 75 percent without valid reason or explanation;
- Lack of full independence on key board committees (i.e. audit, compensation, and nominating committees);
- Failure to establish any key board committees (i.e. audit, compensation, or nominating) including where the board serves in the capacity of a key committee, and where there is insufficient information to determine whether key committees exist, who the committee members are, or whether the committee members are independent;
- Presence of a non-independent board chair;
- Directors serving on an excessive number of other boards which could compromise their primary duties.
 - In Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and European markets where the number of board appointments is routinely available, an excessive number of boards is defined in the following way: Any person who holds more than four mandates at listed companies will be classified as overboarded. For the purposes of calculating this limit, a non-executive directorship counts as one mandate, a non-executive chair position counts as two mandates, and a position as executive director (or a comparable role) is counted as three mandates. Also, any CEO who holds more than one external mandate at listed companies will be classified as overboarded at all boards where the director is not currently CEO.
 - In other markets where the number of board appointments is routinely available, an excessive number of boards is described as: CEOs of publicly traded companies who hold more than one external mandate at listed companies besides their own⁴; or Non-CEO directors who serve on more than four public company boards.

⁴ Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against or withhold from overboarded CEO directors only at their outside directorships and not at the company at which they presently serve as CEO.

- The names of nominees are unavailable or not provided in a timely manner prior to the meeting (in markets where this information is available);
- Director terms are not disclosed or exceed market norms;
- Egregious actions including:
 - Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight⁵, or fiduciary responsibilities at any company on whose board a director serves (objectively coming to light in legal proceedings, regulatory investigation or enforcement, or other manner which takes place in relation to the company, directors or management);
 - Failure to replace management or directors as appropriate; or
 - Egregious actions related to the director(s)' service on other boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company.
- For bundled director elections, vote against the entire slate if any of the concerns above apply to a particular nominee.

At Canadian TSX and TSXV firms, generally withhold votes from all directors nominated by slate ballot at the annual/general or annual/special shareholders' meetings. This policy will not apply to contested director elections. Furthermore, for the Canadian market, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may recommend withhold votes from individual directors, committee members, or the entire board as appropriate in situations where an advance notice policy has been adopted by the board but has not been included on the voting agenda at the next shareholders' meeting. Continued lack of shareholder approval of the advanced notice policy in subsequent years may result in further withhold recommendations.

Furthermore, generally withhold from continuing individual directors or the entire board of directors if:

- At the previous board election, any director received more than 50 percent withhold votes of the votes cast and the company has failed to address the issue(s) that caused the majority withheld vote; or
- The board failed to act⁶ on a shareholder proposal that received the support of a majority of the votes cast for and against at the previous shareholder meeting.

In Italy, the election of directors generally takes place through the *voto di lista* mechanism (similar to slate elections). Since the Italian implementation of the European Shareholder Rights Directive (effective since Nov. 1, 2010), Italian issuers whose shares are listed on the Italian regulated market Euronext Milan must publish the various lists 21 days in advance of the meeting. Since shareholders only have the option to support one such list, where lists are published in sufficient time, vote recommendations will be made on a case-by-case basis, determining which list of nominees are considered best suited to add value for shareholders. Those companies that are excluded from the provisions of the European Shareholder Rights Directive generally publish lists of nominees seven days before the meeting. In the case where nominees are not published in sufficient time, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against the director elections before the lists of director nominees are disclosed. Once the various lists of nominees are disclosed, an alert will be issued to clients and, if appropriate, the vote recommendation will be updated to reflect support for one particular list.

In Brazil, when a separate election is presented for minority board and/or fiscal council nominees, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will prioritize support for the election of minority representatives, if timely disclosure is provided. In the absence of timely disclosure regarding minority nominees, a "Do Not Vote" or an "ABSTAIN" recommendation may be issued for the separate minority election proposal. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will update its report and vote recommendations, as applicable, on a best effort basis, whenever the names and biographical information of minority nominees are disclosed following the publication of the original report.

In France, generally vote against proposals seeking shareholder approval to elect a censor, to amend bylaws to authorize the appointment of censors, or to extend the maximum number of censors to the board. However, vote on a case-by-case basis

⁵ Examples of failure of risk oversight include but are not limited to: bribery; criminal conduct; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies; demonstrably poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant adverse legal judgments or settlements against the company, directors, or management; hedging of company stock; or significant pledging of company stock.

⁶ Responding to the shareholder proposal will generally mean either full implementation of the proposal or, if the matter requires a vote by shareholders, a management proposal on the next annual ballot to implement the proposal. Responses that involve less than full implementation will be considered on a case-by-case basis

when the company provides assurance that the censor would serve on a short-term basis (maximum one year) with the intent to retain the nominee before his/her election as director.

Discussion

Most countries around the world maintain an Anglo-Saxon board structure, as seen in the United States, in which executive and non-executive directors are organized into a single board. However, companies in a number of countries maintain two-tiered board structures, comprising a supervisory board of non-executive directors and a management board with executive directors. The supervisory board oversees the actions of the management board, while the management board is responsible for the company's daily operations. Companies with two-tiered boards elect members to the supervisory board only; management board members are appointed by the supervisory board.

Depending on the country, shareholders will be asked to either elect directors or supervisory board members at annual meetings. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services considers director/supervisory board elections to be one of the most important voting decisions that shareholders make, especially because shareholders are only given the opportunity to review their companies' operations once a year at the AGM. Thus, if detailed information on boards or nominees is available, analysis to the highest degree possible is warranted. Directors and supervisory board members function as the representatives of shareholders and stakeholders throughout the year and are therefore a crucial avenue of ongoing influence on management.

Levels of disclosure regarding directors vary widely. In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, companies publish detailed information such as director biographies, share ownership, and related information that aids shareholders in determining the level of director independence. In these cases, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services applies standards of board and key board committee independence. In many other countries, the only information available on directors is their names, while still other countries disclose no information at all. In low-disclosure markets where sufficiently detailed information about directors is unavailable, it could be counterproductive to vote against directors on the basis of a lack of information. Opposition to specific nominees or boards should be supported by specific problems or concerns.

While Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports the annual election of directors, boards in many countries are divided into two or more classes that are elected on a staggered basis. This system of classified boards is common across the world. In certain countries, executive directors may be appointed for terms of up to six years, and a company's articles may give executive directors protected board seats under which they are not subject to shareholder election. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes directors should stand for reelection annually in order to be accountable to shareholders on an annual basis and opposes article amendment proposals seeking extensions of director terms. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also opposes protected board seats and preferential treatment of executive directors. In some countries the trend is moving toward limiting terms for directors. In the Netherlands, the corporate governance code recommends that management and supervisory board members be subject to maximum four-year terms. Although Taft-Hartley Advisory Services recognizes that four-year terms maybe the standard in some markets, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose the election of new directors or the reelection of an existing director when their terms are not disclosed or where their term lengths exceed market norms.

When reviewing director election proposals (where possible given information disclosure), Taft-Hartley Advisory Services examines board composition, company performance, and any negative views or information on either the company or individual directors. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services determines the number of executive and independent directors on the board, the existence and composition of board committees, and the independence of the chair. An independent director is one whose only significant relationship with the company is through its board seat. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services defines members of supervisory boards, which represent organized workers' interests, as independent. In cases where board composition is of concern, the company's general health and its recent financial performance may play a part in the evaluation of directors. Individual director information is also considered, including share ownership among director nominees. In markets where board independence composition information is routinely available, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally oppose all non-independent director nominees if the board is not majority independent. For U.S. firms incorporated in offshore tax or governance havens that do not qualify for disclosure exemptions, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will apply its U.S. policy and vote against non-independent director nominees if the board is not two-thirds majority independent or where key board committees are not completely independent.

While complete independence on board committees is widely recognized as best practice, there are some markets in which it is still common to find executive directors serving as committee members. Whenever the level of disclosure is adequate to determine whether a committee includes company insiders, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally vote against these executive directors.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also takes into account the attendance records of directors when such information is provided to shareholders, using a benchmark attendance rate of 75 percent of board meetings. If an individual director fails to attend at least 75 percent of board meetings, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services makes further inquiries to the company regarding the absences. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against /withhold votes from the director unless the company has provided a reasonable explanation for the absences. International companies tend to have directors who reside in other countries on their boards, making attendance difficult. While Taft-Hartley Advisory Services understands the difficulties imposed on such directors, failing to attend meetings prevents directors from fulfilling their fiduciary obligations and adequately representing shareholder interests. Other business obligations and conflicting travel schedules are not acceptable reasons for consistently poor attendance records. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports the use of teleconferencing and videoconferencing to cope with the increasing time and travel demands faced by directors in global business.

For shareholder nominees, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services places the persuasive burden on the nominee or the proposing shareholder to prove that they are better suited to serve on the board than management's nominees. Serious consideration of shareholder nominees will be given in cases where there are clear and compelling reasons for the nominee to join the board. These nominees must also demonstrate a clear ability to contribute positively to board deliberations; some nominees may have hidden or narrow agendas and may unnecessarily contribute to divisiveness among directors.

In many countries it is customary to elect a single slate of directors. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services does not approve of this practice because shareholders may wish to express differing views as to the suitability of the director nominees and should have the ability to cast ballots with respect to individuals rather than the entire slate. Given improving best practice in more sophisticated markets, which are moving away from single slate director election items, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally oppose director nominees if their election is not presented to shareholders as an individual item in these markets, and will oppose slate nominees in markets where the practice is prevalent and there are concerns with a particular director nominee up for election.

In recent years, the concept that directors should not serve on an excessive number of boards has gained more support as a legitimate governance concern. A common view among many investors is that a director will not be an effective monitor on any board if he/she serves on numerous boards. In markets where disclosure is sufficient (such as detailed director biographies which include information on the director's role on the board and other external appointments both in the local market and abroad), and markets permit individual election of directors, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against a candidate when he/she holds an excessive number of board appointments. Executive directors are expected not to hold other executive or chair positions. They may, however, hold up to one other non-executive directorships. Board chairs are expected not to hold other executive positions or more than one other chair position. They may, however, hold up to two other non-executive directorships. NEDs who do not hold executive or chair positions may hold up to three other non-executive directorships. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will take into account board positions held in global publicly-listed companies. An adverse vote will not be applied to a director within a company where he/she serves as CEO; instead, any negative votes will be applied to his/her additional seats on other company boards.

Many investors believe that long tenure on a board can, in some circumstances, lead to a sense of identification with the company and the interests of its management team which can damage a director's independence, even in the absence of a formal transactional or professional relationship between the director and the company. Listing rules in both Hong Kong and Singapore have recently been amended to provide that where a director designated as independent has served on the board for more than nine years, the company should provide the reasons why the board considers such director to still be independent – in effect, creating a rebuttable presumption that independence will be affected by long tenure. In Hong Kong and Singapore, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services would classify an "independent non-executive director" as non-independent if such director has served on the board for more than nine years. In Hong Kong, the classification of a director is also contingent upon the board's failure to provide any justification for the director's continued independence status or on the fact that the stated reasons raise

concerns among investors as to the director's true level of independence. In other markets as applicable, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may classify non-executive board members with long-tenures as non-independent directors, despite such directors being considered independent by the company.

Director accountability and competence have become issues of prime importance given the failings in oversight exposed by the global financial crisis. There is also concern over the environment in the boardrooms of certain markets, where past failures appear to be no impediment to continued or new appointments at major companies and may not be part of the evaluation process at companies in considering whether an individual is, or continues to be, fit for the role and best able to serve shareholders' interests. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will consider a potential negative vote at the board, committee, or individual level, if a director has had significant involvement with a failed company, or has in the past appeared not to have acted in the best interests of all shareholders, and/or where substantial doubts have been raised about a director's ability to serve as an effective monitor of management and in shareholders' best interests including consideration of past performance on other boards.

Board Diversity

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will evaluate diversity on boards in international markets when reviewing director elections, to the extent that disclosures and market practices permit.

Canada

Gender Diversity

For S&P/TSX Composite Index companies, generally vote withhold for the chair of the nominating committee or chair of the committee designated with the responsibility of a nominating committee, or chair of the board of directors if no nominating committee has been identified or no chair of such committee has been identified, where women comprise less than 30% of the board of directors.

S&P/TSX Composite Exemptions:

Assuming a publicly disclosed written commitment to achieve 30% representation of women on the board at or prior to the subsequent AGM, an exception will be made for companies which:

- Joined the S&P/TSX Composite Index and have not previously been subject to a 30% representation of women on the board requirement as an S&P/TSX Composite Index constituent in the past; or
- Have fallen below 30% representation of women on the board after achieving such level of representation at the preceding AGM.

For TSX companies which are not also S&P/TSX Composite Index constituents, generally vote withhold for the chair of the nominating committee or chair of the committee designated with the responsibility of a nominating committee, or chair of the board of directors if no nominating committee has been identified or no chair of such committee has been identified, where there are zero women on the board of directors.

Non-S&P/TSX Composite Exemptions:

This policy will not apply to:

- Newly publicly-listed companies within the current or prior fiscal year;
- Companies that have transitioned from the TSXV within the current or prior fiscal year; or
- Companies with four or fewer directors.

Assuming a publicly disclosed written commitment to add at least one woman to the board at or prior to the subsequent AGM, an exception will be made for companies which temporarily have no women on the board after having at least one woman on the board at the preceding AGM.

Evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether withhold recommendations are warranted for additional directors at companies that fail to meet the above policy that would apply to their respective constituent group over two years or more.

Ethnic Diversity

For companies in the S&P/TSX Composite Index, generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee or chair of the committee designated with the responsibility of a nominating committee, or the chair of the board of directors if no nominating committee has been identified or no chair of such committee has been identified, where the board has no apparent racially or ethnically diverse members⁷.

S&P/TSX Composite Exemptions:

With a publicly disclosed written commitment to add at least one racially or ethnically diverse director on the board at or prior to the subsequent AGM, an exception will be made for companies which:

- Joined the S&P/TSX Composite Index and have not previously been subject to the racial/ethnic board requirement as an S&P/TSX Composite Index constituent in the past⁸; or
- Have fallen below the minimum racial or ethnic representation on the board after achieving such level of representation at the preceding AGM.

Evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether against/withhold recommendations are warranted for additional directors at companies that fail to meet the policy over two years or more.

Brazil and Americas Regional

Generally vote against director elections at companies where the post-election board contains no female directors.

- For bundled elections, vote against the entire slate.
- For unbundled elections, vote against the chair of the nominating committee or chair of the committee designated with the responsibility of a nominating committee, or all such committee members if no committee chair has been identified. In case no nominating committee has been disclosed, vote against the chair of the board, or the entire board if no board chair has been identified.

⁷ Aggregate diversity statistics provided by the board will only be considered if specific to racial and/or ethnic diversity. Racial and/or Ethnic Diversity is defined as: Aboriginal peoples (means persons who are Indigenous, Inuit or Métis) and members of visible minorities (means persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour). Employment Equity Act (S.C. 1995, c. 44) <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/E-5.401/section-3.html>

⁸ Since the previous AGM.

South Africa

Generally vote against the nomination committee chair (or, if not on ballot, the board chair or other appropriate director) if there is not at least one woman on the board. Mitigating factors may include:

- Compliance with the relevant board diversity standard at the preceding AGM.
- Clear commitment to address the lack of gender diversity on the board and progress against the agreed voluntary diversity targets during the year.
- Other relevant factors as applicable.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Generally vote against director elections at companies where the post-election board will contain no female directors:

- For bundled elections, vote against the entire slate.
- For unbundled elections, vote against the chair of the Nominating Committee (or chair of the committee designated with the responsibility of a nominating committee) or, on a case-by-case basis, against other relevant director(s).

Mitigating factors:

- Met the relevant board diversity minimum level at the preceding AGM.
- Clear commitment to address the lack of gender diversity on the board and progress against agreed voluntary diversity targets, if any, during the following year.
- Other relevant factors as applicable.

Australia

In Australian companies, generally vote against the chair of the nomination committee or chair of the board (or other relevant directors on a case-by case basis) if:

- The company is a large Australian listed entity and included in the S&P/ASX300 Index, and the board does not comprise at least 30 percent female representation.
- For any company, there are no women on the board.

Exceptional circumstances from this vote recommendation which may be considered on a case-by-case basis may include:

- The company complying with the standard in the preceding year, and publicly available disclosure by the company of a search being undertaken and firm commitment to meet the gender diversity standard in the next year;
- Non-operating exploration or research & development entities which typically have small boards of three directors; or
- Other relevant factors.

New Zealand

Generally, vote against the chair of the nomination committee or chair of the board (or other relevant directors on a case-by-case basis) if:

- The company is included in the S&P/NZX 50 Index, and the board does not comprise at least 30 percent female representation.
- For any other company, there are no women on the board.

Exceptional circumstances from this vote recommendation which may be considered on a case-by-case basis may include:

- The company complying with the standard in the preceding year, and publicly available disclosure by the company of a search being undertaken and a firm commitment to meet the gender diversity standard in the next year;
- Research & development or similar entities which may have smaller boards of three or four directors; or
- Other relevant factors.

UK & Ireland

Gender Diversity

For companies required to report against the FCA Listing Rules on a comply or explain basis, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may consider recommending against the chair of the nomination committee (or another relevant director) if the company has not met the disclosure requirements of the FCA Listing Rules in respect of board diversity, including reporting against the following targets:

- At least 40 percent of the board are women; and
- At least one of the senior board positions (Chair, CEO, Senior Independent Director, or CFO) is held by a woman.

Progress against the targets will be evaluated. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may consider recommending against the chair of the nomination committee (or another relevant director) in the absence of such progress, unaccompanied by a satisfactory rationale.

The market expects higher diversity standards from FTSE 350 companies, which have been subject to pre-existing diversity recommendations.

In respect of AIM-listed companies with a market capitalisation of over GBP 500 million, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may consider recommending against the chair of the nomination committee (or another relevant director) if there is not at least one woman on the board.

In the case of ISEQ 20 companies, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may consider a negative recommendation where less than 33% of the Board is composed of women.

In all cases, diversity is considered in a holistic manner, taking account of the company's explanation. Mitigating factors include, but are not limited to, the company's previous record on board diversity and future commitments.

Ethnic Diversity

For companies required to report against the FCA Listing Rules on a comply or explain basis, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may consider recommending against the chair of the nomination committee (or another relevant director) if the company has not met the relevant disclosure requirements, including reporting against the target that at least one member of the board is from a minority ethnic background⁹.

Progress against the target will be evaluated. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may consider recommending against the chair of the nomination committee (or another relevant director) in the absence of such progress, unaccompanied by a satisfactory rationale.

The market expects higher diversity standards from FTSE 350 companies, which have been subject to pre-existing diversity recommendations.

⁹ Defined by reference to categories recommended by the [Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/ethnicity) (ONS) excluding those listed, by the ONS, as coming from a White ethnic background.

In respect of ISEQ 20 constituents and AIM-listed companies with a market capitalisation of over GBP 500 million, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will consider recommending against the chair of the nomination committee (or another relevant director) if such companies have not appointed at least one individual from an ethnic minority background to the board.

As with gender diversity, ethnic diversity is considered in a holistic manner, taking account of the Company's explanation. Mitigating factors include, but are not limited to, the company's previous record on board diversity and future commitments.

Israel

Generally vote against the chair of the nominating committee (or the chair of the committee designated with the responsibility of a nominating committee), or other directors on a case-by-case basis, if both genders are not represented on the board of directors.

Exceptions may apply in cases where the company has publicly disclosed a commitment to have both genders represented on the board within one year, or where other mitigating factors are present and deemed relevant.

Continental Europe

In Continental Europe, generally vote against the chair of the nomination committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) if:

- The underrepresented gender accounts for less than 30 percent (or any higher domestic threshold) of shareholder-elected directors of a widely held company.
- Both genders are not represented on the board of a non-widely-held company.

Mitigating factors may include:

- Compliance with the relevant standard at the preceding annual meeting and a firm commitment, publicly available, to comply with the relevant standard within a year; or
- Other relevant factors as applicable.

Malaysia

For Malaysia, generally vote against all members of the nomination committee up for reelection if the board has no woman director. For companies with market capitalization of below MYR 2 billion as at Dec. 31, 2021, this policy will be effective for meetings on or after June 1, 2023.

South Korea

For South Korean companies, generally vote against the chair of the nomination committee (or other senior members of the nomination committee on a case-by-case basis) up for election if the company is non-compliant with the board gender diversity regulation.

Japan

For Japanese companies with a statutory auditor structure: vote for the election of directors, except top executive(s) if the board, after the shareholder meeting, will not include at least one female director. For meetings on or after **Feb. 1, 2027**, vote against top executive(s) if at least 10 percent of board members, after the shareholder meeting, are not female directors.

Climate Accountability

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, through their operations or value chain¹⁰, generally vote against the board chair or the responsible incumbent director(s), or any other appropriate item(s), in cases where Taft-Hartley Advisory Services determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to understand, assess, and mitigate risks related to climate change to the company and the larger economy.

Minimum steps to understand and mitigate those risks are considered to be the following. Both minimum criteria will be required to be in compliance:

- Detailed disclosure of climate-related risks, such as according to the framework established by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), including:
 - Board governance measures;
 - Corporate strategy;
 - Risk management analyses; and
 - Metrics and targets.
- Appropriate GHG emissions reduction targets.

At this time, “appropriate GHG emissions reductions targets” will be medium-term GHG reduction targets or Net Zero-by-2050 GHG reduction targets for a company’s operations (Scope 1) and electricity use (Scope 2). Targets should cover the vast majority of the company’s direct emissions.

Contested Director Elections

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on contested elections of directors (e.g. the election of shareholder nominees or the dismissal of incumbent directors), considering the factors below in determining which directors are best suited to add value for shareholders:

- Company performance relative to its peers;
- Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents;
- Independence of directors/nominees;
- Experience and skills of board candidates and their ability to contribute positively to board deliberations and overall board performance;
- Governance profile of the company;
- Evidence of management entrenchment;
- Responsiveness to shareholders;
- Whether a takeover offer has been rebuffed; and
- Whether minority or majority representation is sought.

When analyzing a contested election of directors, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally focuses on two central questions: (1) Have the dissidents proved that board change is warranted? And (2) if so, are the dissident board nominees likely to affect positive change? (i.e., maximize long-term shareholder value).

Discussion

Once fairly infrequent, contested elections (also referred to as proxy contests) have become increasingly common in recent years as large shareholders, frustrated by poor returns and unresponsive boards, have sought to challenge the *status quo*. Even when dissidents do not achieve board seats, studies indicate that at least some of their objectives are often achieved because the

¹⁰ Companies defined as “significant GHG emitters” will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

response to a proxy contest, or one that was narrowly averted, usually includes new strategic initiatives, a restructuring program, governance changes, or selected management changes. Based on these considerations, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' framework for the evaluation of contested elections has the ultimate goal of increasing long-term value for shareholders.

Discharge of Board and Management

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote case-by-case on the discharge of the board and management.
- Vote against the discharge of directors, including members of the management board and/or supervisory board, if there is reliable information about significant and compelling controversies that the board is not fulfilling its fiduciary duties warranted by:
 - A lack of oversight or actions by board members which invoke shareholder distrust related to malfeasance or poor supervision, such as operating in private or company interest rather than in shareholder interest; or
 - Any legal issues (e.g. civil/criminal) aiming to hold the board responsible for breach of trust in the past or related to currently alleged actions yet to be confirmed (and not only the fiscal year in question), such as price fixing, insider trading, bribery, fraud, and other illegal actions; or
 - Other egregious governance issues where shareholders will bring legal action against the company or its directors.
- Vote against proposals to remove approval of discharge of board and management from the agenda.
- For markets which do not routinely request discharge resolutions (e.g. common law countries or markets where discharge is not mandatory), Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may express its concern with the board in other appropriate agenda items, such as approval of the annual accounts or other relevant resolutions to express discontent with the board.

Discussion

The annual formal discharge of board and management represents shareholder approval of actions taken during the year. Discharge is a tacit vote of confidence in the company's management and policies. It does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of future shareholder action, although it does make such action more difficult to pursue. A company's meeting agenda typically lists proposals to discharge both the board and management as one agenda item.

This is a routine item in many countries, and discharge is generally granted unless a shareholder states a specific reason for withholding discharge and plans to undertake legal action. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will withhold discharge when there are serious questions about actions of the board or management for the year in question or legal action is being taken against the board by other shareholders. Withholding discharge is a serious matter and is advisable only when a shareholder has concrete evidence of negligence or abuse on the part of the board or management, has plans to take legal action, or has knowledge of other shareholders' plans to take legal action.

If evidence suggests that one or more board or management members are responsible for problems such as fraud or grave mismanagement, shareholders can withhold discharge from these individuals and pursue further legal action. Poor performance that can be directly linked to flagrant error or neglect on the part of the board or management, or board actions that are detrimental to shareholders' interests, may also constitute grounds for voting against discharge.

If shareholders approve discharge of the board and management, they may face a greater challenge if they subsequently decide to pursue legal action against these parties. Shareholders would be required to prove that management or the board did not supply correct and complete information regarding the matter in question.

Director and Officer Liability and Indemnification, and Auditor Indemnification

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote on a case-by-case basis, proposals seeking indemnification and liability protection for directors and officers.
- Vote against proposals to indemnify auditors.

Discussion

Management proposals typically seek shareholder approval to adopt an amendment to the company's charter to eliminate or limit the personal liability of directors to the company and its shareholders for monetary damages for any breach of fiduciary duty to the fullest extent permitted by law. In contrast, shareholder proposals seek to provide for personal monetary liability for fiduciary breaches arising from gross negligence. While Taft-Hartley Advisory Services recognizes that a company may have a more difficult time attracting and retaining directors if they are subject to personal monetary liability, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes the great responsibility and authority of directors justifies holding them accountable for their actions. Each proposal addressing director liability will be evaluated consistent with this philosophy. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may support these proposals when the company persuasively argues that such action is necessary to attract and retain directors, but Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may often oppose management proposals and support shareholder proposals in light of our philosophy of promoting director accountability.

Specifically, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose management proposals that limit a director's liability for (i) a breach of the duty of loyalty, (ii) acts or omissions not in good faith or involving intentional misconduct or knowing violations of the law, (iii) acts involving the unlawful purchases or redemptions of stock, (iv) the payment of unlawful dividends, or (v) the receipt of improper personal benefits. In addition, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally oppose proposals to reduce or eliminate directors' personal liability when litigation is pending against current board members.

By indemnifying its directors and officers, a company promises to reimburse them for certain legal expenses, damages, and judgments incurred as a result of lawsuits relating to their corporate actions, thereby effectively becoming the insurer for its officers and directors (the company usually purchases insurance to cover its own risk). Proposals to indemnify a company's directors differ from those to eliminate or reduce their liability because with indemnification directors may still be liable for an act or omission, but the company will bear the expense.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote in favor of indemnification proposals that contain provisions limiting such insurance to acts carried out on behalf of the company. The directors covered under the indemnification must be acting in good faith on company business and must be found innocent of any civil or criminal charges for duties performed on behalf of the company. Additionally, the company may persuasively argue that such action is necessary to attract and retain directors, but Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose indemnification when it is proposed to insulate directors from actions they have already taken.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes providing indemnity insurance to auditors. These payments call into question the objectivity of the auditor in carrying out the audit, as the fees paid on its behalf could be greater than the audit fees alone. Eliminating concerns about being sued for carelessness could also lead to a decrease in the quality of the audit. Given the substantial settlements against auditors in recent years for poor audit practices, the cost of such insurance to the company and its shareholders is unwarranted.

Board Structure

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to fix board size.
- Vote against the introduction of classified boards and mandatory retirement ages for directors.

- Vote against proposals to alter board structure or size in the context of a fight for control of the company or the board.
- Vote against proposals to increase board terms.

Discussion

Resolutions relating to board structures range from fixing the number of directors or establishing a minimum or maximum number of directors to introducing classified boards and director term limits.

Board Size

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Proposals to fix board size are common and are routinely approved. Proposals to establish a range of board size are also frequent; a range of two or three open slots relative to the existing board size is reasonable, as it gives the company some flexibility to attract potentially valuable board members during the year. Latitude beyond this range is inappropriate, however, because companies can use this freedom to hinder unwanted influence from potential acquirers or large shareholders.

Adopt Classified Board

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers that all directors stand for reelection every year. All directors should be accountable to shareholders on an annual basis, as the ability to elect directors is the single most important use of the shareholder franchise.

While classified boards are the norm in most countries, some companies have chosen to place their directors up for annual election. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports initiatives to declassify boards and opposes proposals to classify previously unstaggered boards. Classifying the board makes it more difficult to effect a change of control through a proxy contest; because only a minority of the directors is elected each year, a dissident shareholder would be unable to win control of the board in a single election.

Introduction of Mandatory Age of Retirement

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that age should not be the sole factor in determining a director's value to a company. Rather, each director's performance should be evaluated on the basis of their individual contribution and experience.

Altering Board Size

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Companies may attempt to increase board size in order to add related or like-minded directors to the board. Conversely, establishing a minimum number of directors could make it easier to remove independent directors from the board. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services considers these proposals on a case-by-case basis.

All proposals to alter board size during a proxy fight or other possible contests for control should be opposed. Allowing directors to alter the terms of a contest while it is underway is not in shareholders' interests, as this tactic could be used to thwart a takeover that is in shareholders' interests.

3. Capital Structure

Companies have one of two main types of capital systems: authorized and conditional. Both systems provide companies with the means to finance business activities, but they are considerably different in structure. Which system is used by a company is determined by the economic and legal structure of the market in which it operates.

Authorized Capital System

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

The authorized capital system sets a limit in a company's articles on the total number of shares that can be issued by the company's board. The system allows companies to issue shares from this preapproved limit, although in many markets shareholder approval must be obtained prior to an issuance. Companies also request shareholder approval for increases in authorization when the number of shares contained in the articles is inadequate for issuance authorities. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services reviews proposals for such increases based on the following criteria: the history of issuance requests; the size of the request; the purpose of the issuance (general or specific) associated with the increase in authorization; and the status of preemptive rights.

Conditional Capital System

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Under the conditional capital system, companies seek authorizations for pools of capital with fixed periods of availability. For example, if a company seeks to establish a pool of capital for general issuance purposes, it requests the creation of a certain number of shares with or without preemptive rights, issuable piecemeal at the discretion of the board for a fixed period of time. Shares unissued after the fixed time period lapse. This type of authority would be used to carry out a general rights issue or small issuances without preemptive rights.

Requests for a specific issuance authority are tied to a specific transaction or purpose, such as an acquisition or the servicing of convertible securities. Such authorities cannot be used for any purpose other than that specified in the authorization. In this case, a company requests the creation of a certain number of shares with or without preemptive rights, issuable as needed for the specific purpose requested. This pool of conditional capital also carries a fixed expiration date.

In reviewing these proposals, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services takes into consideration the existence of pools of capital from previous years. Because most capital authorizations are for several years, new requests may be made on top of the existing pool of capital. While most requests contain a provision to eliminate earlier pools and replace them with the current request, this is not always the case. Thus, if existing pools of capital are left in place, the aggregate potential dilution amount from all capital requests should be considered.

Share Issuance Requests

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for general issuance requests with preemptive rights up to 50 percent of issued capital.
- For French companies, vote for general issuance requests with preemptive rights, or without preemptive rights but with a binding “priority right,” for a maximum of 50 percent over currently issued capital.
- Vote for general issuance requests without preemptive rights up to 10 percent of issue capital.
- Vote on a case-by-case basis specific issuance requests with or without preemptive rights up to any amount depending on the purpose for the issuance.
- Vote on a case-by-case basis those issuance requests that exceed one-year periods.

General Issuances

General issuance requests under both authorized and conditional capital systems allow companies to issue shares to raise funds for general financing purposes. Approval of such requests gives companies sufficient flexibility to carry out ordinary business activities without having to bear the expense of calling shareholder meetings for every issuance.

Issuances can be carried out with or without preemptive rights. Preemptive rights permit shareholders to share proportionately in any new issuances of stock. These rights guarantee existing shareholders the first opportunity to purchase shares of new issuances of stock in the class they own in an amount equal to the percentage of the class they already own. Corporate law in many countries recognizes preemptive rights and requires shareholder approval for the disapplication of such rights.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that the ability to increase share capital by 50 percent through a rights issue (with preemptive rights) provides the company with sufficient financing to meet most contingencies. Rights issues for general capital needs of less than 50 percent of outstanding capital warrant shareholder approval. Issuance authorities of more than 50 percent can lead to excessive cash calls on shareholders, requiring them to provide the funds necessary to maintain their relative positions in the company or to accept substantial dilution.

In some cases, companies may need the ability to raise funds for routine business contingencies without the expense of carrying out a rights issue. Such contingencies could include the servicing of option plans, small acquisitions, or payment for services. When companies make issuance requests without preemptive rights, shareholders suffer dilution as a result of such issuances. Therefore, authorizations should be limited to a fixed number of shares or a percentage of capital at the time of issuance. While conventions regarding this type of authority vary widely among countries, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services routinely approves issuance requests without preemptive rights for up to ten percent of a company's outstanding capital.

In certain markets, issuance requests are made for several years. This is often the case in France, Germany and Spain. In these situations, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will consider the per annum dilution equivalent as well as consider whether or not the authority can be renewed before the lapse of the specified period. Whenever possible, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will monitor actual share issuances to assure that the company is not abusing the privilege.

Following the Florange Act of 2016, for French companies listed on a regulated market, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally vote against any general authorities impacting the share capital (i.e. authorities for share repurchase plans and any general share issuances with or without preemptive rights) if they can be used for anti-takeover purposes without shareholders' prior explicit approval.

In UK and Ireland, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will support general issuance authority without preemptive rights of up to 10 percent of the issued share capital, provided that any amount in excess of the standard 5 percent is to be used only for purposes of an acquisition or a specified capital investment. A company which receives approval for an authority of this nature but is then subsequently viewed to abuse the authority during the year (for example, by issuing shares up to 10 percent for purposes other than set out in the revised guidelines) is likely to receive a negative recommendation on the authority at the following AGM.

Specific Issuances

Specific issuance requests should be judged on their individual merits. For example, a company may request the issuance of shares for an acquisition in the form of a rights issue to raise funds for a cash payment, or else a company could request an issuance without preemptive rights for use in a share-based acquisition or issuance to a third party. Such a request could be of any size, and Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally support the request as long as the proposal is sound. A more routine request would be an authority to issue shares without preemptive rights for issuance as needed upon conversion of convertible securities or to service a share option plan. These shares can only be used for the purpose defined in the resolution.

Increases in Authorized Capital

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for non-specific proposals to increase authorized capital up to 50 percent over the current authorization.
- In case the proposals to increase authorized capital include the authorization to issue shares according to the (pre-)approved limit without obtaining separate shareholder approval, the general issuance policy applies.
- Vote for specific proposals to increase authorized capital to any amount unless the specific purpose of the increase (such as a share-based acquisition or merger) does not meet Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' guidelines for the purpose proposed.
- Vote against proposals to adopt unlimited capital authorizations.

Discussion

Increases in authorized capital are requested both for general financing flexibility and to provide for a specific purpose. Companies need an adequate buffer of unissued capital in order to take advantage of opportunities during the year, and thus they often request increases in authorized capital for no specific purpose other than to retain this flexibility. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that approving such requests is reasonable.

An increase of 50 percent over the existing authorization gives the company sufficient flexibility in any given year but also limits the company's ability to abuse this privilege. If a company wishes to issue shares for any unforeseen reason during the year that would double (or possibly triple) outstanding share capital, an EGM to seek shareholder approval is justified.

Another important consideration is the status of preemptive rights. Not all countries recognize shareholders' preemptive rights, and excessive authorizations could lead to substantial dilution for existing shareholders. When preemptive rights are not guaranteed, companies do not need shareholder approval for share issuances as long as the issuance does not result in an increase above the authorized capital limit.

For specific requests, increases in capital up to any size may be justified if the purpose of the new authorization is in shareholders' interests. Such increases may be needed to fund a variety of corporate activities, and thus each proposal must be reviewed on its individual merits.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend against proposals seeking to increase authorized capital to an unlimited number of shares. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services does not believe that companies need unlimited financial flexibility to transact ordinary business because such an arrangement precludes management from periodically consulting shareholders for new capital. Unlimited authorizations may also be used as anti-takeover devices, and they have the potential for substantial voting and earnings dilution. As such, they are not in shareholders' best interests.

Reduction of Capital

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to reduce capital unless the terms are unfavorable to shareholders.
- Vote on a case-by-case basis proposals to reduce capital in connection with corporate restructurings.

Discussion

Proposals to reduce capital are usually the result of a significant corporate restructuring in the face of bankruptcy. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally supports such proposals because opposition could lead to insolvency, which is not in shareholders' interests. Evaluation of this type of proposal should take a realistic approach to the company's situation.

Capital Structures

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for resolutions that seek to maintain or convert to a one share, one vote capital structure.
- Vote against requests for the creation or continuation of dual class capital structures or the creation of new or additional super-voting shares.

Discussion

A key decision for any business is determining its capital structure. When timed correctly, sophisticated capital management—finding the right mix of equity, long-term debt, and short-term financing—can enhance shareholder returns. This process involves coordination of important issues, including dividend policy, tax and interest rates, types of assets, opportunities for growth, ability to finance new projects internally, and cost of obtaining additional capital.

These decisions are best left to a company's board and senior management, who should be given the latitude to determine the company's capital structure. However, shareholders should be aware that many financing decisions could have an adverse effect on shareholder returns. For example, additional equity financing may reduce an existing shareholder's ownership interest and can dilute the value of the investment. Some capital requests can be used as takeover defenses; in response to this situation, company laws establish limits on management's authority to issue new capital and often require shareholder approval for significant changes in management's existing authorizations.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports a one share, one vote policy and opposes mechanisms that skew voting rights. Shareholders' voting rights should accrue in accordance with their equity capital commitment to the company. Dual class capital structures entrench certain shareholders and management, insulating them from possible takeovers or other external influence or action. The interests of parties with voting control may not be the same as those of shareholders constituting a majority of the company's capital. Additionally, research and market experience have shown that companies with dual class capital structures or other anti-takeover mechanisms consistently trade at a discount to similar companies without such structures.

When companies with dual class capital structures seek shareholder approval for the creation of new shares, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes the creation of additional super-voting shares because this perpetuates the dual class structure. If companies are seeking to increase ordinary or subordinate share capital, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services reviews such requests on a case-by-case basis. If the shares are needed for a specific purpose, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will approve as long as the proposal meets the issuance guidelines for specific requests. Refusing such requests could cause an immediate loss of shareholder value by not allowing the company to carry out its ordinary business. However, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes general share creation requests on the grounds that they would perpetuate unequal voting structures. If shareholders routinely approve the creation of ordinary or subordinate voting shares, the company has no incentive to reform its capital structure. By not approving such requests, shareholders can send a signal of dissatisfaction to management.

Preferred Stock

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for the creation of a new class of preferred stock or for issuances of preferred stock up to 50 percent of issued capital unless the terms of the preferred stock would adversely affect the rights of existing shareholders.
- Vote for the creation/issuance of convertible preferred stock as long as the maximum number of common shares that could be issued upon conversion meets Taft-Hartley Advisory Services guidelines on equity issuance requests.
- Vote against the creation of blank check preferred stock unless the board expressly states that the authorization will not be used as a takeover defense.
- Vote proposals to increase blank check preferred authorizations on a case-by-case basis.
- Vote against the creation of a new class of preference shares that would carry superior voting rights to the common shares.

Discussion

Preferred stock (also known as preference shares) is an equity security, but it has certain features that liken it to debt instruments, such as fixed dividend payments, seniority of claims relative to regular common stock, and (in most cases) no voting rights except on matters that affect the seniority of preferred stock as a class. Preferred stock usually ranks senior to a company's ordinary shares with respect to dividends and the distribution of assets or winding down of the company. Companies often request approval for the creation of a new class of preferred stock, the issuance of preferred stock, and the introduction of blank check preferred stock authorization. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers that the terms of preferred stock be set out at the time of the issuance or authorization request.

Preferred stock can be an effective means of raising capital without increasing debt levels, especially if a company has recently concluded a series of acquisitions. In determining the acceptability of proposals relating to preferred stock, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services examines the rights and terms of the proposed shares, including their designation, conditions, restrictions, and limitations. Whether or not the preferred shares carry voting rights is also considered, along with their conversion ratio (if the shares are convertible into common shares). Also important is the company's justification for issuing or authorizing preferred stock. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports proposals that would not result in excessive dilution or adversely affect the rights of holders of common shares.

Blank Check Preferred Stock

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against the creation of blank check preferred stock unless the board clearly states that the authorization will not be used to thwart a takeover bid.

Companies may also seek shareholder approval for blank check preferred stock, which are blanket authorities to issue preferred stock under which the directors are allowed to set the size, terms, and recipient of such shares at the time of issuance. Blank check preferred stock can be used for legitimate corporate purposes such as raising capital or making acquisitions. By not establishing the terms of preferred stock at the time the class of stock is created, companies maintain the flexibility to tailor their preferred stock offerings to prevailing market conditions. However, blank check preferred stock can also be used as an entrenchment device. The ability to issue a block of preferred stock with multiple voting or conversion rights to a friendly investor is a powerful takeover defense.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also considers, on a case-by-case basis, proposals to increase authorizations of blank check preferred stock when shareholders have already approved the class of stock and the company has a history of issuing such stock for legitimate financing purposes. Theoretically, companies with authorized blank check preferred stock can use these shares for anti-takeover purposes as long as there are a few shares remaining, as they are free to set voting or conversion terms with each issue. Therefore, an increase in authorization may have little effect on the usage of this stock. In cases where a company has issued preferred stock from its authorization for legitimate financing purposes, there is no reason to object to an increase.

Debt Issuance Requests

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote non-convertible debt issuance requests with or without preemptive rights on a case-by-case basis.
- Vote against the creation or issuance of convertible debt with preemptive rights if the conversion increases the company's share capital by more than 50 percent over the current outstanding capital.
- Vote against the creation or issuance of convertible debt without preemptive rights if the conversion increases the company's share capital by more than 10 percent over the current outstanding capital.
- Vote for proposals to restructure existing debt arrangements unless the terms of the restructuring would adversely affect the rights of shareholders.

Discussion

Debt issuance is a popular financing strategy. Debt instruments are often issued with the right to convert into equity securities. Many companies issue debt denominated in currencies other than their own. Bonds may be issued with or without preemptive rights.

Companies routinely issue bonds directly to shareholders in order to raise funds while enjoying low borrowing costs. Convertible bonds give holders the choice of becoming shareholders, thereby increasing the shareholder base and liquidity of the company's stock, or selling their newly converted shares on the open market. The issuance of unsecured debt often includes warrants, which are detached at the time of bond issuance. Warrants are usually attached to a debt issuance in order to enhance the marketability of the accompanying fixed income security.

When evaluating a debt issuance request, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services examines the issuing company's present financial situation. The main factor for analysis is the company's current debt-to-equity ratio, or gearing level. A high gearing level may incline markets and financial analysts to downgrade the company's bond rating, increasing its investment risk factor in the process. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services routinely approves of debt issuances for companies when the gearing level is between zero and 50 percent. If the company's gearing level is higher than 50 percent, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services then factors in other financial statistics, such as the company's growth over the past five years relative to earnings or market capitalization, recent corporate events that might affect the company's bottom line (such as the acquisition of a major competitor or the release of a revolutionary product), and the normal debt levels in the company's industry and country of origin. In the case of convertible bonds, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also takes into consideration the total level of dilution that would result at the time of conversion. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' guidelines for capital increases would then be applied.

Pledging of Assets for Debt

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote proposals to approve the pledging of assets for debt on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion

In certain countries, shareholder approval is required when a company needs to secure a debt issuance with its assets. In many cases, this is a routine request and is a formality under the relevant law. When reviewing such proposals, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services takes into account the terms of the proposed debt issuance and the company's overall debt level. If both of these factors are acceptable, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will support these requests.

Increase in Borrowing Powers

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote proposals to approve increases in a company's borrowing powers on a case-by-case basis.
- Vote against the removal of a limit on borrowing powers.

Discussion

In some countries, companies are required to seek shareholder approval for increases in their aggregate borrowing power authorities. The aggregate limit on the board's ability to borrow money is often fixed in a company's articles, and shareholder approval to change this limit is therefore legally required. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that a company's financing needs are best determined by the board, and modest increases in borrowing powers are necessary to allow the company to take advantage of new acquisition opportunities or to complete development and restructuring projects. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' analysis of borrowing power increase requests takes into account management's stated need for the increase, the size of the increase, and the company's current gearing level. Large increases in borrowing powers can sometimes result in dangerously high debt-to-equity ratios that could harm shareholder value. If an increase is excessive without sufficient justification and if a company already has exceptionally high gearing compared to its industry, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose the request.

Share Repurchase Plans

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for share repurchase programs/market repurchase authorities, unless the terms do not meet the criteria below:

- A repurchase limit of up to 10 percent of issued share capital (15 percent in UK/Ireland)
- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- A duration of no more than 5 years, or such lower threshold as may be set by applicable law, regulation or code of governance best practice.

Authorities to repurchase shares in excess of the 10 percent repurchase limit will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may support such share repurchase authorities under special circumstances, which are required to be publicly disclosed by the company, provided that, on balance, the proposal is in shareholders' interests. In such cases, the authority should meet the following criteria:

- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- A duration of no more than 18 months.

In markets where it is normal practice not to provide a repurchase limit, the proposal will be evaluated based on the company's historical practice. However, companies should disclose such limits and, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may recommend against proposals at companies that fail to do so. In such cases, the authority should meet the following criteria:

- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- A duration of no more than 18 months.

In addition, vote against any proposal where:

- The repurchase can be used for takeover defenses;
- There is clear evidence of abuse;
- There is no safeguard against selective buybacks; or
- Pricing provisions and safeguards are deemed to be unreasonable in light of market practice.

Discussion

Proposals regarding share repurchase plans are routine in most countries, and such plans are usually sufficiently regulated by local laws or listing requirements to protect shareholder interests.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services looks for the following conditions in share repurchase plans: limitations on a company's ability to use the plan to repurchase shares from third parties at a premium; limitations on the exercise of the authority to thwart takeover threats; and a requirement that repurchases be made at arm's length through independent third parties and that selective repurchases require shareholder approval.

Some shareholders object to companies repurchasing shares, preferring to see extra cash invested in new businesses or paid out as dividends. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that when timed correctly, stock repurchases are a legitimate use of corporate funds and can add to long-term shareholder returns.

However, in certain instances, share buybacks are used to fund stock option plans. In these cases, cash is used to fund stock options plans, which in most cases are a form of management compensation. When possible, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will make efforts to learn whether share repurchase plans are being used to fund stock option plans. In these instances, extra scrutiny will be paid, and a repurchase plan may be opposed.

For markets that either generally do not specify the maximum duration of the authority or seek a duration beyond 18 months that is allowable under market specific legislation, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will assess the company's historic practice. If there is evidence that a company has sought shareholder approval for the authority to repurchase shares on an annual basis, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will support the proposed authority.

Reissuance of Shares Repurchased

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for requests to reissue any repurchased shares unless there is clear evidence of abuse of this authority in the past.

Discussion

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally believes that properly timed repurchases of company shares can enhance shareholder value and improve general shareholder returns. With good timing and proper safeguards, the same returns and improvements in shareholder value can be generated through the reissuance of the shares repurchased. In most countries, the text of this general mandate provides sufficient shareholder protection to make this item routine. When reviewing such proposals, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services takes into account the country's legal framework for such reissuances and the company's history of reissuing shares under the authority.

Capitalization of Reserves for Bonus Issues/Increase in Par Value

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for requests to capitalize reserves for bonus issues of shares or to increase par value.

Discussion

Companies routinely carry out bonus issues of shares or increases in par value to existing shareholders, usually through the capitalization of reserves from either the share premium reserve or the retained earnings account. Capitalization of these reserves—transferring them into the share capital account—usually requires shareholder approval. These issuances essentially function as dividends.

When companies increase par value or capitalize reserves and distribute new fully paid shares to shareholders free of charge through a bonus issue, there is no cost to shareholders to maintain their stakes and no risk of dilution. This procedure transfers wealth to shareholders and does not significantly impact share value. The only impact on shareholders is that by increasing the number of shares on issue, the company could increase liquidity, enhance marketability, and ultimately expand its shareholder base.

4. Mergers and Corporate Restructurings

Reorganizations/Restructurings

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote reorganizations and restructurings on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion

Requests to approve corporate reorganizations or restructurings range from the routine shuffling of subsidiaries within a group to major rescue programs for ailing companies. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services usually approves such resolutions unless there are clear conflicts of interest among the various parties, shareholders' rights are being negatively affected, or certain groups or shareholders appear to be getting a better deal at the expense of general shareholders.

In the case of routine reorganizations of assets or subsidiaries within a group, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' primary focus with the proposed changes is to ensure that shareholder value is being preserved. This includes the effect of the reorganization on the control of group assets, the final ownership structure, the relative voting power of existing shareholders if the share capital is adjusted, and the expected benefits arising from the changes.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also assesses the proposed restructuring and its impact on job loss with an emphasis on the company's U.S. operations. In certain circumstances, jobs may be lost due to economic inefficiencies. However, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will not support reorganizations that unnecessarily eradicate employment, harming the beneficiaries, communities, and the company's economic position.

In the case of a distress restructuring of a company or group, shareholders' options are far more limited; often, they have no choice but to approve the restructuring or lose everything. In such cases, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services first determines the company's degree of distress by determining whether or not the company still has a positive net asset value – that is, if realizable assets are greater than liabilities. Although rare, liquidation should be considered an option in these situations.

In most cases, however, the company has a negative asset value, meaning that shareholders would have nothing left after a liquidation. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services seeks to ensure that the degree of dilution proposed is consistent with the claims of outside parties and is commensurate with the relative commitments of other company stakeholders. Existing shareholders usually must accept the transfer of majority control over the company to outside secured creditors. Ultimately, ownership of a small percentage of something is worth more than majority ownership of nothing.

Mergers and Acquisitions

For every M&A analysis, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services reviews publicly available information as of the date of our analysis and evaluates the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction, balancing various and sometimes countervailing factors.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

- **Valuation:** Is the value to be received by the target shareholders (or paid by the acquirer) reasonable? While the fairness opinion may provide an initial starting point for assessing valuation reasonableness, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services places emphasis on the offer premium, market reaction, and strategic rationale;
- **Market reaction:** How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction will elicit greater scrutiny on a deal;
- **Strategic rationale:** Does the deal make sense strategically? From where is the value derived? Cost and revenue synergies should not be overly aggressive or optimistic, but reasonably achievable. Management should also have a favorable track record of successful integration of historical acquisitions;

- *Negotiations and process*: Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's-length? Was the process fair and equitable? A fair process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Significant negotiation "wins" can also signify the deal makers' competency. The comprehensiveness of the sales process (*e.g.*, ability for alternate bidders to participate) can also affect shareholder value.
- *Conflicts of interest*: Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders? Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will consider whether any special interests may have influenced these directors and officers to support or recommend the merger;
- *Governance*: Impact of the merger on shareholder rights. Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction? If the governance profile is to change for the worse, the burden is on the company to prove that other issues (such as valuation) outweigh any deterioration in governance;
- The possibility of a high degree of job loss with no reasonable explanation; and
- Any significant reduction in basic labor standards.

Vote against if the companies do not provide sufficient information upon request to make an informed voting decision.

Abstain if there is insufficient information available to make an informed voting decision.

Discussion

When evaluating the merits of a proposed acquisition, merger, or takeover offer, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services focuses on the financial and corporate governance impact on shareholder value, both in the immediate and long term. The primary concern is to determine whether or not the proposal is beneficial to shareholders' existing and future earnings stream and to ensure that the impact on voting rights is not disproportionate to that benefit. Generally, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services is interested in the long-term shareholder interests as opposed to short-term gains that devalue assets and could have a negative impact on workers and communities.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will evaluate proposed mergers by looking at the justification for the merger; whether a reasonable financial arrangement has been proposed and a fairness opinion rendered; and the long-term impact of the business plans of the competing parties. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will assess the impact of the proposed merger on the affected workforce and community. For example, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will assess the proposed merger's impact on job loss with an emphasis on the company's U.S. operations. In certain circumstances, jobs may be lost due to economic inefficiencies. However, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will not support mergers that unnecessarily eradicate employment, harming the beneficiaries, communities, and the company's economic position.

In the case of a cross-border merger, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services consider the proposed merger's effect on labor standards. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will not support mergers that diminish basic labor standards. The resulting entity should comply with applicable laws and principles protecting employees' wages, benefits, working conditions, freedom of association, and other rights.

In the case of an acquisition, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services examines the level of voting or earnings dilution and the logic of the proposed purchase if large share issuances are required. The method of financing is also important, as various methods can result in different valuations than originally perceived. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also checks for an independent valuation of the terms, particularly if the target of the acquisition is not a publicly traded entity or asset and precise market valuations are not readily available.

This is important when determining whether or not a specific premium is justified. Control premiums on acquisitions vary widely depending on the industry, the time period, and the country. During the late 1980s in the United States, control premiums of up to 70 percent in certain sectors were considered reasonable. Broad averages over time indicate that premiums in the range of 20 percent to 30 percent are normal, but this must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. For publicly traded entities or assets, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services looks at the price of the acquisition relative to the average market price prior to any announcement, as

well as the historical price trends for 60 days prior. For non-publicly traded entities or assets, an independent financial evaluation becomes even more important.

In the case of mergers, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services examines whether or not the merger makes commercial or strategic sense for the company. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also considers the method of effecting the merger and the ultimate impact on shareholders of the proposed financial and corporate governance structure. While historical relative valuations based on market prices are useful in the financial evaluation process, the often-complicated financial details of such proposals make an independent fairness opinion of extreme importance. The proposed board structure, share capital structure, and relative share ownership of the new company are all important factors for consideration in this evaluation process.

If the details of a given proposal are unclear or not available and a fairness opinion is also not available, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend to either abstain on or to vote against the proposal. Abstention would most likely be the result of a lack of information about the proposal. If a company is uncooperative in providing information about the proposal or is evasive when responding to questions, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend against it.

Reincorporation Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote reincorporation proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion

Reincorporation proposals are most commonly seen in Canada, where companies may register under one of the provincial business statutes. However, companies in other countries may also seek shareholder approval to reincorporate in a U.S. state or another country. Many companies, including U.S. companies, choose to reincorporate in places such as Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, or the British Virgin Islands for tax purposes. With more U.S.-listed companies seeking to move offshore, shareholders are beginning to understand the web of complexities surrounding the legal, tax, and governance implications involved in such a transaction.

When examining a reincorporation proposal, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services first examines the reasons for the move. Sometimes a reincorporation proposal is part of a restructuring effort or merger agreement that contributes significantly to a company's growth, financial health, and competitive position more than the anticipated negative consequences of incorporating in another province or country. Some reincorporations allow firms to realize lower taxes or incorporation fees. In addition, there may be advantages to incorporating in the province in which the company conducts the bulk of its business.

Companies often adopt a new charter or bylaws with increased protection for management upon reincorporation. For instance, many reincorporation proposals are bundled with the ratification of a new charter that increases the company's capital stock or imposes a classified board. When such changes to the charter include the addition of negative corporate governance provisions, the impact of these new provisions on shareholders must be balanced against the anticipated benefits of the reincorporation.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that reincorporations to countries, states, or provinces with less stringent disclosure requirements or corporate governance provisions are often management attempts to lessen accountability to shareholders. In such cases, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against the proposal. The expenses involved in a change of domicile relating to legal and administrative fees, plus the greater entrenchment such a reincorporation could provide management, would likely harm shareholders' interests. In cases where companies propose to move to a more protective province or country and supply reasonable financial reasons for doing so, the benefits of the reincorporation must be weighed against the costs of possible management entrenchment.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also considers the reincorporation's impact on the employment environment. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may not support reincorporations to new jurisdictions that diminish basic labor rights and standards.

While a firm's country of incorporation will remain the primary basis for evaluating companies, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally apply U.S. policies to the extent possible with respect to issuers that file DEF 14As, 10-K annual reports, and 10-Q quarterly reports, and are thus considered domestic issuers by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Corporations that have reincorporated outside the U.S. have found themselves subject to a combination of governance regulations and best practice standards that may not be entirely compatible with an evaluation framework based solely on country of incorporation.

Expansion of Business Activities

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for resolutions to expand business activities unless the new business takes the company into risky areas.

Discussion

Companies are usually required by law to include in their articles of association or memorandum of association specific business purposes in the form of an objects clause. Because most countries require shareholder approval before articles can be amended, any change to the company's objects clause requires shareholder approval. Countries often seek shareholder approval to amend the objects clause to expand business lines.

Expanding business lines is a decision usually best left to management, but there are some instances where Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes support for such changes. If a company has performed poorly for several years and seeks business expansion into a risky enterprise, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services would require further clarification from management regarding the purpose of the expansion. If the company does not provide a satisfactory business plan, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will not support the proposal. Furthermore, if the company does not adhere to basic labor principles or codes of conduct in the expansion of its business, then Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will not support the proposal. For example, the expansion must comply with applicable laws and regulations, provide legitimate policies regarding workplace health and safety, and recognize basic labor rights. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that these policies and practices affect long-term corporate performance and increase shareholder value.

Related Party Transactions

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote on a case-by-case basis, resolutions that seek shareholder approval on related party transactions considering factors including, but not limited to, the following:
 - The parties on either side of the transaction;
 - The nature of the asset to be transferred/service to be provided; the pricing of the transaction (and any associated professional valuation);
 - The views of independent directors (where provided);
 - The views of an independent financial adviser (where appointed);
 - Whether any entities party to the transaction (including advisers) is conflicted; and
 - The stated rationale for the transaction, including discussions of timing.
- If there is a transaction that is deemed problematic and that was not put to a shareholder vote, vote against the election of the director involved in the related-party transaction or the full board.
- Vote against related party transactions when details of a particular arrangement are not available.
- In Malaysia, vote against a related-party transaction mandate if:
 - A director who is classified by the company as independent has a vested interest¹⁰ in the business transaction, and

¹⁰ By virtue of being a partner, executive, or major shareholder of the related-party holding more than a 10 percent equity stake or being the direct recipient of the transaction. For the purpose of clarification, directors who are deemed interested by virtue of being a director at the transacting party or who hold immaterial interest in the transacting party will be exempted.

- The value of the transaction exceeds MYR 250,000¹¹.
- In addition, directors involved in related-party transactions in excess of MYR 250,000 will be classified as non-independent.
- In the case of Nigerian companies, vote for proposals relating to renewal of the general mandate for the company to enter into recurrent transactions with related parties necessary for its day-to-day operations in the absence of any concerns with the related party transactions concluded pursuant to this general mandate.

Discussion

Shareholders are often asked to approve commercial transactions between related parties. A transaction between a parent company and its subsidiary, or a company's dealings with entities that employ the company's directors, is usually classified as a related party transaction and is subject to company law or stock exchange listing requirements that mandate shareholder approval. Shareholder approval of these transactions is meant to protect shareholders against insider trading abuses.

In most cases, both the rationale and terms of such transactions are reasonable. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services looks for evidence of an evaluation of the transaction by an independent body, but this is not always available. Unless the agreement requests a strategic move outside the company's charter or contains unfavorable terms, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will support the proposal. However, in many countries, detailed information about related-party transactions is not available. In some cases, no information is available. When sufficient information is not available, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against the arrangement.

¹¹ Under Bursa Malaysia Listing Requirements, related-party transactions where the value of the transaction is less than MYR 250,000 are exempt from disclosure and approval requirements.

5. Compensation

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that seeking annual shareholder approval of a company's compensation policy is a positive corporate governance provision, and considers the following compensation best practices in evaluating shareholder votes on corporate compensation practices:

- Appropriate pay structure with emphasis on long-term shareholder value;
- Avoidance of arrangements that risk “pay for failure”;
- Independent and effective compensation committees;
- Provision of clear and comprehensive compensation disclosures to shareholders; and
- Avoidance of inappropriate pay to non-executive directors.

Executive Compensation

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking ratification of a company's compensation policy.

- Generally vote against a company's compensation-related proposal due to one or a combination of the following factors:
 - The proposed compensation policy/report was not made available to shareholders in a timely manner;
 - The level of disclosure of the proposed compensation policy is below what local market best practice standards dictate;
 - There is a significant misalignment between CEO pay and company performance (pay for performance);
 - Concerns exist with respect to the disclosure or structure of the bonus or other aspects of the remuneration policy such as pensions, severance terms, and discretionary payments;
 - Concerns exist surrounding the company's long-term incentive plan(s), including but not limited to, dilution, vesting period, and performance conditions;
 - Excessive severance arrangements/payments;
 - Overly generous perquisites and/or tax gross-ups, and/or other excessive arrangements;
 - Provision of stock option grants, or similarly structured equity-based compensation, to non-executive directors; or
 - Where boards have, otherwise, failed to demonstrate good stewardship of investors' interests regarding executive compensation practices.
- Should a company be deemed:
 - To have egregious remuneration practices;
 - To have failed to follow market practice by not submitting expected resolutions on executive compensation; or
 - To have failed to respond to significant shareholder dissent on remuneration-related proposals;

An adverse vote recommendation could be applied to any of the following on a case-by case basis:

- The election of the chair of the remuneration committee or, where relevant, any other members of the remuneration committee;
- The reelection of the board chair;
- The discharge of directors; or
- The annual report and accounts.

This recommendation could be made in addition to other adverse recommendations under existing remuneration proposals (if any).

Where relevant, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will take into account the European Pay for Performance (EP4P) model¹² outcomes within a qualitative review of a company's remuneration practices.

Non-Executive Director Compensation

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for proposals to award cash fees to non-executive directors unless:

- The board fees paid for the fiscal year under review are not disclosed in a timely manner;
- The proposed amounts are excessive relative to similarly sized companies in the same market/sector, with no justification provided by the company;
- There is significant concern regarding the company's past practices regarding directors' remuneration.

Vote on the proposal to award cash fees to non-executive directors on a case-by-case basis in cases where there is a significant increase in fees with limited or no justification.

Vote on non-executive director compensation proposals that include both cash and share-based components on a case-by-case basis.

Vote on proposals that bundle compensation for both non-executive and executive directors into a single resolution on a case-by-case basis.

Vote against proposals to introduce retirement benefits for non-executive directors.

Vote against non-executive director remuneration if documents (general meeting documents, annual report) provided prior to the general meeting do not mention fees paid to non-executive directors.

Vote against non-executive director remuneration if the company intends to excessively increase the fees in comparison with market/sector practices, without stating compelling reasons that justify the increase.

Vote against proposals that provide for the granting of stock options, performance-based equity compensation (including stock appreciation rights and performance-vesting restricted stock), and performance-based cash to non-executive directors.

Equity-Based Compensation Plans

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for equity-based compensation proposals or the like if the plan(s) is(are) in line with long-term shareholder interests and align the award with shareholder value. This assessment includes, but is not limited to, the following factors:

- The volume of awards (to be) transferred to participants under all outstanding plans must not be excessive: awards must not exceed 5 percent of a company's issued share capital. This number may be up to 10 percent for high-growth

¹² Definition of Pay-for-Performance Evaluation:

- Taft-Hartley Advisory Services annually conducts a pay-for-performance analysis to measure the alignment between pay and performance over a sustained period. With respect to companies in the European Main Indices, this analysis considers the following:
- Peer Group Alignment:
 - ✓ The degree of alignment between the company's annualized TSR rank and the CEO's annualized total pay rank within a peer group, each measured over a three-year period.
 - ✓ The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median.
- Absolute Alignment – the absolute alignment between the trend in CEO pay and company TSR over the prior five fiscal years – i.e., the difference between the trend in annual pay changes and the trend in annualized TSR during the period.

companies or particularly well-designed plans (e.g., with challenging performance criteria, extended vesting/performance period, etc.);

- The plan(s) must be sufficiently long-term in nature/structure: the vesting of awards (i) must occur no less than three years from the grant date, and (ii) if applicable, should be conditioned on meeting performance targets that are measured over a continuous period of at least three years;
- If applicable, performance conditions must be fully disclosed, measurable, quantifiable, and long-term oriented;
- The awards must be granted at market price. Discounts, if any, must be mitigated by performance criteria or other features that justify such discount.

Discussion

The global financial crisis has shown that poor remuneration systems can lead to the inefficient allocation of company resources and can incentivize behavior that is detrimental to long-term shareholder interests. More than ever, shareholders have become concerned with how companies compensate their executives. Scrutiny has been applied to ascertain whether executive pay is appropriate for a company's size, market, and industry, and whether remuneration structures sufficiently incentivize long-term share value growth and avoid "pay for failure". In response to this growing trend, many legislatures/regulators have taken steps to strengthen shareholders' role in the determination of remuneration practices by increasing companies' disclosure requirements with respect to compensation practices as well as by recommending (or requiring) that companies provide voting resolutions on remuneration practices at their annual shareholder meetings.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports plans that motivate participants to focus on maximizing long-term shareholder value and returns, encourage employee stock ownership, and more closely align employee interests with those of shareholders. However, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services recognizes that in many markets, the degree of information available to evaluate compensation proposals is usually limited in detail. For this reason, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services applies its compensation policies and methodology to the extent that market disclosure practices allow.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services reviews three main types of compensation plans: stock option plans, incentive plans, and share purchase plans. Also included in this section are grants outside of plans.

Stock Option Plans

Stock option plans grant participants an option to buy company shares at a set price (the exercise price). Shares are usually granted at market prices and may be exercised when the company's share price reaches the exercise price. Participants may then purchase the promised shares at the strike price and may later sell the shares after their purchase (or after a defined holding period when the shares may not be sold). Among the criteria that Taft-Hartley Advisory Services examines in evaluating stock option plans are the following, generally organized from criteria of greater importance to criteria of lesser importance:

Shares Reserved for Issuance of Options under the Plan

The maximum number of shares Taft-Hartley Advisory Services approves under a plan depends on the classification of a company's stage of development as growth or as mature. Growth companies are usually smaller, in new industries requiring significant research and development, and have restricted cash flows. A company in an established industry but expanding rapidly, or a mature company that is experiencing an extended period of rapid expansion, may also be classified as growth. Mature companies are characterized by stable sales and revenue growth, production efficiencies resulting from volume gains, and strong cash flow resulting from developed products in the payoff stage.

For mature companies, shares available under stock option plans should be no more than five percent of the issued capital at the time of approval under all plans. For growth companies, shares available should be no more than ten percent of the issued capital at the time of approval under all plans (and five percent under the proposed plan.) For all companies, an absolute number of shares fixed at the time of approval is ideal, but many countries do not include such a limit. In these cases, revolving limits (a certain percentage of issued shares at any one time) of five or ten percent are common. The practice of setting a percentage of

shares issuable over a certain number of years before or after the plan is adopted appears to be a compromise between these first two methods. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers plans where the limits are sufficiently spread out, e.g., five percent in five years, ten percent in ten years.

Exercise Price

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers that options be priced at 100 percent of the shares' fair market value on the date of grant. Usually this is taken as the closing price of the company's shares on the day prior to the date of grant. Some countries determine fair market value as an average of the trading price for the five days prior to the date of grant. This is a common and acceptable practice. Some emerging market countries use a 30-day average or longer to determine fair market value; these resolutions must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, although provisions of longer than 30 days increase the possibility of discounted options.

Exercise Price Discounts

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services strongly opposes grants of discounted options to both executive and nonexecutive directors. In the absence of vesting periods or performance criteria, discounted option grants to directors amount to a cash bonus at shareholder expense. Under such circumstances, option holders have an incentive to cash in their grants for an immediate return rather than hold on to their options for future gains. This undermines the incentive value underlining these plans. A few countries allow for options to be granted at a discount to market prices. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services approves of discounts up to 20 percent, but only for grants that are a part of a broad-based employee plan, including all nonexecutive employees.

Plan Administration

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes allowing the administering committee to grant options to itself due to the potential for "backscratching" abuse. Administration of plans should be in the hands of directors who are unable to participate in the plan. Plans administered by the full board should not allow voting by executive directors; plans administered by remuneration committees should be composed entirely of independent directors. Plans that allow nonexecutive directors to participate should not give them any discretion on individual grants; instead, an automatic system of grants should be introduced with fixed annual grants at market prices on a fixed date. Alternatively, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services approves of separate nonexecutive director option plans with independent administration.

Eligibility and Participation

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers separate plans for employees, directors, and nonexecutive directors, but most plans include all or some combination of these categories of participants. Other global plans distinguish between full-time and part-time employees or establish a set length of service to the company (usually one year) before options may be granted. Most plans allow the administering committee to select plan participants.

Performance Criteria and Vesting Provisions

Performance criteria and vesting provisions are important considerations when evaluating a compensation plan, and the existence of long vesting provisions and realistic performance criteria are highly preferred. The ultimate goal of share option plans is to tie executive and employee remuneration to company performance and to give key employees and executives incentive to stay with the firm. Generally in markets where disclosure is an issue, if a plan meets all other aspects of Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' guidelines, these two criteria are not mandatory. However, whenever greater disclosure is the market norm, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose plans that do not include sufficiently challenging performance criteria or carry a minimum three-year vesting period. This information is commonly provided in markets such as the United Kingdom, Canada, The Netherlands and Australia. Finally, any matching shares that are provided by companies should be subject to additional performance conditions.

Retesting of Performance Criteria

Remuneration plans should not allow for the retesting of performance criteria over another time period if these conditions were not met within the initial period. Retesting is destructive to the incentive value of such plans and undermines the worth of performance criteria. Whenever disclosure is sufficient enough to determine if retesting is allowed under a company's plan, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will take this feature into consideration for our overall evaluation of the plan.

Issue Terms

Some countries require optionees to pay a nominal fee (often equivalent to \$0.01) for every option received. This is common and acceptable, although many companies that once enforced this provision are now deleting it from the rules of their plans.

Option Repricing

Some plans include specific provisions allowing for the repricing of options at the board's discretion. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes plans that include option repricing when the exercise price is reduced in response to a dropping share price. Repricing outstanding options reduces the incentive that options provide to raise the share price for shareholders.

At Canadian TSX and TSXV firms, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally votes against proposals to reprice outstanding options. The following and any other adjustments that can be reasonably considered repricing will generally not be supported:

- reduction in exercise price or purchase price,
- extension of term for outstanding options,
- cancellation and reissuance of options,
- substitution of options with other awards.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services has long opposed option repricing. Market deterioration is not an acceptable reason for companies to reprice stock options.

Although not required by TSX rules, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that any proposal to reduce the price of outstanding options, including those held by non-insiders, should be approved by shareholders before being implemented (see discussion under Plan Amendment Provisions).

The extension of option terms is also unacceptable. Options are not meant to be a no-risk proposition and may lose their incentive value if the term can be extended when the share price dips below the exercise price. Shareholders approve option grants on the basis that recipients have a finite period during which to increase shareholder value, typically five to ten years. As a company would not shorten the term of an option to rein in compensation during, for example, a commodities bull market run, it is not expected to extend the term during a market downturn when shareholders suffer a decrease in share value.

Financial Assistance

Some plans offer participants loans to pay the full exercise price on their options. If loans are part of a company's option plan, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers that loans be made to employees as part of a broad-based, company-wide plan to encourage ownership rather than be given only to executive directors. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also prefers loans with interest set at market rates that must be paid back in full over a reasonable length of time. The absence of these features does not necessary warrant a vote against an option plan, but they are taken into consideration in Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' analysis of the plan.

Plans for International Employees

Many overseas companies introduce separate plans or delegate a special section of their option plan to deal with tax considerations raised by having a large number of employees working in other countries. Many of these plans contain provisions that deal directly with particular U.S. tax code provisions on stock options. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services applies the same criteria to these plans as to country-specific plans.

Stock Appreciation Rights

Stock appreciation rights (SARs) allow participants to receive the difference between the exercise price and the market price at the date of exercise. Many companies use SARs in lieu of regular options. While SARs do not result in the dilution associated with large option exercises, there is little difference between an SAR and a regular option from a shareholder perspective because the financial cost to the company is the same. However, SARs do not encourage stock ownership by participants because they involve no purchase or sale of company stock. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services reviews SARs in the context of the option plan under which they are issued.

Phantom Stock Option Plans

Phantom stock options offer participants cash bonuses based on the increase in share price during a set period of time. Phantom plans are distinct from SARs in that they often form their own separate plan. Some companies will create a phantom stock option plan to award employees who reside in countries that do not allow stock-based compensation. Participants are designated a set number of hypothetical (phantom) shares, on which the award is based. While Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers compensation plans that encourage employee ownership, SARs and phantom options are an effective way to provide incentive.

Super Options

Super options exceed the limits in a particular country for the value of options granted to any one individual, although they are usually tied to significantly more restrictive vesting provisions and performance criteria. U.K. super options, for example, exceed the Association of British Insurers' recommended limit that options represent no more than four times a participant's salary, yet the stricter performance criteria and longer vesting periods usually mitigate excessive grants. Additionally, dilution resulting from super options has historically been fairly moderate. Super options appear most often in advanced markets with developed stock option plans.

Restricted Stock

Restricted stock is specifically designated stock offered at a discount to executives, often under U.S. option plans but increasingly among overseas plans as well. Company shares may be granted outright to optionees with no payment required for the receipt of the shares. Such awards can be extremely expensive, as participants exercise awards at fixed prices far below the current market price. If restricted stock is included as part of a stock option plan, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services expects strict limits on the amount of shares that may be issued in this form.

Dividends under Option and Dividend Equivalent Payment Provisions

Most holders of stock options do not receive dividend payments. However, some option plans allow participants to receive dividends or dividend equivalent payments prior to the exercise of options. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that any economic benefit derived from option plans should occur at the time of exercise.

Incentive Plans

Share incentive plans tie key employees' compensation more directly to company performance. Though most popular in the United Kingdom, incentive plans are becoming increasingly popular across the globe. Incentive plans provide participants with free grants of company shares (or, less frequently, cash grants) in proportion with prearranged performance criteria—often earnings per share measured against inflation or total shareholder return. These indicators are frequently compared with those of other firms in the company's industry or stock market index, creating a benchmark and a further determinant of the number of shares granted to a particular participant. Proponents of incentive plans note that they offer shareholders the potential for less dilution and that they more directly encourage participants to focus on long-term company performance through strict performance criteria tied to more than just share price movements.

Most incentive plans are organized with strict vesting provisions, where participants may not receive the share awards until after a period of three years or more. Many plans also grant a percentage of the total amount reserved for each participant on a sliding scale measured against performance criteria. Performance criteria targets that have been satisfied only to a certain point may represent disbursement of 25 percent of the shares or cash to a participant, while 100-percent satisfaction may represent the full allotment of the grant. From a shareholder perspective, this graduated system of performance criteria is a major advance.

Evaluation of incentive plans is similar to that of option plans in that acceptable dilution and impartial administration and eligibility remain key factors for a positive recommendation. Insufficient performance criteria or abbreviated vesting provisions are deciding factors as well.

Share Purchase Plans

Share purchase plans allow participants to purchase shares in the company, often at a discount to market prices. These plans are often broad-based in nature, as they are usually open to all employees. Other plans operate via monthly deductions from employees' paychecks, gathered and held for safe keeping by a trust or a bank and used every month or year to purchase company stock.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will approve many of these plans because they encourage wide share ownership in the company among employees. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally approves broad-based, employee-directed share purchase plans with discounts up to 20 percent. Dilution, eligibility, and administration are the key factors in determining votes on purchase plans.

Eligibility

While eligibility under share purchase plans is evaluated similarly to stock option plans, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services affords more flexibility with the terms of broad-based employee purchase plans. The inclusion of permanent part-time employees and employees who have been with the company for less than one year are provisions of employee plans that are routinely approved.

Loan Terms

Some plans offer participants loans to pay for the shares. If loans are part of a share purchase plan, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers that loans be made to employees as part of a broad-based, company-wide plan to encourage ownership rather than being given only to executive directors. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also prefers loans with interest set at market rates that must be paid back in full over a reasonable length of time. The absence of these features does not necessarily warrant a vote against a share purchase plan, but they are taken into consideration in Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' analysis of the plan.

Grants Outside of Plans

Resolutions asking shareholders to approve specific grants of shares or cash outside of established plans are problematic. Some companies prefer not to adopt formal share plans, instead asking shareholders to approve yearly grants to specific employees. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services prefers that companies make such grants in the context of an established plan.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' primary concern with grants outside of plans is the level of dilution they afford. The number of shares issued as part of the grants, when combined with the number of shares reserved for the company's other share plans, must fall within acceptable dilution limits. Vesting provisions and performance criteria are also important and are evaluated on the same basis as if the grants were part of a formal plan.

6. Anti-takeover Mechanisms

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against all anti-takeover proposals, unless they are structured in such a way that they give shareholders the ultimate decision on any proposal or offer.

Discussion

Common anti-takeover mechanisms include staggered boards, super-voting shares, poison pills, unlimited authorized capital authorizations (including blank check preferred stock), and golden shares. Some of these restrictions are aimed solely at limiting share ownership by foreign or unwanted minority shareholders, and others are designed to preclude an unwanted takeover of the target company by any party. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes all forms of such mechanisms, as they limit shareholder value by eliminating the takeover or control premium for the company. As owners of the company, shareholders should be given the opportunity to decide on the merits of takeover offers.

Renew Partial Takeover Provision (Australia)

Australian law allows companies to introduce into their articles a provision to protect shareholders from partial takeover offers, to be renewed by shareholders every three years. If a partial takeover of the company is announced, directors are required to convene a shareholder meeting at least 15 days before the closing of the offer to seek approval of the offer. If shareholders reject the resolution, the offer is considered withdrawn under company law and the company can refuse to register the shares tendered to the offer. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services approves of consulting shareholders on takeover offers, and this article provides protection for minority shareholders by giving them ultimate decision-making authority based on their own interests, not the interests of directors or outside parties. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports the adoption of this proposal in almost all cases.

Golden Shares

Recently privatized companies across the world often include in their share structure a golden share held by their respective governments. These shares often carry special voting rights or the power of automatic veto over specific proposals. Golden shares are most common among former state-owned companies or politically sensitive industries such as utilities, railways, and airlines. While the introduction of golden shares is not a desirable governance practice, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services recognizes the political importance certain companies hold for governments and treats the introduction or amendment of government shares on a case-by-case basis.

Poison Pills (Canada, Japan)

Otherwise known as shareholder rights plans, poison pills are seen primarily in the Canadian and Japanese markets. Companies generally state that they seek to adopt or renew pills in order to protect shareholders against unfair, abusive, or coercive takeover strategies and to give the target company's board time to pursue alternatives to a hostile takeover bid. Theoretically, the board will refuse to redeem the pill in the face of an unfair offer in order to force a bidder to negotiate for a better offer, at which point it will redeem the pill.

In accomplishing these goals, however, many rights plans place too much of the decision-making powers in the hands of the board and management and out of the hands of shareholders. However, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services notes that many Canadian companies have adopted new shareholder rights plans that address the concerns of institutional investors, namely providing for three-year sunset provisions, allowing for partial bids to proceed despite board opposition, and curtailing the overall level of discretion afforded the board in interpreting the pills.

Nonetheless, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services guidelines generally do not support the adoption of poison pills on the grounds that they serve to entrench management. Improperly structured rights plans have been used by boards to ward off offers beneficial

to shareholders. Current owners should decide who will own the company, with advice and negotiation from the board and management. When considering the merits of a poison pill, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also examines what other anti-takeover devices the company has and the company's treatment of shareholders in past situations.

Poison pills often have a sunset provision, which requires shareholder confirmation of the plan. Most pills have either a three-year or a five-year sunset provision, requiring that shareholders confirm the continuation of the plan three or five years from the date of adoption. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services guidelines support a three-year sunset provision, which affords shareholders the ability to reconsider the plan in light of changing market conditions and to review management's use of the plan. Canadian pills also typically include a permitted bid clause, under which the takeover bid must be made on equal terms to all holders of the company's voting shares; the company must extend the expiration of the bid, usually by 45 or 60 days following the date of the bid. Management sets the terms of the permitted bid clause, and therefore it influences the level of protection that will be provided to shareholders.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services determines whether the permitted bid feature offers shareholders adequate powers relative to the board in the event of a bid not being approved by the board. Allowing shareholders the right to override the board as a means of balancing power is crucial, but the specifics of the permitted bid clause are usually insufficient. Under the clause, a shareholder who is not intent on a complete acquisition but merely wishes to purchase a significant stake in the company may trigger the pill. This gives the board power to deny shareholders the benefit of a large semi-controlling shareholder and precludes partial bids that may be in shareholders' interests. In addition to the sunset provision and the structure of the permitted bid clause, in order to qualify for approval, a shareholder rights plan must satisfy ALL of the following conditions:

- Permitted bid clause structure: a permitted bid clause must allow for partial bids supported by a majority of shareholders to proceed despite board opposition; bid periods should generally not be greater than 60 days; the clause should not contain a "toehold provision" that would prevent any person who already controls a specified percentage of shares from making a permitted bid;
- Amendments: the ability of the board to amend key terms of the plan without shareholder approval following initial adoption of the plan must be limited to clerical and typographical changes and changes required to maintain the validity of the rights plan;
- Exchange option: a plan must not contain a provision that would enable the board to issue in exchange for the right, with or without further charge, debt or equity securities, other assets of the company, or any combination thereof;
- Definition of Fair Market Value: the board must not have the discretion to interpret the fair market value of the company's shares if the board determines that the value was adversely affected by the news of an anticipated or actual bid or by other means of manipulation;
- Affiliates and Associates: the board's discretion to decide which parties are acting in concert to determine the level of beneficial ownership, which could be used to trigger the pill should be limited and well-defined in the text of the plan;
- Mandatory Waiver: if the board waives the triggering of the pill with respect to one bidder, the board must be required to waive the pill in favor of any subsequent bids, preventing the board from favoring one bid over another regardless of shareholder interests.

Since 2006, the vast majority of Japanese poison pills have been so called "advance warning-type" ("advance notice-type") defense plans. In these cases, the board announces in advance a set of disclosure requirements it expects any bidder to comply with, as well as a waiting period between the submission of this information and the launch of the bid. As long as the bidder complies with these rules, the company "in principle" will take no action to block the bid but will allow shareholders to decide.

The exceptions are where the bid is judged to be clearly detrimental to shareholders, such as in situations defined by a Japanese court or in a report of the government's Corporate Value Study Group. These include greenmail, asset stripping and coercive two-tier offers. Usually, such judgments are made by a "special committee" or "independent committee," but the committee's decision is usually subject to being overruled by the board. At some companies the decisions are made by the board with no committee input at all. Advance warning-type defenses do not require shareholder approval, although in most cases companies are choosing to put them to a shareholder vote, as it is believed that doing so will put the company in a stronger position in the event of a lawsuit.

Where a company implements an advance warning-type defense without a shareholder vote, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will similarly examine the details of the plan, and where Taft-Hartley Advisory Services deems it to be detrimental to shareholder value, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will consider a vote against the company's representative director(s).

Depository Receipts and Priority Shares (The Netherlands)

Depository receipts are an especially common anti-takeover defense among large Dutch companies. In the event of a hostile takeover bid, ordinary voting shares are first issued to a company-friendly trust or foundation. The trust or foundation in turn issues depository receipts, similar to banks in the United States issuing ADRs except that the foundation retains the voting rights of the issued security. The depository receipts carry only the financial rights attached to the shares (i.e., dividends). In this manner, the company gains access to capital while retaining control over voting rights. Nonvoting preference shares can be issued to trusts or foundations in a similar fashion.

Priority shares, established in a company's articles, may be awarded with certain powers of control over the rest of the company. In practice, priority shares are held by members of the supervisory board, company-friendly trusts or foundations, or other friendly parties. Depending on the articles, priority shareholders may determine the size of the management or supervisory boards or may propose amendments to articles and the dissolution of the company. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against the introduction of depository receipts and priority shares.

7. Shareholder Rights and Defenses

Exclusive Forum Proposals (Canada)

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to adopt an exclusive forum by-law or to amend by-laws to add an exclusive forum provision, taking the following into consideration:

- Jurisdiction of incorporation;
- Board rationale for adopting exclusive forum;
- Legal actions subject to the exclusive forum provision;
- Evidence of past harm as a result of shareholder legal action against the company originating outside of the jurisdiction of incorporation;
- Company corporate governance provisions and shareholder rights; and
- Any other problematic provisions that raise concerns regarding shareholder rights.

Discussion

Exclusive forum by-laws, which have been adopted widely in the US market, are still relatively new to the Canadian market, although an increasing number of companies continue to adopt these provisions as by-laws which require shareholder approval. There is merit to the notion that judges based in a corporation's jurisdiction of incorporation are best suited to apply that jurisdiction's law to those companies. As well, given a corporation's typically strong presence in that province or jurisdiction, an exclusive forum provision may help to reduce the likelihood of high legal costs accrued through litigation outside of the jurisdiction of incorporation.

It can be argued, however, that there is often more than one proper forum available to shareholder plaintiffs, and this proposal would curtail the right of shareholders to select any proper forum of their choosing. The proposed exclusive forum jurisdiction and the details of the extent and types of legal actions that would be subject to the exclusive forum by-law provide critical information to shareholders whose rights may be impacted. This information together with the board of directors' rationale in adopting an exclusive forum by-law will be key considerations in evaluating the acceptability of such a proposal. As well, the absence of a compelling company-specific history with regard to out-of-province/jurisdiction shareholder litigation is important in light of the limitation on shareholder litigation rights that this provision represents. More generally, a company's track record vis-à-vis corporate governance and shareholder rights should be examined to identify any other concerns when considering the acceptability of an exclusive forum by-law.

This policy codifies the policy approach currently applied as it is expected that more companies will adopt exclusive forum by-laws, providing more transparency and a rationale.

8. Shareholder Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote all shareholder proposals on a case-by-case basis.
- Vote for proposals that would improve the company's corporate governance or business profile at a reasonable cost.
- Vote against proposals that limit the company's business activities or capabilities or result in significant costs being incurred with little or no benefit.

Discussion

Unlike in the United States where shareholders proposals are quite common, they are less common overseas. One market where proposals sponsored by shareholders are more common is the German market. There are two types of such proposals – shareholder proposals and counterproposals. Counterproposals are filed in direct opposition to proposals put forward by management at a given shareholder meeting. Many shareholders and counterproposals in Germany focus on environmental and labor issues. The number of shareholder proposals is also on the rise in Canada, although the aggregate annual number still pales in comparison to the U.S. In general shareholder proposals seen at global companies cover a wide variety of issues, including fundamental corporate governance topics, social issues, direct action proposals, as well as many unique proposals.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' position on the issues covered in many of these proposals has already been discussed. Generally, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will evaluate shareholder proposals to determine whether they are in the best economic interests of the participants and beneficiaries we represent. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' clients choose the companies in which they invest and, ultimately, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' responsibility is to protect their economic interests. This does not mean, though, that Taft-Hartley Advisory Services must take a short-term approach when evaluating these proposals. Rather, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will issue recommendations in a manner consistent with the long-term economic best interests of the participants and beneficiaries.

In general, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports proposals that request the company to furnish information helpful to shareholders in evaluating the company's operations. In order to intelligently monitor their investments, shareholders often need information best provided by the company in which they have invested. Requests to report such information merit support. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will evaluate proposals seeking the company to cease taking certain actions that proponents believe are harmful to society or some segment of society with special attention to the company's legal and ethical obligations, its ability to remain profitable, and potential negative publicity if the company fails to honor the request.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services reviews all shareholder proposals to ascertain whether the proposals are beneficial or detrimental to shareholder value. Most resolutions fall into three basic categories: corporate governance, social, and environmental. While shareholder proposals in most countries are not as prevalent as they are in the United States, they are becoming more common, and standards for reviewing the various types of proposals are necessary.

Corporate Governance Proposals

Corporate governance-related proposals must be evaluated carefully because any changes can dramatically affect shareholder value. Support for such proposals must be measured against the likely impact that approval would have on the company's operations. If a measure would improve disclosure of company activities in nonstrategic areas and at minimal costs, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services would generally support the proposal. If a proposal seeks to improve the company's corporate governance structure, such as adopting board committees, eliminating staggered board structures, or canceling anti-takeover instruments, approval is also warranted. However, if acceptance of a proposal is likely to lead to a disruption in board or management operations and to cause the company to incur significant costs without clear benefit, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose the proposal.

Social and Environmental Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: In determining votes on shareholder social and environmental proposals, the following factors are considered:

- Whether the proposal itself is well framed and reasonable;
- Whether adoption of the proposal would have either a positive or negative impact on the company's short-term or long-term share value;
- Whether the company's analysis and voting recommendation to shareholders is persuasive;
- The degree to which the company's stated position on the issues could affect its reputation or sales, or leave it vulnerable to boycott or selective purchasing;
- Whether the subject of the proposal is best left to the discretion of the board;
- Whether the issues presented in the proposal are being appropriately or effectively dealt with through legislation, regulation, or company-specific action;
- The company's relevant practices compared with its peers or any industry standard practices for addressing the issue(s) raised by the proposal;
- Whether the company has already responded in an appropriate or sufficient manner to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental or social practices;
- If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether sufficient information is publicly available to shareholders and whether it would be unduly burdensome for the company to compile and avail the requested information to shareholders in a more comprehensive or amalgamated fashion;
- Whether implementation of the proposal would achieve the objectives sought in the proposal; and
- Whether the proposal addresses substantive matters that may impact shareholders' interests, including how the proposal may impact shareholders' rights.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally supports social and environmental shareholder proposals if they either contribute to the long-term interests of plan participants and beneficiaries or will have no adverse impact on plan participants and beneficiaries.

Global codes of conduct for social, human, and economic standards are an important component in the stability of world economic conditions and in protecting the current lifestyle of plan beneficiaries and participants. Without agreement on international codes, some companies could pursue a race to the bottom strategy that could ultimately undermine environmental and economic conditions.

Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan¹³, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions in line with Paris Agreement goals (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
- Whether the company has sought and received third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
- Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
- Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
- Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
- Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
- Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and
- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report providing its GHG emissions levels and reduction targets and/or its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan, taking into account information such as the following:

- The completeness and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Report on Environmental Policies

These resolutions request the company to disclose its environmental practices. For example, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally support proposals calling for a report on hazardous waste policies and adopting the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) disclosure standards.

¹³ Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

Adoption of Ceres Roadmap to 2030

These resolutions call for the adoption of principles that encourage the company to protect the environment and the safety and health of its employees. Many companies have voluntarily adopted these principles.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals calling for the adoption of Ceres Roadmap 2030 as they often improve the company's public image, reduce exposure to liabilities, and establish standards so that environmentally responsible companies and markets are not at a competitive financial disadvantage.

Adoption of "MacBride Principles"

These resolutions call for the adoption of the MacBride Principles for operations located in Northern Ireland. They request companies operating abroad to support the equal employment opportunity policies that apply in facilities they operate domestically. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally support such proposals.

Contract Supplier Standards

These resolutions call for compliance with governmental mandates and corporate policies regarding nondiscrimination, affirmative action, workplace safety and health and other basic labor protections. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally support proposals that:

- Seek publication of a "Code of Conduct" by the company's foreign suppliers and licensees, requiring they satisfy all applicable standards and laws protecting employees' wages, benefits, working conditions, freedom of association, and other rights;
- Request a report summarizing the company's current practices for enforcement of its Code of Conduct;
- Establish independent monitoring programs in conjunction with local and respected religious and human rights groups to monitor supplier and licensee compliance with the Code of Conduct;
- Create incentives to encourage suppliers to raise standards rather than terminate contracts;
- Implement policies for ongoing wage adjustments, ensuring adequate purchasing power and a sustainable living wage for employees of foreign suppliers and licensees;
- Request public disclosure of contract supplier reviews on a regular basis.

Corporate Conduct and Human Rights

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally support proposals that call for the adoption and/or enforcement of principles or codes relating to countries in which there are systematic violations of human rights; such as the use of slave, child, or prison labor; a government that is illegitimate; or there is a call by human rights advocates, pro-democracy organizations, or legitimately-elected representatives for economic sanctions.

9. Other Items

Charitable Donations

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote proposals seeking the approval of donations on a case-by-case basis, considering factors including, but not limited to, the following:

- Size of the proposed donation request;
- The destination of the proposed allocation of funds; and
- The company's historical donations practices, including allocations approved at prior shareholder meetings.

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UNITED STATES

TAFT-HARTLEY PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES

2026 Policy Recommendations

Effective for Meetings on or after February 1, 2026

Published December 26, 2025

*Effective for Shareholder Meeting Reports Published on or after February 25, 2025,
Consideration of Certain Diversity Factors in Making Vote Recommendations Is Suspended
(for more information, see p. 8)*

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Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Proxy Voting Policy Statement and Guidelines

This statement sets forth the proxy voting policy of ISS' Taft-Hartley Advisory Services. The Taft-Hartley Proxy Voting Guidelines are designed for investors who take a worker-owner view of long-term corporate value. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has stated that the fiduciary act of managing plan assets that are shares of corporate stock includes the voting of proxies appurtenant to those shares of stock and that trustees may delegate this duty to an investment manager. ERISA section 3(38) defines an investment manager as any fiduciary who is registered as an investment adviser under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940.

ISS is a registered investment adviser under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will make voting recommendations for the proxies of its clients under these guidelines solely considering the guidelines and the interests of plan participants and beneficiaries and for the exclusive purpose of providing benefits to them. The interests of participants and beneficiaries will not be subordinated to unrelated objectives. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services shall act with the care, skill, prudence, and diligence under the circumstances then prevailing that a prudent person acting in a like capacity and familiar with such matters would use in the conduct of an enterprise of a like character and with like aims. ISS' Taft-Hartley Guidelines takes as one frame of reference the AFL-CIO Proxy Voting Guidelines. ISS regularly solicits feedback on the Taft-Hartley Guidelines from its subscribers and revises the guidelines as events warrant in order to remain in conformity with its subscribers' view of responsible corporate governance practices.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services shall analyze each proxy on a case-by-case basis and make its voting recommendations informed by the guidelines set out below. These guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive.

1. Director Elections

Electing directors is the single most important stock ownership right that shareholders can exercise. By electing directors who share their views, shareholders can help to define performance standards against which management can be held accountable. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services holds directors to a high standard when voting on their election, qualifications, and compensation. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services evaluates directors fairly and objectively, rewarding them for significant contributions and holding them ultimately accountable to shareholders for corporate performance. Institutional investors should use their voting rights in uncontested elections to influence financial performance and corporate strategies for achieving long term shareholder value.

Director accountability, independence and competence have become issues of prime importance to investors given the failings in oversight exposed by the global financial crisis. There is also concern over the environment in the boardrooms of certain markets, where past failures appear to be no impediment to continued or new appointments at major companies and may not be part of the evaluation process at companies in considering whether an individual is, or continues to be, fit for the role and best able to serve shareholders' interests.

Voting on Director Nominees in Uncontested Elections

Votes concerning the entire board of directors and members of key board committees are examined using the following factors:

Board Independence: Without independence from management, the board and/or its committees may be unwilling or unable to effectively set company strategy and scrutinize performance or executive compensation.

Board Competence: Companies should seek a diverse board of directors who can add value to the board through specific skills or expertise and who can devote sufficient time and commitment to serve effectively. While directors should not be constrained by arbitrary limits such as age or term limits, directors who are unable to attend board and committee meetings and/or who are overextended (i.e. serving on too many boards) raise concern about the director's ability to effectively serve in shareholders' best interests.

Board Accountability: Practices that promote accountability include: transparency into a company's governance practices, annual board elections, and providing shareholders the ability to remove problematic directors and to vote on takeover defenses or other charter/bylaw amendments. These practices help reduce the opportunity for management entrenchment.

Board Responsiveness: Directors should be responsive to shareholders, particularly in regard to shareholder proposals that receive a majority vote or management proposals that receive low shareholder support, and to tender offers where a majority of shares are tendered. Boards should also be sufficiently responsive to high withhold/against votes on directors. Furthermore, shareholders should expect directors to devote sufficient time and resources to oversight of the company.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Votes on individual director nominees are always made on a case-by-case basis. Specific director nominee withhold/against¹ votes can be triggered by one or more of the following factors:

¹ In general, companies with a plurality vote standard use "Withhold" as the valid contrary vote option in director elections; companies with a majority vote standard use "Against". However, it will vary by company and the proxy must be checked to determine the valid contrary vote option for the particular company.

Board Independence

- Lack of a board that is at least two-thirds (67 percent) independent – i.e. where the composition of non-independent board members is in excess of 33 percent of the entire board;
- Lack of an independent board chair;
- Lack of independence on key board committees (i.e. audit, compensation, and nominating committees); or
- Failure to establish any key board committees (i.e. audit, compensation, or nominating committees).

Board Competence

- Directors serving on an excessive number of other boards which could compromise their primary duties of care and loyalty; or
- Attendance of director nominees at board and committee meetings of less than 75 percent in one year without valid reason or explanation.

In cases of chronic poor attendance without reasonable justification, in addition to voting against the director(s) with poor attendance, generally vote against or withhold from appropriate members of the nominating/governance committees or the full board.

Gender Diversity

NOTE: For shareholder meeting reports published on or after February 25th, 2025, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) has indefinitely halted the consideration of the gender diversity of a company's board when making vote recommendations with respect to the election or re-election of directors at U.S. companies covered by these guidelines under its proprietary ISS U.S. Taft-Hartley Specialty policy.

Generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) at companies where there are no women on the company's board. An exception will be made if there was at least one woman on the board at the preceding annual meeting and the board makes a firm commitment to return to a gender-diverse status within a year.

Racial and/or Ethnic Diversity

NOTE: For shareholder meeting reports published on or after February 25th, 2025, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) has indefinitely halted the consideration of the racial and/or ethnic diversity of a company's board when making vote recommendations with respect to the election or re-election of directors at U.S. companies covered by these guidelines under its proprietary ISS U.S. Taft-Hartley Specialty policy.

For companies in the Russell 3000 or S&P 1500 indices, generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) where the board has no apparent racially or ethnically diverse members². An exception will be made if there was racial and/or ethnic diversity on the board at the preceding annual meeting and the board makes a firm commitment to appoint at least one racial and/or ethnic diverse member within a year.

² Aggregate diversity statistics provided by the board will only be considered if specific to racial and/or ethnic diversity.

Board Accountability

Generally vote for director nominees, except under the following circumstances (with new nominees³ considered on a case-by-case basis):

Problematic Takeover Defenses

- The board lacks accountability and oversight due to the presence of problematic governance provisions, coupled with long-term poor corporate performance relative to peers;
- If the company has a classified board and a continuing director is responsible for a problematic governance issue at the board/committee level that would warrant a withhold/against vote, in addition to potential future withhold/against votes on that director, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may recommend votes against or withhold votes from any or all of the nominees up for election, with the exception of new nominees³; or
- The company has opted into, or failed to opt out of, state laws requiring a classified board structure.

Restriction of Binding Shareholder Proposals

Vote against or withhold from members of the governance committee if:

- The company's governing documents impose undue restrictions on shareholders' ability to amend the bylaws. Such restrictions include but are not limited to: outright prohibition on the submission of binding shareholder proposals, or share ownership requirements, subject matter restrictions, or time holding requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8. Vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis.

Submission of management proposals to approve or ratify requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8 for the submission of binding bylaw amendments will generally be viewed as an insufficient restoration of shareholders' rights. Continue to vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis until shareholders are provided with an unfettered ability to amend the bylaws or a proposal providing for such unfettered right is submitted for shareholder approval.

Problematic Compensation Practices

In the absence of an Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say on Pay) ballot item or in egregious situations, vote against or withhold from the members of the compensation committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is an unmitigated misalignment between CEO pay and company performance (see [Pay-for-Performance](#) policy);
- The company maintains [problematic pay practices](#) including [options backdating](#), excessive perks and overly generous employment contracts etc.;
- There is evidence that management/board members are using company stock in hedging activities;
- The company fails to include a Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions, or under the company's declared frequency of say on pay; or
- The company fails to include a Frequency of Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions.

Generally vote against members of the board committee responsible for approving/setting non-employee director compensation if there is a pattern (i.e. two or more consecutive or non-consecutive years/across multiple years) of awarding excessive or otherwise problematic⁴ non-employee director compensation without disclosing a compelling rationale or other mitigating factors.

³ A "new nominee" is a director who is being presented for election by shareholders for the first time. Recommendations on new nominees who have served for less than one year are made on a case-by-case basis depending on the timing of their appointment and the problematic governance issue in question.

⁴ May include performance awards, retirement benefits, or problematic perquisites.

Adverse recommendations may be warranted in the first year for director pay issues that are considered egregious.⁴

Problematic Audit-Related Practices

Performance of audit committee members concerning the approval of excessive non-audit fees, material weaknesses, and/or the lack of auditor ratification upon the proxy ballot;

Vote against or withhold votes from the members of the audit committee when:

- Consulting (i.e. non-audit) fees paid to the auditor are excessive;
- Auditor ratification is not included on the proxy ballot;
- The company receives an adverse opinion on the company's financial statements from its auditor;
- There is evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm; or
- Poor accounting practices such as: fraud; misapplication of GAAP; and material weaknesses identified in Section 404 disclosures, exist. Poor accounting practices may warrant voting against or withholding votes from the full board.

Problematic Pledging of Company Stock

Vote against the members of the committee that oversees risks related to pledging and any directors involved in significant pledging activity or the full board where a significant level of pledged company stock by executives or directors raises concerns. The following factors will be considered:

- The presence of an anti-pledging policy, disclosed in the proxy statement, that prohibits future pledging activity;
- The magnitude of aggregate pledged shares in terms of total common shares outstanding, market value, and trading volume;
- Disclosure of progress or lack thereof in reducing the magnitude of aggregate pledged shares over time;
- Disclosure in the proxy statement that shares subject to stock ownership and holding requirements do not include pledged company stock; and
- Any other relevant factors.

Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments and Problematic Capital Structures

Generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees³, who should be considered case-by-case) if the board amends the company's bylaws or charter without shareholder approval in a manner that materially diminishes shareholders' rights or that could adversely impact shareholders, considering the following factors:

- The board's rationale for adopting the bylaw/charter amendment without shareholder ratification;
- Disclosure by the company of any significant engagement with shareholders regarding the amendment;
- The level of impairment of shareholders' rights caused by the board's unilateral amendment to the bylaws/charter;
- The board's track record with regard to unilateral board action on bylaw/charter amendments or other entrenchment provisions;
- The company's ownership structure;
- The company's existing governance provisions;
- The timing of the board's amendment to the bylaws/charter in connection with a significant business development; and
- Other factors, as deemed appropriate, that may be relevant to determine the impact of the amendment on shareholders.

Unless the adverse amendment is reversed or submitted to a binding shareholder vote, in subsequent years vote case-by-case on director nominees. Generally vote against directors (except new nominees³, who should be considered case-by-case) if the board:

- Classified the board;
- Adopted supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- Eliminated shareholders' ability to amend bylaws;
- Adopted a fee-shifting provision; or
- Adopted another provision deemed egregious.

Problematic Governance Structure – Newly public companies

For companies that hold or held their first annual meeting⁵ of public shareholders after Feb. 1, 2015, generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees³, who should be considered case-by-case) if, prior to or in connection with the company's public offering, the company or its board adopted the following bylaw or charter provisions that are considered to be materially adverse to shareholder rights:

- Supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- A classified board structure; or
- Other egregious provisions.

A provision which specifies that the problematic structure(s) will be sunset within seven years of the date of going public will be considered a mitigating factor.

Unless the adverse provision is reversed or removed, vote case-by-case on director nominees in subsequent years.

Unequal Voting Rights

Generally vote withhold or against directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees³, who should be considered case-by-case), if the company employs a multi-class capital structure with unequal voting rights⁶.

Exceptions to this policy will generally be limited to:

- Newly-public companies⁵ with a sunset provision of no more than seven years from the date of going public;
- Limited Partnerships and the Operating Partnership (OP) unit structure of REITs;
- Convertible preferred shares that vote on an “as-converted” basis;
- Situations where the enhanced voting rights are limited in duration and applicability, such as where they are intended to overcome low voting turnout and ensure approval of a specific non-controversial agenda item and “mirrored voting” applies;
- Situations where the super-voting shares represent less than 5% of total voting power and therefore considered to be *de minimis*; or
- The company provides sufficient protections for minority shareholders, such as allowing minority shareholders a regular binding vote on whether the capital structure should be maintained.

Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions

⁵ Newly-public companies generally include companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

⁶ This generally includes classes of common or preferred stock that have more votes per share than other shares; classes of shares that are not entitled to vote on all the same ballot items or nominees; or stock with time-phased voting rights (“loyalty shares”). Preferred shares that have voting rights only with respect to items that affect the rights of their holders as a class are not generally considered a problematic capital structure.

Vote against or withhold from directors individually, governance committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees³, who should be considered case-by-case), where boards ask shareholders to ratify existing charter or bylaw provisions considering the following factors:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

Governance Failures

Under extraordinary circumstances, vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board, due to:

- The presence of problematic governance practices including interlocking directorships, multiple related-party transactions, excessive risk-taking, imprudent use of corporate assets, etc.;
- Inadequate CEO succession planning, including the absence of an emergency and non-emergency/orderly CEO succession plan;
- Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight⁷, or fiduciary responsibilities at the company, failure to replace management as appropriate, flagrant or egregious actions related to the director(s)' service on other boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company; or
- Chapter 7 bankruptcy, Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) violations or fines, and criminal investigations by the Department of Justice (DOJ), Government Accounting Office (GAO) or any other federal agency.

Climate Accountability

For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, through their operations or value chain⁸, generally vote against or withhold from the incumbent chair of the responsible committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) in cases where Taft-Hartley Advisory Services determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to understand, assess, and mitigate risks related to climate change to the company and the larger economy.

Minimum steps to understand and mitigate those risks are considered to be the following. Both minimum criteria will be required to be in alignment with the policy:

- Detailed disclosure of climate-related risks, such as according to the framework established by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), including:
 - Board governance measures;
 - Corporate strategy;
 - Risk management analyses; and
 - Metrics and targets.
- Appropriate GHG emissions reduction targets.

⁷ Examples of failure of risk oversight include but are not limited to: bribery; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies; demonstrably poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant adverse legal judgments or settlements; or hedging of company stock.

⁸ Companies defined as "significant GHG emitters" will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

At this time, “appropriate GHG emissions reductions targets” will be medium-term GHG reduction targets or Net Zero-by-2050 GHG reduction targets for a company’s operations (Scope 1) and electricity use (Scope 2). Targets should cover the vast majority of the company’s direct emissions.

Board Responsiveness

Vote against or withhold from individual directors, committee members, or the entire board of directors as appropriate if:

- At the previous board election, any director received more than 50 percent withhold/against votes of the shares cast and the company has failed to address the underlying issue(s) that caused the high withhold/against votes;
- The board failed to act on takeover offers where the majority of the shareholders tendered their shares; or
- The board failed to act on a shareholder proposal that received approval by a majority of the shares cast the previous year or failed to act on a management proposal seeking to ratify an existing charter/bylaw provision that received opposition of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year.

Vote case-by-case on compensation committee members (or, potentially, the full board) and/or the say-on-pay proposal when the company’s previous say-on-pay proposal received support of less than 70 percent of votes cast. Factors that will be considered in assessing board responsiveness include:

- Disclosure of engagement efforts with major institutional investors regarding the issues that contributed to the low level of support (including the timing and frequency of engagements and whether independent directors participated);
- Disclosure of the specific concerns voiced by dissenting shareholders that led to the say-on-pay opposition; and
- Disclosure of specific and meaningful actions taken to address shareholders’ concerns.

If the company discloses meaningful engagement efforts, but in addition states that it was unable to obtain specific feedback, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will assess company actions taken in response to the say-on-pay vote as well as the company’s explanation as to why such actions are beneficial for shareholders.

Additional factors that may be considered include:

- Whether the issues raised are recurring or isolated;
- The company’s ownership structure;
- Significant corporate activity, such as a recent merger or proxy contest; and
- Any other compensation action or factor considered relevant to assessing board responsiveness.

If the support level was less than 50 percent of votes cast, this would warrant the highest degree of responsiveness, as assessed under the factors noted above.

Vote case-by-case on Compensation Committee members (or, potentially, the full board) if the board implements an advisory vote on executive compensation on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received the plurality of votes cast.

Discussion

Independence

Board independence from management is of vital importance to a company and its shareholders. Accordingly, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes votes should be cast in a manner that will encourage the independence of boards. Independence will be evaluated based upon a number of factors, including: employment by the company or an affiliate in an executive capacity; tenure on the board, past or current employment by a firm that is one of the company's paid advisors or consultants; a personal services contract with the company; family relationships of an executive or director of the company; interlocks with other companies on which the company's chair or chief executive officer is also a board member; and service with a non-profit organization that receives significant contributions from the company.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote against or withhold votes from non-independent director nominees (executive directors and non-independent, non-executive directors) where the entire board is not at least two-thirds (67 percent) independent.
- Generally vote against or withhold votes from non-independent director nominees when the nominating, compensation and audit committees are not fully independent.
- Generally consider directors who have been on the board continually for a period longer than 10 years as non-independent, non-executive directors.
- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting that all key board committees (i.e. audit, compensation and/or nominating) include independent directors exclusively.
- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting that the board be comprised of a two-thirds majority of independent directors.

Non-Independent Chair

Two major components at the top of every public company are the running of the board and the executive responsibility for the running of the company's business. Many institutional investors believe there should be a clear division of responsibilities at the head of the company that will ensure a balance of power and authority, such that no one individual has unfettered powers of decision. When there is no clear division between the executive and board branches of a company, poor executive and/or board actions often go unchecked to the ultimate detriment of shareholders. Since executive compensation is so heavily correlated to the managerial power relationship in the boardroom, the separation of the CEO and chair positions is a critical step in curtailing excessive pay, which ultimately can become a drain on shareholder value.

Arguments have been made that a smaller company and its shareholders can benefit from the full-time attention of a joint chair and CEO. This may be so in select cases, and indeed, using a case-by-case review of circumstances there may be worthy exceptions. But, even in these cases, it is the general view of many institutions that a person should only serve in the position of joint CEO and chair on a temporary basis, and that these positions should be separated following their provisional combination.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services strongly believes that the potential for conflicts of interest in the board's supervisory and oversight duties trumps any possible corollary benefits that could ensue from a dual CEO/chair scenario. Instead of having an ingrained quid pro quo situation whereby a company has a single leader overseeing both management and the boardroom, Taft-Hartley fiduciaries believe that it is the board's implicit duty to assume an impartial and objective role in overseeing the executive team's overall performance. Shareholder interests are placed in jeopardy if the CEO of a company is required to report to a board that she/he also chairs.

Inherent in the chair's job description is the duty to assess the CEO's performance. This objectivity is obviously compromised when a chair is in charge of evaluating her/his own performance or has a past or present affiliation with management. Moreover, the unification of chair and CEO poses a direct threat to the smooth functioning of

the entire board process since it is the ultimate responsibility of the chair to set the agenda, facilitate discussion, and make sure that directors are given complete access to information in order to make informed decisions.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote against or withhold votes from any non-independent director who serves as board chair.
- Generally vote against or withhold votes from a CEO who is also serving in the role of chair at the same company.
- Generally support shareholder proposals calling for the separation of the CEO and chair positions.
- Generally support shareholder proposals calling for a non-executive director to serve as chair who is not a former CEO or senior-level executive of the company.

Competence

Excessive Directorships

As new regulations mandate that directors be more engaged and vigilant in protecting shareholder interests or else risk civil and/or criminal sanctions, board members have to devote more time and effort to their oversight duties. Recent surveys of U.S. directors confirm a desire for limiting board memberships, to between three and five seats. In view of the increased demands placed on corporate board members, Taft-Hartley fiduciaries believe that directors who are overextended may be impairing their ability to serve as effective representatives of shareholders. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against or withhold from directors serving on an excessive number of other boards, which could compromise their primary duties of care and loyalty.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote against or withhold votes from directors serving on an excessive number of boards. As a general rule, vote against or withhold from director nominees who are:

- CEOs of publicly-traded companies who serve on more than one public board besides their own. NOTE: Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote against or withhold from overboarded CEO directors only at their outside directorships⁹ and not at the company in which they presently serve as CEO; or
- Non-CEO directors who serve on more than four public company boards.

Accountability

Director Performance Evaluation

Many institutional investors believe long-term financial performance and the appropriateness of governance practices should be taken into consideration when determining vote recommendations with regard to directors in uncontested elections. When evaluating whether to vote against or withhold votes from director nominees, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will evaluate underperforming companies that exhibit sustained poor performance as measured by total returns to shareholders over a one-, three-, and five-year period.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services views deficient oversight mechanisms and the lack of board accountability to shareholders especially in the context of sustained poor performance, as problematic. As part of the framework for assessing director performance, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will also evaluate board accountability and oversight at companies that demonstrate sustained underperformance. A governance structure that discourages director accountability may lead to board and management entrenchment. For example, the existence of several anti-takeover provisions* has the cumulative effect of deterring legitimate tender offers, mergers, and corporate

⁹ Although all of a CEO's subsidiary boards with publicly-traded common stock will be counted as separate boards, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will not recommend a withhold/against vote for the CEO of a parent company board or any of the controlled (>50 percent ownership) subsidiaries of that parent, but will do so at subsidiaries that are less than 50 percent controlled and boards outside the parent/subsidiary relationships.

transactions that may have ultimately proved beneficial to shareholders. When a company maintains entrenchment devices, shareholders of poorly performing companies are left with few effective routes to beneficial change.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will assess the company's response to the ongoing performance issues, and consider recent board and management changes, board independence, overall governance practices, and other factors that may have an impact on shareholders. If a company exhibits sustained poor performance coupled with a lack of board accountability and oversight, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' evaluation may also consider the company's operational metrics and other factors as warranted.

*Problematic provisions include but are not limited to:

- A classified board structure;
- A supermajority vote requirement;
- Either a plurality vote standard in uncontested director elections or a majority vote standard with no plurality carve-out for contested elections;
- The inability for shareholders to call special meetings;
- The inability for shareholders to act by written consent;
- A multi-class structure; and/or
- A non-shareholder approved poison pill.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against or withhold votes from all director nominees if the board lacks accountability and oversight, coupled with sustained poor performance relative to peers. Sustained poor performance is measured by one-, three-, and five-year total shareholder returns in the bottom half of a company's four-digit GICS industry group (Russell 3000 companies only). Sustained poor performance for companies outside the Russell 3000 universe is defined as underperforming peers or index on the basis of one-, three-, and five-year total shareholder returns.

Classified Boards ~ Annual Elections

The ability to elect directors is the single most important use of the shareholder franchise, and all directors should be accountable on an annual basis. Annually elected boards provide the best governance system for accountability to shareholders. A classified board is a board that is divided into separate classes, with directors serving overlapping terms. A company with a classified board usually divides the board into three classes. Under this system, only one class of nominees comes up to shareholder vote at the AGM each year.

As a consequence of these staggered terms, shareholders only have the opportunity to vote on a single director approximately once every three years. A classified board makes it difficult to change control of the board through a proxy contest since it would normally take two years to gain control of a majority of board seats. Under a classified board, the possibility of management entrenchment greatly increases. Classified boards can reduce director accountability by shielding directors, at least for a certain period of time, from the consequences of their actions. Continuing directors who are responsible for a problematic governance issue at the board/committee level would avoid shareholders' reactions to their actions because they would not be up for election in that year. Ultimately, in these cases, the full board should be responsible for the actions of its directors.

Many in management believe that staggered boards provide continuity. Some shareholders believe that in certain cases a staggered board can provide consistency and continuity in regard to decision-making and commitment that may be important to the long-term financial future of the company. Nevertheless, empirical evidence strongly suggests that staggered boards are generally not in the shareholders' best interest. In addition to shielding directors from being held accountable by shareholders on an annual basis, a classified board can entrench management and effectively preclude most takeover bids or proxy contests.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against management or shareholder proposals seeking to classify the board when the issue comes up for vote.
- Vote for management or shareholder proposals to repeal a company's classified board structure.
- If the company has a classified board and a continuing director is responsible for a problematic governance issue at the board/committee level that would warrant a withhold/against vote, in addition to potential future withhold/against votes on that director, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may vote against or withhold votes from any or all of the nominees up for election, with the exception of new nominees³.

Shareholder Rights Plan (i.e. Poison Pills)

Institutional investors view shareholder rights plans, or poison pills, as among the most onerous of takeover defenses that may serve to entrench management and have a detrimental impact on their long-term share value. While recognizing that boards have a fiduciary duty to use all available means to protect shareholders' interests, as a best governance principle, boards should seek shareholder ratification of a poison pill (or an amendment thereof) within a reasonable period, to ensure that the features of the poison pill support the interests of shareholders and do not merely serve as a management entrenchment device. Boards that fail to do so should be held accountable for ultimately disregarding shareholders' interests. In applying this principle to voting in uncontested director elections, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services considers the term of the pill an important factor, as shorter-term pills are generally less onerous as a takeover defense when compared to longer term pills, and may in some cases provide the board with a valuable tool to maximize shareholder value in the event of an opportunistic offer.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Generally vote against or withhold votes from all nominees (except new nominees³, who should be considered on a case-by-case basis) if:

- The company has a poison pill (with a term of over one year) that was not approved by public shareholders¹⁰;
- The board makes a material adverse change to an existing pill, including, but not limited to, extension, renewal, or lowering the trigger, without shareholder approval; or
- The company has a poison pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature¹¹.

Vote case-by-case on nominees if the board adopts an initial short-term pill¹¹ (with a term of one year or less) without shareholder approval, taking into consideration:

- The trigger threshold and other terms of the pill;
- The disclosed rationale for the adoption;
- The context in which the pill was adopted (e.g., factors such as the company's size and stage of development, sudden changes in its market capitalization, and extraordinary industry-wide or macroeconomic events);
- A commitment to put any renewal to a shareholder vote;
- The company's overall track record on corporate governance and responsiveness to shareholders; and
- Other factors as relevant.

¹⁰ Approval prior to, or in connection, with a company's becoming publicly-traded, or in connection with a de-SPAC transaction, is insufficient.

¹¹ If a short-term pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature is enacted but expires before the next shareholder vote, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally still recommend withhold/against nominees at the next shareholder meeting following its adoption.

Responsiveness

Failure to Act on Shareholder Proposals Receiving Majority Support

Majority-supported proposals represent a request for action (usually the removal of an anti-takeover mechanism) by shareholder proponents. Because they are non-binding or precatory in nature, boards may easily disregard them, forcing proponents to either repeat their submissions, take alternative actions, or withdraw their offer altogether.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote against or withhold from all director nominees at a company that has ignored a shareholder proposal that was approved by a majority of the votes cast at the last annual meeting.

Other Board-Related Proposals

Director Diversity

Gender and ethnic diversity are important components on a company's board. Diversity brings different perspectives to a board that in turn leads to a more varied approach to board issues. Taft-Hartley fiduciaries generally believe that increasing diversity in the boardroom would better reflect a company's workforce, customers, and community and enhance shareholder value.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Support proposals asking the board to make greater efforts to search for qualified female and minority candidates for nomination to the board of directors.
- Support endorsement of a policy of board inclusiveness.
- Support reporting to shareholders on a company's efforts to increase diversity on their boards.

Stock Ownership Requirements

Corporate directors should own some amount of stock of the companies on which they serve as board members. Stock ownership is a simple method to align the interests of directors with company shareholders. Nevertheless, many highly qualified individuals such as academics and clergy who can offer valuable perspectives in boardrooms may be unable to purchase individual shares of stock. In such a circumstance, the preferred solution is to look at the board nominees individually and take stock ownership into consideration when voting on the merits of each candidate.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against shareholder proposals requiring directors to own a minimum amount of company stock in order to qualify as a director nominee or to remain on the board.

Board and Committee Size

While there is no hard and fast rule among institutional investors as to what may be an optimal board size, there is an acceptable range that companies should strive to meet and not exceed. A board that is too large may function inefficiently. Conversely, a board that is too small may allow the CEO to exert disproportionate influence or may stretch the time requirements of individual directors too thin.

Proposals seeking to set board size will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Given that the preponderance of boards in the U.S. range between five and fifteen directors, many institutional investors believe this benchmark is a useful standard for evaluating such proposals.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote against any proposal seeking to amend the company's board size to fewer than five seats.
- Generally vote against any proposal seeking to amend the company's board size to more than fifteen seats;
- Evaluate board size on a case-by-case basis and consider withhold or against votes or other action at companies that have fewer than five directors and more than 15 directors on their board.

Limit Term of Office

Those who support term limits argue that this requirement would bring new ideas and approaches on to a board. While term of office limitations can rid the board of non-performing directors over time, it can also unfairly force experienced and effective directors off the board. When evaluating shareholder proposals on director term limits, consider whether the company's performance has been poor and whether problematic or entrenching governance provisions are in place at the company. Additionally, consider board independence, including whether the board chair is independent.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote against shareholder proposals to limit the tenure of outside directors.

Cumulative Voting

Most corporations provide that shareholders are entitled to cast one vote for each share owned. Under a cumulative voting scheme, the shareholder is permitted to have one vote per share for each director to be elected. Shareholders are permitted to apportion those votes in any manner they wish among the director candidates. Thus, under a cumulative voting scheme, shareholders have the opportunity to elect a minority representative to a board by cumulating their votes, thereby ensuring minority representation for all sizes of shareholders.

For example, if there is a company with a ten-member board and 500 shares outstanding-the total number of votes that may be cast is 5,000. In this case a shareholder with 51 shares (10.2 percent of the outstanding shares) would be guaranteed one board seat because all votes may be cast for one candidate. Without cumulative voting, anyone controlling 51 percent of shares would control the election of all ten directors.

With the advent and prevalence of majority voting for director elections, shareholders now have greater flexibility in supporting candidates for a company's board of directors. Cumulative voting and majority voting are two different voting mechanisms designed to achieve two different outcomes. While cumulative voting promotes the interests of minority shareholders by allowing them to get some representation on the board, majority voting promotes a democratic election of directors for all shareholders and ensures board accountability in uncontested elections. Though different in philosophic view, cumulative voting and majority voting can work together operationally, with companies electing to use majority voting for uncontested elections and cumulative voting for contested elections to increase accountability and ensure minority representation on the board.

In contested elections, similar to cumulative voting, proxy access allows shareholder access to the ballot without a veto from the nominating committee, but unlike cumulative voting, it also requires majority support to elect such directors.

At controlled companies, where majority insider control would preclude minority shareholders from having any representation on the board, cumulative voting would allow such representation and shareholder proposals for cumulative voting would be supported.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote against proposals to eliminate cumulative voting;
- Generally vote for proposals to restore or provide for cumulative voting unless:

- The company has proxy access thereby allowing shareholders to nominate directors to the company's ballot; and
- The company has adopted a majority vote standard, with a carve-out for plurality voting in situations where there are more nominees than seats, and a director resignation policy to address failed elections.
- Vote for proposals for cumulative voting at controlled companies (where insider voting power exceeds 50%).

Majority Threshold Voting Requirement for Director Elections

Shareholders have expressed strong support for precatory resolutions on majority threshold voting since 2005, with a number of proposals receiving majority support from shareholders. Taft-Hartley fiduciaries believe shareholders should have a greater voice in regard to the election of directors and view majority threshold voting as a viable alternative to the current deficiencies of the plurality system in the U.S.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally support reasonably crafted shareholders proposals calling for directors to be elected with an affirmative majority of votes cast and/or the elimination of the plurality standard for electing directors (including binding resolutions requesting that the board amend the company's bylaws), provided the proposal includes a carve-out for a plurality voting standard when there are more director nominees than board seats (e.g. in contested elections).
- Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may recommend a vote against or withhold votes from members of the board at companies without the carve-out for plurality voting in contested elections, as the use of a majority vote standard can act as an anti-takeover defense in contested elections. (e.g. although the dissident nominees may have received more shares cast, as long as the combination of withhold/against votes and the votes for the management nominees keep the dissident nominees under 50%, the management nominees will win, due to the holdover rules). This clearly contradicts the expressed will of shareholders.
- In addition to supporting proposals seeking a majority vote standard in director elections, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also support a post-election "director resignation policy" that addresses the situation of holdover directors to accommodate both shareholder proposals and the need for stability and continuity of the board.

Proxy Access

The current director election process as it exists leaves much to be desired. Companies currently nominate for election only one candidate for each board seat. Shareholders who oppose a candidate have no easy way to do so unless they are willing to undertake the considerable expense of running an independent candidate for the board. The only way for shareholders to register dissent about a certain director candidate is to vote against or "withhold" support from that nominee. But because directors are still largely elected by a plurality (those nominees receiving the most votes win board seats) at a large proportion of firms in the U.S., nominees running unopposed are typically reelected despite shareholder opposition.

Many investors view proxy access as an important shareholder right, one that is complementary to other best-practice corporate governance features. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services is generally supportive of reasonably crafted shareholder proposals advocating for the ability of long-term shareholders to cost-effectively nominate director candidates that represent their interests on management's proxy card. Shareholder proposals that have the potential to result in abuse of the proxy access right by way of facilitating hostile takeovers will generally not be supported.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for management and shareholder proposals for proxy access with the following provisions:

- **Ownership threshold:** maximum requirement not more than three percent (3%) of the voting power;

- **Ownership duration:** maximum requirement not longer than three (3) years of continuous ownership for each member of the nominating group;
- **Aggregation:** minimal or no limits on the number of shareholders permitted to form a nominating group;
- **Cap:** cap on nominees of generally twenty-five percent (25%) of the board.

Review for reasonableness any other restrictions on the right of proxy access.

Generally vote against proposals that are more restrictive than these guidelines.

CEO Succession Planning

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for proposals seeking disclosure on a CEO succession planning policy.

Establish an Office of the Board

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholders proposals requesting that the board establish an *Office of the Board of Directors* in order to facilitate direct communication between shareholders and non-management directors, unless the company has effectively demonstrated via public disclosure that it already has an established structure in place.

Director and Officer Liability Protection and Exculpation

Management proposals typically seek shareholder approval to adopt an amendment to the company's charter to eliminate or limit the personal liability of directors to the company and its shareholders for monetary damages for any breach of fiduciary duty to the fullest extent permitted by state law. Charter amendments may also include limited liability wherein a person's financial liability is limited to a fixed sum, or personal financial assets are not at risk if the individual loses a lawsuit that results in financial award/damages to the plaintiff. In contrast, shareholder proposals seek to provide for personal monetary liability for fiduciary breaches arising from gross negligence.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services may support these proposals when the company persuasively argues that such action is necessary to attract and retain directors but will likely oppose management proposals and support shareholder proposals in order to promote greater accountability.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against proposals to limit or eliminate entirely director and officer liability in regard to: (i) breach of the director's fiduciary "duty of loyalty" and "duty of care" to shareholders; (ii) acts or omissions not made in "good faith" or involving intentional misconduct or knowledge of violations under the law; (iii) acts involving the unlawful purchases or redemptions of stock; (iv) payment of unlawful dividends; or (v) use of the position as director for receipt of improper personal benefits.

Director and Officer Indemnification

Indemnification is the payment by a company of the expenses of directors who become involved in litigation as a result of their service to a company. Proposals to indemnify a company's directors differ from those to eliminate or reduce their liability because with indemnification directors may still be liable for an act or omission, but the company will bear the expense. Taft-Hartley fiduciaries may support these proposals when the company persuasively argues that such action is necessary to attract and retain directors but should generally oppose indemnification when it is being proposed to insulate directors from actions that have already occurred.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against indemnification proposals that would expand individual coverage beyond ordinary legal expenses to also cover specific acts of negligence that are more serious violations of fiduciary obligation than mere carelessness.
- Vote against proposals that would expand the scope of indemnification to provide for mandatory indemnification of company officials in connection with acts that previously the company was permitted to provide indemnification for at the discretion of the company's board (i.e., "permissive indemnification") but that previously the company was not required to indemnify.
- Vote for only those proposals which provide expanded coverage in cases when a director's or officer's legal defense was unsuccessful if: (1) the individual was found to have acted in good faith and in a manner that the individual reasonably believed was in the best interests of the company; and (2) only if the individual's legal expenses would be covered.

Proxy Contests/Proxy Access — Voting for Director Nominees in Contested Elections

Contested elections of directors frequently occur when a board candidate or "dissident slate" seeks election for the purpose of achieving a significant change in corporate policy or control of seats on the board. Competing slates will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with a number of considerations in mind. These include, but are not limited to, the following: personal qualifications of each candidate; the economic impact of the policies advanced by the dissident slate of nominees; and their expressed and demonstrated commitment to the interests of the shareholders of the company.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Votes in a contested election of directors are evaluated on a case-by-case basis with the following seven factors in consideration:

- Long-term financial performance of the company relative to its industry;
- Management's track record;
- Background to the contested election;
- Nominee qualifications and any compensatory arrangements;
- Strategic plan of dissident slate and quality of critique against management;
- Likelihood that the proposed goals and objectives can be achieved (both slates); and
- Stock ownership positions.

In the case of candidates nominated pursuant to proxy access, vote case-by-case considering any applicable factors listed above or additional factors which may be relevant, including those that are specific to the company, to the nominee(s) and/or to the nature of the election (such as whether there are more candidates than board seats).

2. Compensation

The housing market collapse and resulting credit crisis resulted in significant erosion of shareholder value, unprecedented levels of market volatility, and a lack of confidence among financial market participants. Many Taft-Hartley trustees have questioned the role of executive compensation in incentivizing inappropriate or excessive risk-taking behavior by executives that could threaten a corporation's long-term viability. Further, generous severance packages and other payments to departing executives of failed institutions have heightened attention on the issue of pay for performance.

Trustees of Taft-Hartley funds, which have lost significant value in their investments as a result of the financial crisis, have little patience for "pay for failure" and continue to press for the adoption of executive compensation practices aimed at creating and sustaining long-term shareholder value.

Companies have long argued that legally binding executive compensation obligations cannot be modified. The Capital Purchase Program implemented under the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, the "bail out" program for the U.S. financial system, set the tone for executive compensation reform and requires participating firms to accept certain limits and requirements on executive compensation, regardless of existing contractual arrangements. A number of firms agreed to these requirements.

Evolving disclosure requirements have opened a wider window into compensation practices and processes, giving shareholders more opportunity and responsibility to ensure that pay is designed to create and sustain shareholder value. Companies in the U.S. are now required to evaluate and discuss potential risks arising from misguided or misaligned compensation programs. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act requires advisory shareholder votes on executive compensation (management "Say on Pay"), an advisory vote on the frequency of Say on Pay, as well as a shareholder advisory vote on golden parachute compensation. The advent of "Say on Pay" votes for shareholders in the U.S. has provided a new communication mechanism and impetus for constructive engagement between shareholders and managers/directors on pay issues.

Evaluation of Executive Pay

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes that executive pay programs should be fair, competitive, reasonable, and appropriate, and that pay for performance should be a central tenet in executive compensation philosophy. When evaluating executive and director pay programs and practices, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services looks for the following best practice considerations in the design and administration of executive compensation programs:

- **Appropriate pay-for-performance alignment with emphasis on long-term shareholder value:** executive pay practices must be designed to attract, retain, and appropriately motivate the key employees who drive shareholder value creation over the long term. Evaluating appropriate alignment of pay incentives with shareholder value creation includes taking into consideration, among other factors, the link between pay and performance, the mix between fixed and variable pay, performance goals, and equity-based plan costs.
- **Avoiding arrangements that risk "pay for failure":** this includes assessing the appropriateness of long or indefinite contracts, excessive severance packages, and guaranteed compensation.
- **Independent and effective compensation committee:** oversight of executive pay programs by directors with appropriate skills, knowledge, experience, and a sound process for compensation decision-making (e.g., including access to independent expertise and advice when needed) should be promoted.
- **Clear, comprehensive compensation disclosures:** shareholders expect companies to provide informative and timely disclosures that enable shareholders to evaluate executive pay practices fully and fairly.
- **Avoiding inappropriate pay to non-executive directors:** compensation to outside directors should not compromise their independence and ability to make appropriate judgments in overseeing managers' pay and performance.

Examples of best pay practices include:

- *Employment contracts:* Companies should enter into employment contracts under limited circumstances for a short time period (e.g., new executive hires for a three-year contract) for limited executives. The contracts should not have automatic renewal feature and should have a specified termination date.
- *Severance agreements:* Severance provisions should not be so appealing that they become an incentive for the executive to be terminated. The severance formula should be reasonable and not overly generous to the executive (e.g., use a reasonable severance multiple; use pro-rated target/average historical bonus and not maximum bonus). Failure to renew employment contract, termination under questionable events or for poor performance should not constitute “good reason” for termination with severance payments.
- *Change-in-control payments:* Change-in-control payments should be “double-triggered” – i.e. payouts should only be made when there is a significant change in company ownership structure, and when there is a loss of employment or substantial change in job duties associated with the change in company ownership structure. Change-in-control provisions should exclude excise tax gross-ups and should not authorize the acceleration of vesting of equity awards upon a change in control unless provided under a double-trigger scenario. Similarly, change in control provisions in equity plans should be double-triggered. A change in control event should not result in an acceleration of vesting of all unvested stock options or lapsing of vesting/performance requirements on restricted stock/performance shares, unless there is a loss of employment or substantial change in job duties.
- *Supplemental executive retirement plans (SERPs):* SERPs should not include sweeteners that can increase the payout value significantly or even exponentially, such as additional years of service credited for pension calculations, or inclusion of variable pay (e.g. bonuses and equity awards) into the formula. Pension formulas should not include extraordinary annual bonuses paid close to the time of retirement and should be based on an average, not the maximum, level of compensation earned.
- *Deferred compensation:* Above-market returns or guaranteed minimum returns should not be applied on deferred compensation.
- *Disclosure practices:* The Compensation, Discussion and Analysis should be written in plain English, with as little “legalese” as possible and formatted using section headers, bulleted lists, tables and charts where possible to ease reader comprehension. Ultimately, the document should provide detail and rationale regarding compensation, strategy, pay mix, goals/metrics, challenges, competition and pay for performance linkage, etc. in a narrative fashion.
- *Responsible use of company stock:* Companies should adopt policies that prohibit executives from speculating in company’s stock or using company stock in hedging activities, such as “cashless” collars, forward sales, equity swaps or other similar arrangements. Such behavior undermines the ultimate alignment with long-term shareholders’ interests. In addition, the policy should prohibit or discourage the use of company stock as collateral for margin loans, to avoid any potential sudden stock sales (required upon margin calls) that could have a negative impact on the company’s stock price.
- *Long-term focus:* Executive compensation programs should be designed to support companies’ long-term strategic goals. A short-term focus on performance does not necessarily create sustainable shareholder value. Instead, long-term goals may be sacrificed to achieve short-term expectations to the detriment of shareholder value, as evidenced by the financial crisis.
- Compensation programs embedding a long-term focus with respect to company goals better align with the long-term interests of shareholders. Granting stock options and restricted stock to executives that vest in five years does not necessarily provide a long-term focus, as executives can sell off the company shares once they vest. However, requiring senior executives to hold company stock until retirement or after retirement can encourage a long-term focus on company performance.

Pay-For-Performance Evaluation

Stock-based pay is often the main driver for excessive executive compensation, which could be fueled by poor plan design or administration. Therefore, it is important to closely examine any discrepancies between CEO pay and total shareholder returns over a sustained period of time in assessing equity-based compensation. Many investors do not consider standard stock options or time-vested restricted stock to be performance-based. If a company provides performance-based incentives to its executives, the company should provide complete disclosure of the performance measures and goals to allow shareholders to assess the rigor of the performance program. Complete

and transparent disclosure enables shareholders to better comprehend the company's pay for performance linkage.

When financial or operational measures are utilized in incentive awards, the achievements related to these measures should ultimately translate into superior shareholder returns in the long-term. The use of non-GAAP financial metrics makes it very challenging for shareholders to ascertain the rigor of the program as shareholders often cannot tell the type of adjustments being made and if the adjustments were made consistently.

Pay-for-performance should be a central tenet in executive compensation philosophy. In evaluating the degree of alignment between the CEO's pay with the company's performance over a sustained period, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services conducts a pay-for-performance analysis.

With respect to companies in the Russell 3000 or Russell 3000E Indices¹², this analysis considers the following:

1. Peer Group¹³ Alignment:

- The degree of alignment between the company's annualized TSR rank and the CEO's annualized total pay rank within a peer group, each measured over a five-year period.
- The rankings of CEO total pay and company financial performance within a peer group, each measured over a five-year period.
- The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median over one- and three-year periods.

2. Absolute Alignment¹⁴ – the absolute alignment between the trend in CEO pay and company TSR over the prior five fiscal years – i.e., the difference between the trend in annual pay changes and the trend in annualized TSR during the period.

If the above analysis demonstrates significant unsatisfactory long-term pay-for-performance alignment or, in the case of companies outside the Russell indices, misaligned pay and performance are otherwise suggested, our analysis may include any of the following qualitative factors, as relevant to evaluating how various pay elements may work to encourage or to undermine long-term value creation and alignment with shareholder interests:

- The overall ratio of performance-based compensation to fixed or discretionary pay;
- The ratio of performance- to time-based long-term incentive awards;
- Vesting and/or retention requirements for equity awards that demonstrate a long-term focus;
- The completeness of disclosure and rigor of performance goals;
- The company's peer group benchmarking practices;
- Actual results of financial/operational metrics, both absolute and relative to peers;
- Special circumstances related to, for example, a new CEO in the prior FY or anomalous equity grant practices (e.g., bi-annual awards);
- Realizable and/or realized pay compared to granted pay; and
- Any other factors deemed relevant.

¹³ The ISS peer group is generally comprised of 14-24 companies that are selected using factors such as market cap, revenue, assets, GICS industry group, and the company-selected peers' GICS industry group. ISS peer selection methodology is detailed in the U.S. Peer Group FAQ.

¹⁴ Russell 3000E Index companies (excluding S&P1500 and Russell 3000 companies) are not subject to the Absolute Alignment analysis.

Problematic Compensation Practices

Poor disclosure, the absence or non-transparency of disclosure and flawed compensation plan design can lead to excessive executive pay practices that are detrimental to shareholders.

Companies are expected to meet a minimum standard of tally sheet disclosure as to allow shareholders to readily assess the total executive pay package, understand the actual linkage between pay and performance, and mitigate misinformation to shareholders. The SEC has issued rules on executive and director compensation that require expansive disclosure and a total compensation figure for each of the named executive officers. Poorly designed executive compensation plans or those lacking in transparency can be reflective of a poorly performing compensation committee.

Executive compensation will continue to be in the spotlight in the ensuing years, particularly when shareholders are expected to have access to more complete information.

Problematic pay elements are generally evaluated case-by-case considering the context of a company's overall pay program and demonstrated pay-for-performance philosophy. The focus is on executive compensation practices that contravene best practice compensation considerations, including:

- Problematic practices related to non-performance-based compensation elements;
- Incentives that may motivate excessive risk-taking or present a windfall risk; and
- Pay decisions that circumvent pay-for-performance, such as options backdating or waiving performance requirements.

While not exhaustive, the following list represents certain adverse practices that carry significant weight in this overall consideration, and may lead to negative vote recommendations:

- Egregious employment contracts:
- Contracts containing multi-year guarantees for salary increases, non-performance based bonuses, and equity compensation;
- New CEO with overly generous new-hire package:
 - Excessive “make whole” provisions without sufficient rationale;
 - Any of the problematic pay practices listed in this policy;
- Abnormally large bonus payouts without justifiable performance linkage or proper disclosure:
 - Includes performance metrics that are changed, canceled, or replaced during the performance period without adequate explanation of the action and the link to performance;
- Egregious pension/SERP (supplemental executive retirement plan) payouts:
 - Inclusion of additional years of service not worked that result in significant benefits provided in new arrangements;
 - Inclusion of performance-based equity or other long-term awards in the pension calculation;
- Excessive Perquisites:
 - Perquisites for former and/or retired executives, such as lifetime benefits, car allowances, personal use of corporate aircraft, or other inappropriate arrangements;
 - Extraordinary relocation benefits (including home buyouts);
 - Excessive amounts of perquisites compensation;
- Excessive severance and/or change in control provisions:
 - Change in control cash payments exceeding 3 times base salary plus target/average/last paid bonus;
 - Arrangements that provide for change-in-control payments without loss of job or substantial diminution of job duties (single-triggered or modified single-triggered - where an executive may voluntarily leave for any reason and still receive the change-in-control severance package) or in connection with a problematic Good Reason definition;
 - Employment or severance agreements that provide for excise tax gross-ups. Modified gross-ups would be treated in the same manner as full gross-ups;
 - Excessive payments upon an executive's termination in connection with performance failure;

- Severance payments made when the termination is not clearly disclosed as involuntary (for example, a termination without cause or resignation for good reason); and
- Liberal change in control definition in individual contracts or equity plans which could result in payments to executives without an actual change in control occurring;
- Tax Reimbursements/Gross-ups: income tax reimbursements on executive perquisites or other payments (e.g., related to personal use of corporate aircraft, executive life insurance, bonus, restricted stock vesting, secular trusts, etc.; see also excise tax gross-ups above);
- Dividends or dividend equivalents paid on unvested performance shares or units;
- Executives using company stock in hedging activities, such as “cashless” collars, forward sales, equity swaps, or other similar arrangements;
- Internal pay disparity: Excessive differential between CEO total pay and that of next highest-paid named executive officer (NEO);
- Significant disparity in a company’s Pay Ratio¹⁵;
- Repricing or replacing of underwater stock options/stock appreciation rights (SARs) without prior shareholder approval (including cash buyouts, option exchanges, and certain voluntary surrender of underwater options where shares surrendered may subsequently be re-granted);
- Options backdating;
- Insufficient executive compensation disclosure by externally- managed issuers (EMIs) such that a reasonable assessment of pay programs and practices applicable to the EMI's executives is not possible; and
- Other pay practices that may be deemed problematic in a given circumstance but are not covered in the above categories.

Incentives that may Motivate Excessive Risk-Taking

Assess company policies and disclosure related to compensation that could incentivize excessive risk-taking, for example:

- Guaranteed bonuses or other abnormally large bonus payouts without justifiable performance linkage or appropriate disclosure;
- Mega annual equity grants that provide unlimited upside with no downside risk;
- A single performance metric used for short- and long-term plans;
- High pay opportunities relative to industry peers;
- Disproportionate supplemental pensions; or
- Lucrative severance packages.

Factors that potentially mitigate the impact of risky incentives include rigorous claw-back provisions, robust stock ownership/holding guidelines, and substantive bonus deferral/escrowing programs.

Options Backdating

Options backdating has serious implications and has resulted in financial restatements, delisting of companies, and/or the termination of executives or directors. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will adopt a case-by-case approach to differentiate companies that had sloppy administration vs. deliberate action or fraud, as well as those companies which have since taken corrective action. Instances in which companies have committed fraud are considered most egregious, and Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will look to them to adopt formal policies to ensure that such practices will not re-occur in the future.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will consider several factors, including, but not limited to, the following:

¹⁵Pay Ratio Disclosure is based on the 2010 Dodd-Frank Act disclosure mandate that has required public companies to disclose the ratio of the compensation of their chief executive officer (CEO) to the median compensation of employees.

- Reason and motive for the options backdating issue, such as inadvertent vs. deliberate grant date changes;
- Duration of options backdating;
- Size of restatement due to options backdating;
- Corrective actions taken by the board or compensation committee, such as canceling or repricing backdated options, or recoupment of option gains on backdated grants; and
- Adoption of a grant policy that prohibits backdating, and creation of a fixed grant schedule or window period for equity grants going forward.

Compensation Committee Communications and Responsiveness

Consider the following factors when evaluating ballot items related to executive pay on the board's responsiveness to investor input and engagement on compensation issues:

- Failure to respond to majority-supported shareholder proposals on executive pay topics; or
- Failure to adequately respond to the company's previous say-on-pay proposal that received a low level of shareholder support, taking into account the factors identified under the Responsiveness section in the Director Elections policy with respect to say-on-pay.

Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation – Management Say-on-Pay Proposals

The Dodd-Frank Act Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010 mandates advisory votes on executive compensation (aka management "say on pay" or MSOP) for a proxy or consent or authorization for an annual or other meeting of the shareholders that includes required SEC compensation disclosures. This non-binding shareholder vote on compensation must be included in a proxy or consent or authorization at least once every 3 years.

In general, the management say on pay (MSOP) ballot item is the primary focus of voting on executive pay practices – dissatisfaction with compensation practices can be expressed by voting against MSOP rather than voting against or withhold from the compensation committee. However, if there is no MSOP on the ballot, then the negative vote will apply to members of the compensation committee. In addition, in egregious cases, or if the board fails to respond to concerns raised by a prior MSOP proposal, then Taft-Hartley fiduciaries should vote against or withhold votes from compensation committee members (or, if the full board is deemed accountable, all directors). If the negative factors involve equity-based compensation, then a vote against an equity-based plan proposal presented for shareholder approval may be warranted.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Evaluate executive pay and practices, as well as certain aspects of outside director compensation on a case-by-case basis.
- Vote against management say on pay (MSOP) proposals if:
 - There is an unmitigated misalignment between CEO pay and company performance ([pay for performance](#));
 - The company maintains [problematic pay practices](#);
 - The board exhibits [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders; or
 - The board has failed to demonstrate good stewardship of investors' interests regarding executive compensation practices.
- Vote against or withhold from the members of the compensation committee and potentially the full board if:
 - There is no MSOP on the ballot, and an against vote on an MSOP is warranted due to pay for performance misalignment, problematic pay practices, or the lack of adequate responsiveness on compensation issues raised previously, or a combination thereof;
 - The board fails to respond adequately to a previous MSOP proposal that received low levels of shareholder support;
 - The company has practiced or approved [problematic pay practices](#), including option repricing or option backdating; or
 - The situation is egregious.
- Vote against an equity plan on the ballot if:
 - A pay for performance misalignment exists, and a significant portion of the CEO's misaligned pay is attributed to non-performance-based equity awards, taking into consideration:
 - Magnitude of pay misalignment;
 - Contribution of non-performance-based equity grants to overall pay; and
 - The proportion of equity awards granted in the last three fiscal years concentrated at the named executive officer (NEO) level.

Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation – Management Say on Pay

The Dodd-Frank Act, in addition to requiring advisory votes on compensation (aka management say-on-pay or MSOP), requires that each proxy for the first annual or other meeting of the shareholders (that includes required SEC compensation disclosures) occurring after Jan. 21, 2011, include an advisory voting item to determine whether, going forward, the "say on pay" vote by shareholders to approve compensation should occur every one, two, or three years.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will recommend a vote for annual advisory votes on compensation. The MSOP is at its essence a communication vehicle, and communication is most useful when it is received in a consistent and timely manner. Support for an annual MSOP vote is merited for many of the same reasons Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports annual director elections rather than a classified board structure: because this provides the highest level of accountability and direct communication by enabling the MSOP vote to correspond to the majority of the information presented in the accompanying proxy statement for the applicable shareholders' meeting. Having MSOP votes every two or three years, covering all actions occurring between the votes, would make it difficult to create the meaningful and coherent communication that the votes are intended to provide. Under triennial elections, for example, a company would not know whether the shareholder vote references the compensation year being discussed or a previous year, making it more difficult to understand the implications of the vote.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for annual advisory votes on compensation, which provide the most consistent and clear communication channel for shareholder concerns about companies' executive pay programs.

Advisory Vote on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale

This is a proxy item regarding specific advisory votes on "golden parachute" arrangements for Named Executive Officers (NEOs) that is required under The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services places particular emphasis on severance packages that provide inappropriate windfalls and cover certain executive tax liabilities.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to approve the company's golden parachute compensation, consistent with Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' policies on problematic pay practices related to severance packages. Features that may lead to a vote against include:

- Agreements that include excise tax gross-up provisions;
- Single- or modified-single-trigger cash severance;
- Single trigger acceleration of unvested equity, including acceleration of performance-based equity despite the failure to achieve performance measures;
- Single-trigger vesting of equity based on a definition of change in control that requires only shareholder approval of the transaction (rather than consummation);
- Potentially excessive severance payments;
- Recent amendments or actions that may make packages so attractive as to influence merger agreements that may not be in the best interests of shareholders; and
- The company's assertion that a proposed transaction is conditioned on shareholder approval of the golden parachute advisory vote. Such a construction is problematic from a corporate governance perspective.

In cases where the golden parachute vote is incorporated into a company's separate advisory vote on compensation ("management "say on pay"), Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will evaluate the say on pay proposal in accordance with these guidelines, which may give higher weight to that component of the overall evaluation.

Equity Pay Plans

The theory that stock awards including stock options are beneficial to shareholders because they motivate management and align the interests of investors with those of executives is no longer held sacrosanct. Indeed, a number of academic studies have found that there is limited correlation between executive stock ownership and company performance. Misused stock options can give executives an incentive to inflate their company's earnings, take excessive risks, and make irresponsibly optimistic forecasts in order to keep stock prices high and their paychecks gargantuan.

Therefore, it is vital for shareholders to fully analyze all equity plans that appear on ballot.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: In general, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services evaluates executive and director compensation plans on a case-by-case basis. When evaluating equity-based compensation items on ballot, the following elements will be considered:

- *Dilution:* Vote against plans in which the potential voting power dilution (VPD) of all shares outstanding exceeds ten percent.
- *Full Market Value:* Awards must be granted at 100 percent of fair market value on the date of grant. However, in instances when a plan is open to broad-based employee participation and excludes the five most highly compensated employees, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services accept a 15 percent discount.
- *Burn Rate:* Vote against plans where the company's value-adjusted burn rate exceeds the greater of: (1) an industry-specific threshold based on three-year burn rates within the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P 500) and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) a de minimis threshold established separately for each of the S&P 500, the Russell 3000 index less the S&P 500, and the non-Russell 3000 index.
- *Liberal Definition of Change-in-Control:* Vote against equity plans if the plan provides for the accelerated vesting of equity awards even though an actual change in control may not occur. Examples of such a definition could include, but are not limited to, announcement or commencement of a tender offer, provisions for acceleration upon a "potential" takeover, shareholder approval of a merger or other transactions, or similar language.
- *Problematic Pay Practices:* Vote against equity plans if the plan is a vehicle for problematic pay practices (e.g. if the plan allows for change-in-control payouts that are single triggered).
- *Executive Concentration Ratio:* Vote against plans where the annual grant rate to the top five executives ("named officers") exceeds one percent of shares outstanding.
- *Pay-For-Performance:* Vote against plans where there is a misalignment between CEO pay and the company's performance, or if performance criteria are not disclosed.
- *Evergreen Features:* Vote against plans that reserve a specified percentage of outstanding shares for award each year instead of having a termination date.
- *Repricing:* Vote against plans if the company's policy permits repricing of "underwater" options or if the company has a history of repricing past options.
- *Loans:* Vote against the plan if the plan administrator may provide loans to officers to assist in exercising the awards.

Stock Option Plans

Compensation to executive and other senior level employees should be strongly correlated to sustained performance. Stock options, restricted stock and other forms of non-cash compensation should be performance-based with an eye toward improving long-term corporate value. Well-designed stock option plans can align the interests of executives and shareholders by providing that executives benefit when stock prices rise so that the employees of the company, along with shareholders, prosper together. Likewise, option plans should not allow for the benefits of share price gains without the risk of share price declines. Poorly designed stock option plans can encourage excessive risk-taking behavior and incentivize executives to pursue corporate strategies that promote short-term stock price to the ultimate detriment of long-term shareholder value.

Many plans sponsored by management provide goals so easily attained that executives can realize massive rewards even though shareholder value is not created. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports option plans when they provide legitimately challenging performance targets that serve to truly motivate executives in the pursuit of sustained superior performance. Moreover, equity pay plans should be designed in a fashion that ensures executive compensation is veritably performance driven and “at risk” such that executives are penalized (by either reducing or withholding compensation) for failure to meet pre-determined performance hurdles. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose those plans that offer unreasonable benefits to executives that are not generally available to other shareholders or employees.

Voting Power Dilution (VPD) Calculation

Voting power dilution, or VPD, measures the amount of voting power represented by the number of shares reserved over the life of the plan. Industry norm dictates that ten percent dilution over the life of a ten-year plan is reasonable for most mature companies. Restricted stock plans or stand-alone stock bonus plans that are not coupled with stock option plans can be held to a lower dilution cap.

Voting power dilution may be calculated using the following formula:

- A: Shares reserved for this amendment or plan
- B: Shares available under this plan and/or continuing plans prior to proposed amendment
- C: Shares granted but unexercised under this plan and/or continuing plans
- D: All outstanding shares plus any convertible equity, outstanding warrants, or debt

The formula can be applied as follows:
$$\frac{A + B + C}{A + B + C + D}$$

Fair Market Value, Dilution and Repricing

Consideration will be made as to whether the proposed plan is being offered at fair market value or at a discount; whether the plan excessively dilutes the earnings per share of the outstanding shares; and whether the plan gives management the ability to replace or reprice “underwater” options. Repricing is an amendment to a previously granted stock option contract that reduces the option exercise price. Options are “underwater” when their current price is below the current option contract price. Options can also be repriced through cancellations and re-grants. The typical new grant would have a ten-year term, new vesting restrictions, and a lower exercise price reflecting the current lower market price.

Burn Rate

The annual burn rate is a measure of dilution that illustrates how rapidly a company is deploying shares reserved for equity compensation plans. A "Value-Adjusted Burn Rate" is used for stock plan evaluations. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally oppose plans whose Value-Adjusted Burn Rates exceed the greater of: (1) an industry-specific threshold based on three-year burn rates within the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P 500) and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) a de minimis threshold established separately for each of the S&P 500, the Russell 3000 index less the S&P 500, and the non-Russell 3000 index. Year-over-year burn-rate benchmark changes will be limited to a predetermined range above or below the prior year's burn-rate benchmark.

The Value-Adjusted Burn Rate is calculated as follows:

Value-Adjusted Burn Rate = ((# of options * option's dollar value using a Black-Scholes model) + (# of full-value awards * stock price)) / (Weighted average common shares * stock price).

Executive Concentration Ratio

In examining stock option awards, restricted stock and other forms of long-term incentives, it is important to consider internal pay equity; that is, the concentration and distribution of equity awards to a company's top five executives ("named officers") as a percentage of overall grants. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will consider voting against equity compensation plans whose annual grant rate to top executives exceeds one percent of shares outstanding.

Evergreen Provisions

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will oppose plans that reserve a specified percentage of outstanding shares for award each year (evergreen plans) instead of having a termination date. Such plans provide for an automatic increase in the shares available for grant with or without limits on an annual basis. Because they represent a transfer of shareholder value and have a dilutive impact on a regular basis, evergreen plans are expensive to shareholders. Evergreen features also minimize the frequency that companies seek shareholder approval in increasing the number of shares available under the plan.

Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals to put option repricings to a shareholder vote.

Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking approval to exchange/reprice options taking into consideration the following factors:

- Historic trading patterns: the stock price should not be so volatile that the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term;
- Rationale for the re-pricing: was the stock price decline beyond management's control?
- Option vesting: does the new option vest immediately or is there a black-out period?
- Term of the option: the term should remain the same as that of the replaced option;
- Exercise price: should be set at fair market or a premium to market;
- Participants: the plan should be broad-based and executive officers and directors must be excluded;
- Is this a value-for-value exchange?
- Are surrendered stock options added back to the plan reserve?
- Timing--repricing should occur at least one year out from any precipitous drop in company's stock price.

If the surrendered options are added back to the equity plans for re-issuance, then Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will also take into consideration the impact on the company's equity plans and its three-year average burn rate.

In addition to the above considerations, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will evaluate the intent, rationale, and timing of the repricing proposal. The proposal should clearly articulate why the board is choosing to conduct an exchange program at this point in time. Repricing underwater options after a recent precipitous drop in the company's stock price demonstrates poor timing and warrants additional scrutiny. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services does not view market deterioration, in and of itself, as an acceptable reason for companies to reprice stock options and/or reset goals under performance plans. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services also considers the terms of the surrendered options, such as the grant date, exercise price and vesting schedule. Grant dates of surrendered options should be far enough back (two to three years) so as not to suggest that repricings are being done to take advantage of short-term downward price movements. Similarly, the exercise price of surrendered options should be above the 52-week high for the stock price.

Restricted Stock

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports the use of performance-vesting restricted stock as long as the absolute amount of restricted stock being granted is a reasonable proportion of an executive's overall compensation. The best way to align the interests of executives with shareholders is through direct stock holdings, coupled with at-risk variable compensation that is tied to explicit and challenging performance benchmarks. Performance-vesting restricted stock both adds to executive's direct share holdings and incorporates at-risk features.

To reward performance and not job tenure, restricted stock vesting requirements should be performance-based rather than time lapsing. Such plans should explicitly define the performance criteria for awards to senior executives and may include a variety of corporate performance measures in addition to the use of stock price targets. In addition, executives should be required to hold their vested restricted stock as long as they remain employees of the company.

Employee Stock Purchase Plans (ESPPs) - Qualified Plans

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on qualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for plans if:

- Purchase price is at least 85 percent of fair market value;
- Offering period is 27 months or less; and
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is five percent or less of the outstanding shares.

Employee Stock Purchase Plans (ESPPs) – Non-Qualified Plans

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on nonqualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for plans with:

- Broad-based participation (i.e. all employees with the exclusion of individuals with 5 percent or more of beneficial ownership of the company);
- Limits on employee contribution (a fixed dollar amount or a percentage of base salary);
- Company matching contribution up to 25 percent of employee's contribution, which is effectively a discount of 20 percent from market value; and
- No discount on the stock price on the date of purchase when there is a company matching contribution.

Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)

An Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) is an employee benefit plan that makes the employees of a company also owners of stock in that company. Recent academic research of the performance of ESOPs in closely held

companies found that ESOPs appear to increase overall sales, employment, and sales per employee over what would have been expected absent an ESOP. Studies have also found that companies with an ESOP are also more likely to still be in business several years later, and are more likely to have other retirement oriented benefit plans than comparable non-ESOP companies.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for proposals that request shareholder approval in order to implement an ESOP or to increase authorized shares for existing ESOPs except in cases when the number of shares allocated to the ESOP is deemed excessive (i.e. generally greater than five percent of outstanding shares).

OBRA-Related Compensation Proposals

Cash bonus plans can be an important part of an executive's overall pay package, along with stock-based plans tied to long-term total shareholder returns. Section 162(m) of the IRS Code Section limits the deductibility of compensation in excess of \$1 million to a named executive officer unless certain prescribed actions are taken including shareholder approval and the establishment of performance goals.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote for proposals to approve or amend executive incentive bonus plans if the proposal:
 - Is only to include administrative features;
 - Places a cap on the annual grants any one participant may receive to comply with the provisions of Section 162(m);
 - Adds performance goals to existing compensation plans to comply with the provisions of Section 162(m) unless they are clearly inappropriate; or
 - Covers cash or cash and stock bonus plans that are submitted to shareholders for the purpose of exempting compensation from taxes under the provisions of Section 162(m) if no increase in shares is requested.
- Vote against such proposals if:
 - The plan provides for awards to individual participants in excess of \$2 million a year;
 - The compensation committee does not fully consist of independent directors as defined by Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' definition of director independence; or
 - The plan contains excessive problematic provisions including lack of rigorous performance measures.
- Vote case-by-case on such proposals with respect to equity incentive plans if:
 - In addition to seeking 162(m) tax treatment, the amendment may cause additional voting power dilution to shareholders (e.g., by requesting additional shares, extending the option term, or expanding the pool of plan participants);
 - A company is presenting the plan to shareholders for Section 162(m) favorable tax treatment for the first time after the company's initial public offering (IPO). Perform a full equity plan analysis, including consideration of potential voting power dilution, burn rate (if applicable), repricing, and liberal change in control. Other factors such as pay-for-performance or problematic pay practices as related to Management Say-on-Pay may be considered if appropriate.

Severance Agreements for Executives/Golden Parachutes

Golden parachutes are designed to protect the employees of a corporation in the event of a change-in-control. Under most golden parachute agreements, senior level management employees receive a lump sum payout triggered by a change-in-control at usually two to three times their current base salary. The SEC requires disclosure of all golden parachute arrangements in the proxy statement.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation

- Vote case-by-case on management proposals to ratify or cancel golden parachutes taking into consideration the following factors:
 - Whether the triggering mechanism is beyond the control of management;
 - Whether the payout amount is based on an excessive severance multiple; and
 - Whether the change-in-control payments are double-triggered, i.e., (1) after a change in control has taken place, and (2) termination of the executive as a result of the change in control. Change in control is defined as a change in the company ownership structure.
- Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requiring that executive severance (including change-in-control related) arrangements or payments be submitted for shareholder ratification. Factors that will be considered include, but are not limited to:
 - The company's severance or change-in-control agreements in place, and the presence of problematic features (such as excessive severance entitlements, single triggers, excise tax gross-ups, etc.);
 - Any existing limits on cash severance payouts or policies which require shareholder ratification of severance payments exceeding a certain level;
 - Any recent severance-related controversies; and
 - Whether the proposal is overly prescriptive, such as requiring shareholder approval of severance that does not exceed market norms.

Director Compensation

Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking ratification of non-employee director compensation, based on the following factors:

- If the equity plan under which non-employee director grants are made is on the ballot, whether or not it warrants support; and
- An assessment of the following qualitative factors:
 - The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile;
 - The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation;
 - Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements;
 - Equity award vesting schedules;
 - The balance of cash vs. equity compensation;
 - Meaningful limits on director compensation;
 - The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites; and
 - The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

Shareholder Proposals on Compensation

Disclosure of Executive and Director Pay

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that seek additional disclosure of executive and director pay information, including the preparation of a formal report on executive compensation practices and policies.

Limit Executive and Director Pay

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote for shareholder proposals that seek to eliminate outside directors' retirement benefits.
- Vote case-by-case on all other shareholder proposals that seek to limit executive and director pay. This includes shareholder proposals that seek to link executive compensation to customer, employee, or stakeholder satisfaction.

Executive Perks and Retirement/Death Benefits

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports enhanced disclosure and shareholder oversight of executive benefits and other in-kind retirement perquisites. For example, compensation devices like executive pensions (SERPs), deferred compensation plans, below-market-rate loans or guaranteed post-retirement consulting fees can amount to significant liabilities to shareholders and it is often difficult for investors to find adequate disclosure of their full terms. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services opposes any perquisite or benefit to executives that exceeds what is generally offered to other company employees. From a shareholder perspective, the cost of these executive entitlements would be better allocated to performance-based forms of executive compensation during their term in office.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting to put extraordinary benefits contained in SERP agreements to a shareholder vote unless the company's executive pension plans do not contain excessive benefits beyond what is offered under employee-wide plans.
- Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling companies to adopt a policy of discontinuing or obtaining shareholder approval for any future agreements and corporate policies that could oblige the company to make payments or awards following the death of a senior executive. This could come, for example, in the form of unearned salary or bonuses, accelerated vesting or the continuation in force of unvested equity grants, perquisites and other payments or awards made in lieu of compensation. However, this would not apply to any benefit programs or equity plan proposals that the broad-based employee population is eligible.

Executive Holding Periods

Senior level executives should be required to hold a substantial portion of their equity compensation awards, including shares received from option exercises (e.g. 75% of their after-tax stock option proceeds), while they are employed at a company or even into retirement. Equity compensation awards are intended to align management interests with those of shareholders, and allowing executives to sell these shares while they are employees of the company undermines this purpose. Given the large size of a typical annual equity compensation award, holding requirements that are based on a multiple of cash compensation may be inadequate.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt policies requiring senior executive officers to retain a portion of the net shares acquired through compensation plans while employed or following the termination of their employment.

Pay for Superior Performance

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the board to establish a pay-for-superior performance standard in the company's executive compensation programs for senior executives.

Performance-Based Options

Stock options are intended to align the interests of management with those of shareholders. However, stock option grants without performance-based elements can excessively compensate executives for stock increases due solely to a general stock market rise, rather than improved or superior company stock performance. When option grants reach the hundreds of thousands, a relatively small increase in the share price may permit executives to reap millions of dollars without providing material benefits to shareholders.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services advocates for performance-based awards – such as premium-priced or indexed – which encourage executives to outperform peers, certain indices, or the broader market rather than being rewarded for any minimal rise in the share price, which can occur if there are not empirical performance measures incorporated into the structure of the options. Additionally, it should be noted that performance-accelerated vesting and premium priced options allow fixed plan accounting, whereas performance-vested and indexed options entail certain expensing requirements.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that seek to provide for performance-based options such as indexed and/or premium priced options.

Tax Gross-up Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals calling for companies to adopt a policy of not providing tax gross-up payments to executives, except in situations where gross-ups are provided pursuant to a plan, policy, or arrangement applicable to management employees of the company, such as a relocation or expatriate tax equalization policy.

Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay) Shareholder Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally, vote for shareholder proposals that call for non-binding shareholder ratification of the compensation of the Named Executive Officers and the accompanying narrative disclosure of material factors provided to understand the Summary Compensation Table.

Compensation Consultants - Disclosure of Board or Company's Utilization

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking disclosure regarding the company, board, or compensation committee's use of compensation consultants, such as company name, business relationship(s) and fees paid.

Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking a policy that prohibits named executive officers from engaging in derivative or speculative transactions involving company stock, including hedging, holding stock in a margin account, or pledging stock as collateral for a loan.

Bonus Banking/Bonus Banking “Plus”

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for on proposals seeking deferral of a portion of annual bonus pay, with ultimate payout linked to sustained results for the performance metrics on which the bonus was earned (whether for the named executive officers or a wider group of employees).

Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment and Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking a policy requiring termination of employment prior to severance payment and eliminating accelerated vesting of unvested equity.

Recoup Bonuses

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to recoup unearned incentive bonuses or other incentive payments made to senior executives if it is later determined that the incentive compensation was based upon figures that later turn out to have been in error.

Link Compensation to Non-Financial Factors

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking disclosure on linking executive pay to non-financial factors.
- Evaluate shareholder proposals calling for linkage of executive pay to non-financial factors, such as corporate downsizing, customer/employee satisfaction, community involvement, human rights, social and environmental goals and performance, and predatory lending on a case-by-case basis.

Pension Plan Income Accounting

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals to exclude pension plan income in the calculation of earnings used in determining executive bonuses/compensation.

3. Auditors

Auditors play an integral role in certifying the integrity and reliability of corporate financial statements on which investors rely to gauge the financial well-being of a company and the viability of an investment. The well-documented auditor-facilitated bankruptcies and scandals at several large public companies in recent years underscore the catastrophic consequences that investors can suffer when the audit process breaks down.

Auditor Independence

The wave of accounting scandals over the past decade illuminates the need to ensure auditor independence in the face of consulting services to audit clients. The ratio of non-audit services to total revenues at the large accounting firms grew significantly leading up to the accounting scandals. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes the ratio of non-audit fees should make up no more than one-quarter of all fees paid to the auditor so as to properly discourage even the appearance of any undue influence upon an auditor's objectivity.

Under SEC rules, disclosed categories of professional fees paid for audit and non-audit services are as follows: (1) Audit Fees, (2) Audit-Related Fees, (3) Tax Fees, and (4) All Other Fees. Under the reporting requirements, companies are required to describe – in qualitative terms – the types of services provided under the three categories other than Audit Fees. The following fee categories are defined as: A) tax compliance or preparation fees are excluded from our calculations of non-audit fees; and B) fees for consulting services for tax-avoidance strategies and tax shelters will be included in "other fees" and will be considered non-audit fees if the proxy disclosure does not indicate the nature of the tax services. In circumstances where "Other" fees include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events: initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergence, and spin-offs; and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees which are an exception to the standard "non-audit fee" category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit/audit-related fees/tax compliance and preparation for purposes of determining whether non-audit fees are excessive.

As auditors are the backbone upon which a company's financial health is measured, auditor independence is absolutely essential for rendering objective opinions upon which investors then rely. When an auditor is paid excessive consulting fees in addition to fees paid for auditing, the company-auditor relationship is left open to conflicts of interest.

Auditor Ratification

The ratification of auditors is an important component of good governance. In light of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 and increased shareholder scrutiny, some companies are opting to take auditor ratification off the ballot. Neglecting to include the ratification of auditors on the proxy takes away the fundamental shareholder right to ratify the company's choice of auditor. Whereas shareholder ratification of auditors was once considered routine by many shareowners, accounting scandals have caused shareholders to be more vigilant about the integrity of the auditors certifying their companies' financial statements. It is now viewed as best practice for companies to place the item on ballot.

Although U.S. companies are not legally required to allow shareholders to ratify their appointment of independent auditors, submission of the audit firm for approval at the annual meeting on an annual basis gives shareholders the means to weigh in on their satisfaction (or lack thereof) of the auditor's independent execution of their duties. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes mandatory auditor ratification is in line with sound and transparent corporate governance and remains an important mechanism to ensure the integrity of the auditor's work. In the absence of legislation mandating shareholder ratification of auditors, the failure by a company to present its selection of auditors for shareholder ratification should be discouraged as it undermines good governance and disenfranchises shareholders.

Proposals to ratify auditors is examined for potential conflicts of interest, with particular attention to the fees paid to the auditor, as well as whether the ratification of auditors has been put up for shareholder vote.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to ratify auditors when the amount of audit fees is equal to or greater than three times (75 percent) the amount paid for consulting, unless: i) An auditor has a financial interest in or association with the company, and is therefore not independent; or ii) There is reason to believe that the independent auditor has rendered an opinion which is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position.
- Vote against proposals to ratify auditors when the amount of non-audit consulting fees exceeds a quarter of all fees paid to the auditor.
- Generally support shareholder proposals seeking to limit companies from buying consulting services from their auditor.

Auditor Rotation

Long-term relationships between auditors and their clients can impede auditor independence, objectivity and professional skepticism. Such long-standing relationships foster an undesirable coziness between audit firms and their clients, which can cause the auditors to lose their independence and become less questioning especially where lucrative contracts for the provision of non-audit consulting services are involved. Mandatory auditor rotation is a widely supported safeguard against improper audits and is viewed by many as an effective mechanism for mitigating the potential risks borne by long-term auditor-client relationships.

Proponents of compulsory audit firm rotation contend that rotation policies promote objectivity and independence among auditors and minimize the scope of vested interests developing in the audit. Opponents of audit firm rotation argue that regular re-tendering is a costly practice, likely to reduce audit quality and increase the risk of audit failure in the early years due to the time required to gain cumulative knowledge of an often complex and geographically diverse business. A solution around this apparent negative effect of mandatory rotation is to keep a longer rotation period.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services recommends that companies not maintain the same audit firm in excess of seven years and will vote against auditors if their tenure at a company exceeds seven years. A revolving seven-year rotation period allows the auditor to develop cumulative knowledge of a company's business and the effect of changes in the business along with the corresponding changes in its risks, thereby enhancing the quality of the audit and trammeling potential loss of auditor objectivity and independence. Many institutional investors argue that the increased costs associated with compulsory auditor rotation are a lesser evil vis-à-vis the larger evil of the costs to shareholders when the objectionable coziness between clients and long-standing auditors leads to gross erosion of shareholder value.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support shareholder proposals to ensure auditor independence through measures such as mandatory auditor rotation (no less than every seven years).

Auditor Indemnification and Limitation of Liability

Indemnification clauses allow auditors to avoid liability for potential damages, including punitive damages. Eliminating concerns about being sued for carelessness could lead to; 1) potential impairment of external auditor independence and impartiality by contractual clauses limiting their liability; and 2) a decrease in the quality and reliability of the audit given the lack of consequence for an inadequate audit.

Given the substantial settlements against auditors in recent years for poor audit practices and the cost of such insurance to the company and its shareholders, there are legitimate concerns over the broader use of indemnification clauses. Such agreements may weaken the objectivity, impartiality and performance of audit firms. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes it is important for shareholders to understand the full risks and implications of these agreements and determine what impact they could have on shareholder value. At the present time,

however, due to poor disclosure in this area, it is difficult to identify the existence and extent of limited liability provisions and auditor agreements, and investors lack the information needed to make informed decisions regarding these agreements.

Without uniform disclosure, it is difficult to consistently apply policy and make informed vote recommendations. As such, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services reviews the use of indemnification clauses and limited liability provisions in auditor agreements on a case-by-case basis, when disclosure is present.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against or withhold from audit committee members if there is persuasive evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

Disclosures Under Section 404 of Sarbanes-Oxley Act

Section 404 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act requires that companies document and assess the effectiveness of their internal financial controls. Beginning in 2005, most public companies must obtain annual attestation of the effectiveness of their internal controls over financial reporting from their outside auditors. Companies with significant material weaknesses identified in the Section 404 disclosures potentially have ineffective internal financial reporting controls. This may lead to inaccurate financial statements, which hampers shareholders' ability to make informed investment decisions, and may lead to destruction of public confidence and shareholder value. The audit committee is ultimately responsible for the integrity and reliability of the company's financial information and its system of internal controls.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against or withhold votes from audit committee members under certain circumstances when a material weakness rises to a level of serious concern, if there are chronic internal control issues, or if there is an absence of established effective control mechanisms.
- Vote against management proposals to ratify auditors if there is reason to believe that the independent auditor has rendered an opinion which is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position.

Adverse Opinions

An Adverse Opinion on the company's financial statements is issued when the auditor determines that the financial statements are materially misstated and, when considered as a whole, do not conform to GAAP. It essentially states that the information contained is materially incorrect, unreliable, and inaccurate in order to assess the company's financial position and results of operations.

Adverse opinions on companies' financial statements are generally very rare because they essentially state that a significant portion of the financial statements are unreliable and the auditor had no choice but to issue an adverse opinion after a long process of seeking resolution with the company subjected to the audit.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote against or withhold votes from audit committee members if the company receives an adverse opinion on the company's financial statements from its auditors.

4. Takeover Defenses

Poison Pills

Shareholder rights plans, typically known as poison pills, take the form of rights or warrants issued to shareholders and are triggered when a potential acquiring stockholder reaches a certain threshold of ownership. When

triggered, poison pills generally allow shareholders to purchase shares from, or sell shares back to, the target company (“flip-in pill”) and/or the potential acquirer (“flip-out pill”) at a price far out of line with fair market value.

Depending on the type of pill, the triggering event can either transfer wealth from the target company or dilute the equity holdings of current shareholders. Poison pills insulate management from the threat of a change in control and provide the target board with veto power over takeover bids. Because poison pills greatly alter the balance of power between shareholders and management, shareholders should be allowed to make their own evaluation of such plans.

In evaluating management proposals on poison pills, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services considers the company’s rationale for adopting the pill and its existing governance structure in determining whether or not the pill appropriately serves shareholders’ best interests. The rationale for adopting the pill should be thoroughly explained by the company. Additionally, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services examines the company’s existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, or any problematic governance concerns.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals that ask a company to submit its poison pill for shareholder ratification.
- Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals to redeem a company’s poison pill.
- Vote case-by-case on management proposals to ratify a poison pill.
- Vote against or withhold from any board where a dead-hand poison pill provision is in place. From a shareholder perspective, there is no justification for a dead-hand provision. Directors of companies with these lethal protective devices should be held fully accountable.

Net Operating Loss (NOL) Poison Pills/Protective Amendments

The financial crisis prompted widespread losses in certain industries. This resulted in previously profitable companies considering the adoption of a poison pill and/or NOL protective amendment to protect their NOL tax assets, which may be lost upon an acquisition of 5 percent of a company’s shares.

When evaluating management proposals seeking to adopt NOL pills or protective amendments, the purpose behind the proposal, its terms, and the company’s existing governance structure should be taken into account to assess whether the structure actively promotes board entrenchment or adequately protects shareholder rights. While the high estimated tax value of NOLs would typically benefit shareholders, the ownership acquisition limitations contained in an NOL pill/protective amendment coupled with a company’s problematic governance structure could serve as an antitakeover device.

Given the low ownership thresholds involved, shareholders want to ensure that such pills/amendments do not remain in effect permanently. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will closely review whether the pill/amendment contains a sunset provision or a commitment to cause the expiration of the NOL pill/protective amendment upon exhaustion or expiration of the NOLs.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against proposals to adopt a poison pill/ protective amendment for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses ("NOLs") if the term of the pill/ protective amendment would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.
- Evaluate management proposals to ratify an NOL pill /adopt an NOL protective amendment if the term of the pill/amendment would be the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL on a case-by-case basis considering the following factors;
 - The ownership threshold to transfer (NOL pills generally have a trigger slightly below 5% and NOL protective amendments generally prohibit stock ownership transfers that would result in a new 5-percent holder or increase the stock ownership percentage of an existing five-percent holder);
 - The value of the NOLs;
 - Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision, or commitment to cause expiration of the pill upon exhaustion or expiration of NOLs);
 - The company's existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns; and
 - Any other factors that may be applicable.

Greenmail

Greenmail payments are targeted share repurchases by management of company stock from individuals or groups seeking control of the company. Since only the hostile party receives payment, usually at a substantial premium over the market value of shares, the practice discriminates against most shareholders. This transferred cash, absent the greenmail payment, could be put to much better use for reinvestment in the company, payment of dividends, or to fund a public share repurchase program.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to adopt an anti-greenmail provision in their charter or bylaws that would thereby restrict a company's ability to make greenmail payments to certain shareholders.
- Vote case-by-case on all anti-greenmail proposals when they are presented as bundled items with other charter or bylaw amendments.

Shareholder Ability to Remove Directors/Fill Vacancies

Shareholder ability to remove directors, with or without cause, is either prescribed by a state's business corporation law, individual company's articles of incorporation, or its corporate bylaws. Many companies have sought shareholder approval for charter or bylaw amendments that would prohibit the removal of directors except for cause, thus ensuring that directors would retain their directorship for their full-term unless found guilty of self-dealing. By requiring cause to be demonstrated through due process, management insulates the directors from removal even if a director has been performing poorly, not attending meetings, or not acting in the best interests of shareholders.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against proposals that provide that directors may be removed only for cause.
- Vote for proposals which seek to restore the authority of shareholders to remove directors with or without cause.
- Vote against proposals that provide only continuing directors may elect replacements to fill board vacancies.
- Vote for proposals that permit shareholders to elect directors to fill board vacancies.

Shareholder Ability to Alter the Size of the Board

Proposals that would allow management to increase or decrease the size of the board at its own discretion are often used by companies as a takeover defense. Proposals to fix the size of the board at a specific number can prevent management from increasing the board size without shareholder approval when facing a proxy context. By increasing the size of the board, management can make it more difficult for dissidents to gain control of the board. Fixing the size of the board also prevents a reduction in the size of the board as a strategy to oust independent directors. Fixing board size also prevents management from increasing the number of directors in order to dilute the effects of cumulative voting.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals that seek to fix the size of the board within an acceptable range.
- Vote against proposals that give management the ability to alter the size of the board without shareholder approval.

5. Shareholder Rights

Confidential Voting

The confidential ballot ensures that voters are not subject to real or perceived coercion. In an open voting system, management can determine who has voted against its nominees or proposals before a final vote count. As a result, shareholders can be pressured to vote with management at companies with which they maintain or would like to establish a business relationship.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals that request corporations to adopt confidential voting, the use of independent tabulators, and the use of independent inspectors for an election as long as the proposals include clauses for proxy contests. In the case of a contested election, management is permitted to request that the dissident group honor its confidential voting policy. If the dissidents agree, the policy remains in place. If the dissidents do not agree, the confidential voting policy is waived.
- Vote for management proposals to adopt confidential voting procedures.

Shareholder Ability to Call Special Meetings

Most state corporation statutes allow shareholders to call a special meeting when they want to take action on certain matters that arise between regularly scheduled annual meetings. Sometimes this right applies only if a shareholder or a group of shareholders own a specified percentage of shares, with ten percent being the most common. Shareholders may lose the ability to remove directors, initiate a shareholder resolution, or respond to a beneficial offer without having to wait for the next scheduled meeting if they are unable to act at a special meeting of their own calling.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholder ability to call special meetings.
- Generally vote for proposals that remove restrictions on the right of shareholders to act independently of management.
- Vote against provisions that would require advance notice of more than sixty days.

Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent

Consent solicitations allow shareholders to vote on and respond to shareholder and management proposals by mail without having to act at a physical meeting. A consent card is sent by mail for shareholder approval and only requires a signature for action. Some corporate bylaws require supermajority votes for consents, while at others standard annual meeting rules apply. Shareholders may lose the ability to remove directors, initiate a shareholder resolution, or respond to a beneficial offer without having to wait for the next scheduled meeting if they are unable to act by written consent.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholder ability to take action by written consent.
- Generally vote for proposals to allow or make easier shareholder action by written consent.

Unequal Voting Rights

Incumbent managers are able to use unequal voting rights through the creation of a separate class of shares that has superior voting rights to the common shares of regular shareholders. This separate class of shares with

disproportionate voting power allows management to concentrate its power and insulate itself from the wishes of the majority of shareholders. Dual class exchange offers involve a transfer of voting rights from one group of shareholders to another group of shareholders typically through the payment of a preferential dividend. A dual class recapitalization plan also establishes two classes of common stock with unequal voting rights, but initially involves an equal distribution of preferential and inferior voting shares to current shareholders.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for resolutions that seek to maintain or convert to a one-share-one-vote capital structure.
- Generally vote against requests for the creation or continuation of dual class capital structures or the creation of new or additional super-voting shares.

Supermajority Shareholder Vote Requirement to Amend the Charter or Bylaws

Supermajority shareholder vote requirements for charter or bylaw amendments are often the result of “lock-in” votes, which are the votes required to repeal new provisions to the corporate charter. Supermajority provisions violate the principle that a simple majority of voting shares should be all that is necessary to effect change regarding a company and its corporate governance provisions. Requiring more than this may entrench managers by blocking actions that are in the best interests of shareholders.

The general lack of credit availability for financially distressed companies has resulted in “rescue” or highly dilutive stock and warrant issuances, which often comprise a majority of the company’s voting stock upon conversion. When an investor takes control of the company through the conversion of securities, the new owners often seek statutory amendments, such as adopting written consent, or allowing 50 percent shareholders to call a special meeting, that allow effective control over the company with little or no input from minority shareholders.

In such cases, the existing supermajority vote requirements would serve to protect minority shareholders’ interests. The reduction in the vote requirements, when coupled with low quorum requirements (in Nevada and other states) could shift the balance in power away from small shareholders while overly empowering large shareholders.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against management proposals to require a supermajority shareholder vote to approve charter and bylaw amendments.
- Vote against management proposals seeking to lower supermajority shareholder vote requirements when they accompany management sponsored proposals to also change certain charter or bylaw amendments.
- Vote for management or shareholder proposals to reduce supermajority vote requirements for charter and bylaw amendments. However, for companies with shareholders who have significant ownership levels, vote on a case-by-case basis, taking into account 1) ownership structure, 2) quorum requirements, and 3) supermajority vote requirements.

Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Generally vote against management proposals to ratify provisions of the company's existing charter or bylaws, unless these governance provisions align with best practice.

In addition, voting against or withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board may be warranted, considering:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

Supermajority Shareholder Vote Requirement to Approve Mergers

Supermajority provisions violate the principle that a simple majority of voting shares should be all that is necessary to effect change regarding a company and its corporate governance provisions. Requiring more than this may entrench managers by blocking actions that are in the best interests of shareholders.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote against management proposals to require a supermajority shareholder vote to approve mergers and other significant business combinations.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to lower supermajority shareholder vote requirements for mergers and other significant business combinations.

Virtual Shareholder Meetings

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals allowing for the convening of shareholder meetings by electronic means, so long as they do not preclude in-person meetings. Companies are encouraged to disclose the circumstances under which virtual-only¹⁶ meetings would be held, and to allow for comparable rights and opportunities for shareholders to participate electronically as they would have during an in-person meeting.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals concerning virtual-only meetings, considering:

- Scope and rationale of the proposal; and
- Concerns identified with the company's prior meeting practices.

¹⁶ Virtual-only shareholder meeting" refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively using technology without a corresponding in-person meeting.

Reimbursing Proxy Solicitation Expenses

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally support shareholder proposals to reimburse for proxy solicitation expenses.
- When voting in conjunction with support of a dissident slate, always support the reimbursement of all appropriate proxy solicitation expenses associated with the election.
- Generally support requests seeking to reimburse a shareholder proponent for all reasonable campaign expenditures for a proposal approved by the majority of shareholders.

Exclusive Venue

Issuers began seeking shareholder approval of exclusive venue charter provisions in 2011 after a court opinion suggested that unilaterally adopted exclusive venue bylaw provisions might not be enforceable. All the exclusive venue proposals to date have sought to make Delaware the exclusive forum for resolution on shareholder disputes.

Corporations have defended exclusive forum provisions on the grounds that the Delaware Chancery Court moves cases more quickly than other courts and is presided over by judges who are experienced in corporate law. Firms have also argued that making Delaware the sole forum for lawsuits avoids the possibility of duplicative suits arising out of the same events. A number of shareholder advocates have, however, countered that exclusive venue provisions deprive shareholders of the flexibility to choose the forum in which to assert claims of wrongdoing.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote against management proposals to restrict the venue for shareholder claims by adopting charter or bylaw provisions that seek to establish an exclusive judicial forum.

Fee-Shifting Bylaws

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote against bylaws that mandate fee-shifting whenever plaintiffs are not completely successful on the merits (i.e., in cases where the plaintiffs are partially successful).

Bundled Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on bundled or conditional proxy proposals. In the case of items that are conditioned upon each other, examine the benefits and costs of the packaged items. In instances when the joint effect of the conditioned items is not in shareholders' best interests, vote against the proposals. If the combined effect is positive, support such proposals.

6. Mergers & Acquisitions / Corporate Restructurings

A number of academic and industry studies have estimated that nearly three quarters of all corporate acquisitions fail to create economically meaningful shareholder value. These studies have also demonstrated that the larger the deal the greater the risk in realizing long-term value for shareholders of the acquiring firm. These risks include integration challenges, over-estimation of expected synergies, incompatible corporate cultures and poor succession planning. Indeed, some studies have found that smaller deals within specialized industries on average outperform “big bet” larger deals by a statistically significant factor.

In analyzing M&A deals, private placements or other transactional related items on proxy, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services performs a well-rounded analysis that seeks to balance all facets of the deal to ascertain whether the proposed acquisition is truly going to generate long-term value for shareholders and enhance the prospects of the ongoing corporation.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Votes on mergers and acquisitions are always considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the following factors:

- Impact of the merger on shareholder value;
- Perspective of ownership (target vs. acquirer) in the deal;
- Form and mix of payment (i.e. stock, cash, debt, etc.);
- Fundamental value drivers behind the deal;
- Anticipated financial and operating benefits realizable through combined synergies;
- Offer price (cost vs. premium);
- Change-in-control payments to executive officers;
- Financial viability of the combined companies as a single entity;
- Was the deal put together in good faith? What kind of auction setting took place? Were negotiations carried out at arm’s length? Was any portion of the process tainted by possible conflicts of interest?
- Fairness opinion (or lack thereof);
- Changes in corporate governance and their impact on shareholder rights;
- What are the potential legal or environmental liability risks associated with the target firm?
- Impact on community stakeholders and employees in both workforces; and
- How will the merger adversely affect employee benefits like pensions and health care?

Fair Price Provisions

Fair price provisions were originally designed to specifically defend against the most coercive of takeover devices—the two-tiered, front-end loaded tender offer. In such a hostile takeover, the bidder offers cash for enough shares to gain control of the target. At the same time, the acquirer states that once control has been obtained, the target’s remaining shares will be purchased with cash, cash and securities, or only securities. Since the payment offered for the remaining stock is, by design, less valuable than the original offer for the controlling shares, shareholders are forced to sell out early to maximize the value of their shares. Standard fair price provisions require that in the absence of board or shareholder approval of the acquisition the bidder must pay the remaining shareholders the same price for their shares that brought control.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for fair price proposals as long as the shareholder vote requirement embedded in the provision is no more than a majority of disinterested shares.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to lower the shareholder vote requirement in existing fair price provisions.

Appraisal Rights

Rights of appraisal provide shareholders who do not approve of the terms of certain corporate transactions the right to demand a judicial review in order to determine the fair value for their shares. The right of appraisal applies to mergers, sale of corporate assets, and charter amendments that may have a materially adverse effect on the rights of dissenting shareholders.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for proposals to restore or provide shareholders with the right of appraisal.

Corporate Restructuring

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Votes concerning corporate restructuring proposals, including minority squeeze outs, leveraged buyouts, spin-offs, liquidations, and asset sales, are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Spin-offs

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on spin-offs depending on the tax and regulatory advantages, planned use of sale proceeds, market focus, and managerial incentives.

Asset Sales

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Votes case-by-case on asset sales taking into consideration the impact on the balance sheet/working capital, value received for the asset, and potential elimination of diseconomies.

Liquidations

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on liquidations after reviewing management's efforts to pursue other alternatives, appraisal value of assets, and the compensation plan for executives managing the liquidation.

Going Private Transactions (LBOs, Minority Squeezeouts)

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote case-by-case on going private transactions, taking into account the following: offer price/premium, fairness opinion, how the deal was negotiated, conflicts of interest, other alternatives/offers considered, and non-completion risk.
- Vote case-by-case on “going dark” transactions, determining whether the transaction enhances shareholder value by taking into consideration whether the company has attained benefits from being publicly-traded (examination of trading volume, liquidity, and market research of the stock), cash-out value, whether the interests of continuing and cashed-out shareholders are balanced, and market reaction to public announcement of transaction.

Changing Corporate Name

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for changing the corporate name in all instances if proposed and supported by management and the board.

Plans of Reorganization (Bankruptcy)

The recent financial crisis has placed Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganizations as a potential alternative for distressed companies. While the number of bankruptcies has risen as evidenced by many firms, including General Motors and Lehman Brothers, the prevalence of these reorganizations can vary year over year due to, among other things, market conditions and a company's ability to sustain its operations. Additionally, the amount of time that lapses between a particular company's entrance into Chapter 11 and its submission of a plan of reorganization varies significantly depending on the complexity, timing, and jurisdiction of the particular case. These plans are often put to a vote of shareholders (in addition to other interested parties), as required by the Bankruptcy Code.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to common shareholders on bankruptcy plans of reorganization, considering the following factors including, but not limited to:

- Estimated value and financial prospects of the reorganized company;
- Percentage ownership of current shareholders in the reorganized company;
- Whether shareholders are adequately represented in the reorganization process (particularly through the existence of an official equity committee);
- The cause(s) of the bankruptcy filing, and the extent to which the plan of reorganization addresses the cause(s);
- Existence of a superior alternative to the plan of reorganization; and
- Governance of the reorganized company.

Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs)

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on SPAC mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

- *Valuation* - Is the value being paid by the SPAC reasonable? SPACs generally lack an independent fairness opinion and the financials on the target may be limited. Compare the conversion price with the intrinsic value of the target company provided in the fairness opinion. Also, evaluate the proportionate value of the combined entity attributable to the SPAC IPO shareholders versus the pre-merger value of SPAC. Additionally, a private company discount may be applied to the target, if it is a private entity.
- *Market reaction* - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction may be a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.
- *Deal timing* - A main driver for most transactions is that the SPAC charter typically requires the deal to be complete within 18 to 24 months, or the SPAC is to be liquidated. Evaluate the valuation, market reaction, and potential conflicts of interest for deals that are announced close to the liquidation date.
- *Negotiations and process* - What was the process undertaken to identify potential target companies within specified industry or location specified in charter? Consider the background of the sponsors.
- *Conflicts of interest* - How are sponsors benefiting from the transaction compared to IPO shareholders? Potential conflicts could arise if a fairness opinion is issued by the insiders to qualify the deal rather than a third party or if management is encouraged to pay a higher price for the target because of an 80 percent rule (the charter requires that the fair market value of the target is at least equal to 80 percent of net assets of the SPAC). Also, there may be sense of urgency by the management team of the SPAC to close the deal since its charter typically requires a transaction to be completed within the 18-24 month timeframe.
- *Voting agreements* - Are the sponsors entering into any voting agreements/tender offers with shareholders who are likely to vote against the proposed merger or exercise conversion rights?
- *Governance* - What is the impact of having the SPAC CEO or founder on key committees following the proposed merger?
- *Stakeholder Impact* - impact on community stakeholders and workforce including impact on stakeholders, such as job loss, community lending, equal opportunity, impact on environment etc.

Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) – Proposals for Extensions

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support requests to extend the termination date by up to one year from the SPAC's original termination date (inclusive of any built-in extension options, and accounting for prior extension requests).

Other factors that may be considered include: any added incentives, business combination status, other amendment terms, and, if applicable, use of money in the trust fund to pay excise taxes on redeemed shares.

7. Capital Structure

The management of a corporation's capital structure involves a number of important issues including dividend policy, types of assets, opportunities for growth, ability to finance new projects internally, and the cost of obtaining additional capital. Many financing decisions have a significant impact on shareholder value, particularly when they involve the issuance of additional common stock, preferred stock, or debt.

Common Stock Authorization

State statutes and stock exchanges require shareholder approval for increases in the number of common shares. Corporations increase their supply of common stock for a variety of ordinary business purposes: raising new capital, funding stock compensation programs, business acquisitions, implementation of stock splits, or payment of stock dividends.

Clear justification should accompany all management requests for shareholder approval of increases in authorized common stock. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports increases in authorized common stock to fund stock splits that are in shareholders' interests. Dual requests on the same ballot, in which an increase in common stock is requested in tandem with a reverse stock split in which shares are not proportionately reduced may not be in shareholder best interests. Although the reverse stock split may be needed in the face of imminent delisting, there is little justification in effectively approving two increases in common stock on the same ballot.

General Authorization Requests

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of common stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes.

Vote for an increase of up to **50** percent of current authorized shares.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if less than or equal to 50 percent, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- The proposal seeks to increase the number of authorized shares of the class of common stock that has superior voting rights to other share classes;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;
- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); or
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases above 50 percent of the current authorized shares when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In or subsequent to the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.

For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

Specific Authorization Requests

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized common shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support.

Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends

Stock splits/dividends involve the partitioning of the outstanding shares of a corporation into a larger number of shares, while proportionately decreasing the market price of the stock. Stock splits/dividends do not affect the equity of the company. An understanding of forward and reverse stock splits and stock dividends is relevant because proposals to increase authorized common shares may be tied to the implementation of a planned stock distribution.

Shareholders can effectively cancel a split or dividend if the company does not have sufficient shares to implement a split without an increase in authorized shares.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals to increase the common share authorization for stock split or stock dividend, provided that the increase in authorized shares is reasonable in accordance with Taft-Hartley Advisory Services' Common Stock Authorization policy.

Reverse Stock Splits

Reverse splits exchange multiple shares for a lesser amount to increase share price. Increasing share price is sometimes necessary to restore a company's share price to a level that will allow it to be traded on the national stock exchanges. In addition, some brokerage houses have a policy of not monitoring or investing in very low priced shares. Reverse stock splits can help maintain stock liquidity.

Evaluation of management proposals to implement a reverse stock split will take into account whether there is a corresponding proportional decrease in authorized shares. Without a corresponding decrease, a reverse stock split is effectively an increase in authorized shares by way of reducing the number of shares outstanding, while leaving the number of authorized shares to be issued at the pre-split level.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to implement a reverse stock split if:

- The number of authorized shares will be proportionately reduced; or
- The effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or less than half of the company's existing authorization.

Vote case-by-case on proposals that do not meet either of the above conditions, taking into consideration the following factors:

- Stock exchange notification to the company of a potential delisting; or
- Disclosure of substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern without additional financing;
- The company's rationale; or
- Other factors as applicable.

Shareholders should only vote for non-proportionate reverse stock splits in the most dire of situations. Companies should provide disclosure of external evidence that a potential delisting is imminent to separate the true emergencies from vague potential risks to shareholders.

Share Repurchase Programs

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: For U.S.-incorporated companies, and foreign-incorporated U.S. Domestic Issuers that are traded solely on U.S. exchanges, vote for management proposals to institute open-market share repurchase plans in which all shareholders may participate on equal terms, or to grant the board authority to conduct open-market repurchases, in the absence of company-specific concerns regarding:

- Greenmail,
 - buybacks to inappropriately manipulate incentive compensation metrics,
 - Threats to the company's long-term viability, or
 - Other company-specific factors as warranted.
-
- The use of Vote case-by-case on proposals to repurchase shares directly from specified shareholders, balancing the stated rationale against the possibility for the repurchase authority to be misused, such as to repurchase shares from insiders at a premium to market price.

Preferred Stock Authorization

Preferred stock is an equity security which has certain features similar to debt instruments- such as fixed dividend payments and seniority of claims to common stock - and usually carries little to no voting rights. The terms of blank check preferred stock give the board of directors the power to issue shares of preferred stock at their discretion with voting, conversion, distribution, and other rights to be determined by the board at time of issue.

General Authorization Requests

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of preferred stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes.

Vote for an increase of up to 50 percent of current authorized shares.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if less than or equal to 50 percent, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- If the shares requested are blank check preferred shares that can be used for antitakeover purposes;¹⁷
- The company seeks to increase a class of non-convertible preferred shares entitled to more than one vote per share on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders "supervoting shares");
- The company seeks to increase a class of convertible preferred shares entitled to a number of votes greater than the number of common shares into which they're convertible ("supervoting shares") on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders;
- The stated intent of the increase in the general authorization is to allow the company to increase an existing designated class of supervoting preferred shares;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;

¹⁷ To be acceptable, appropriate disclosure would be needed that the shares are "declawed": i.e., representation by the board that it will not, without prior stockholder approval, issue or use the preferred stock for any defensive or anti-takeover purpose or for the purpose of implementing any stockholder rights plan.

- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); or
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases above 50 percent of the current authorization when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In, or subsequent to, the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.

For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

Specific Authorization Requests

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized preferred shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support.

Blank Check Preferred Stock

Blank check preferred stock, with unspecified voting, conversion, dividend, distribution, and other rights, can be used for sound corporate purposes but can also be used as a device to thwart hostile takeovers without shareholder approval.

- Vote against proposals that would authorize the creation of new classes of blank check preferred stock.
- Vote against proposals to increase the number of blank check preferred stock authorized for issuance when no shares have been issued or reserved for a specific purpose.
- Vote for proposals to create “decawed” blank check preferred stock (stock that cannot be used as a takeover defense).
- Vote for requests to require shareholder approval for blank check authorizations.

Adjust Par Value of Common Stock

Stock that has a fixed per share value that is on its certificate is called par value stock. The purpose of par value stock is to establish the maximum responsibility of a stockholder in the event that a corporation becomes insolvent. Proposals to reduce par value come from certain state level requirements for regulatory industries such as banks and other legal requirements relating to the payment of dividends.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to reduce the par value of common stock.

Preemptive Rights

Preemptive rights permit shareholders to share proportionately in any new issues of stock of the same class. These rights guarantee existing shareholders the first opportunity to purchase shares of new issues of stock in the same class as their own and in the same proportion. The absence of these rights could cause stockholders' interest in a company to be reduced by the sale of additional shares without their knowledge and at prices unfavorable to

them. Preemptive rights, however, can make it difficult for corporations to issue large blocks of stock for general corporate purposes.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to create or abolish preemptive rights. In evaluating proposals on preemptive rights, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services looks at the size of a company and the characteristics of its shareholder base.

Debt Restructuring

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding debt restructurings.
- Vote for the debt restructuring if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.
- Review on a case-by-case basis proposals to increase common and/or preferred shares and to issue shares as part of a debt-restructuring plan. The following factors are considered:
 - *Dilution*—How much will the ownership interest of existing shareholders be reduced, and how extreme will dilution to any future earnings be?
 - *Change in Control*—Will the transaction result in a change in control of the company? Are board and committee seats guaranteed? Do standstill provisions and voting agreements exist?
 - *Financial Issues*— company's financial situation, degree of need for capital, use of proceeds, and effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
 - *Terms of the offer*—discount/premium in purchase price to investor including any fairness opinion, termination penalties and exit strategy;
 - *Conflict of interest*—arm's length transactions and managerial incentives; and
 - Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives.

Share Issuance Mandates at U.S. Domestic Issuers Incorporated Outside the U.S.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: For U.S. domestic issuers incorporated outside the U.S. and listed solely on a U.S. exchange, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 10 percent of currently issued common share capital, where not tied to a specific transaction or financing proposal.

For pre-revenue or other early-stage companies that are heavily reliant on periodic equity financing, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 50 percent of currently issued common share capital. The burden of proof will be on the company to establish that it has a need for the higher limit.

Renewal of such mandates should be sought at each year's annual meeting.

Vote case-by-case on share issuances for a specific transaction or financing proposal.

8. State of Incorporation

Voting on State Takeover Statutes

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Review on a case-by-case basis proposals to opt in or out of state takeover statutes (including control share acquisition statutes, control share cash-out statutes, freeze out provisions, fair price provisions, stakeholder laws, poison pill endorsements, severance pay and labor contract provisions, anti-greenmail provisions, and disgorgement provisions). Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally supports opting into stakeholder protection statutes if they provide comprehensive protections for employees and community stakeholders. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services is less supportive of takeover statutes that only serve to

protect incumbent management from accountability to shareholders and which negatively influence shareholder value.

Reincorporation Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Management or shareholder proposals to change a company's state of incorporation should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, giving consideration to both financial and corporate governance concerns including the following:

- Reasons for reincorporation;
- Comparison of company's governance practices and provisions prior to and following the reincorporation; and
- Comparison of corporation laws of original state and destination state.

Vote for reincorporation when the economic factors outweigh any neutral or negative governance changes.

Offshore Reincorporations and Tax Havens

For a company that seeks to reincorporate, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services evaluates the merits of the move on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the company's strategic rationale for the move, the potential economic ramifications, potential tax benefits, and any corporate governance changes that may impact shareholders. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services believes there are a number of concerns associated with a company looking to reincorporate from the United States to offshore locales such as Bermuda, the Cayman Islands or Panama. With more U.S.-listed companies seeking to move offshore, shareholders are beginning to understand the web of complexities surrounding the legal, tax, and governance implications involved in such a transaction.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote case-by-case on proposed offshore moves, taking into consideration:
 - Legal recourse for U.S. stockholders of the new company and the enforcement of legal judgments against the company under the U.S. securities laws;
 - The transparency (or lack thereof) of the new locale's legal system;
 - Adoption of any shareholder-unfriendly corporate law provisions;
 - Actual, quantifiable tax benefits associated with foreign incorporation;
 - Potential for accounting manipulations and/or discrepancies;
 - Any pending U.S. legislation concerning offshore companies;
 - Prospects of reputational harm and potential damage to brand name via increased media coverage concerning corporate expatriation.
- Generally vote for shareholder requests calling for "expatriate" companies that are domiciled abroad yet predominantly owned and operated in America to re-domesticate back to a U.S. state jurisdiction.

While a firm's country of incorporation will remain the primary basis for evaluating companies, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services will generally apply its U.S. policies to the extent possible with respect to issuers that file DEF 14As, 10-K annual reports, and 10-Q quarterly reports, and are thus considered domestic issuers by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). U.S. policies will also apply to companies listed on U.S. exchanges as Foreign Private Issuers (FPIs) and that may be exempt from the disclosure and corporate governance requirements that apply to most companies traded on U.S. exchanges, including a number of SEC rules and stock market listing requirements. Corporations that have reincorporated outside the U.S. have found themselves subject to a combination of governance regulations and best practice standards that may not be entirely compatible with an evaluation framework based solely on the country of incorporation.

9. Corporate Responsibility & Accountability

Social, Environmental and Sustainability Issues

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally supports social, workforce, and environmental shareholder-sponsored resolutions if they seek to create responsible corporate citizens while at the same time attempting to enhance long-term shareholder value. Taft-Hartley Advisory Services typically supports proposals that ask for disclosure reporting of information that is not available outside the company that is not proprietary in nature. Such reporting is particularly most vital when it appears that a company has not adequately addressed shareholder concerns regarding social, workplace, environmental and/or other issues. A determination whether the request is relevant to the company's core business and in-line with industry practice will be made on a case-by-case basis. The proponent of the resolution must make the case that the benefits of additional disclosure outweigh the costs of producing the report.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: In analyzing social, workplace, environmental, and other related proposals, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services considers the following factors:

- Whether the proposal itself is well framed and reasonable;
- Whether adoption of the proposal would have either a positive or negative impact on the company's short-term or long-term share value;
- Whether the company's analysis and voting recommendation to shareholders is persuasive;
- The degree to which the company's stated position on the issues could affect its reputation or sales, or leave it vulnerable to boycott or selective purchasing;
- Whether the subject of the proposal is best left to the discretion of the board;
- Whether the issues presented in the proposal are being appropriately or effectively dealt with through legislation, government regulation, or company-specific action;
- The company's approach compared with its peers or any industry standard practices for addressing the issue(s) raised by the proposal;
- Whether the company has already responded in an appropriate or sufficient manner to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's practices related to the issue(s) raised in the proposal;
- If the proposal requests increased disclosure or greater transparency, whether sufficient information is publicly available to shareholders and whether it would be unduly burdensome for the company to compile and avail the requested information to shareholders in a more comprehensive or amalgamated fashion; and
- Whether implementation of the proposal would achieve the objectives sought in the proposal.

In general, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports proposals that request the company to furnish information helpful to shareholders in evaluating the company's operations from top to bottom. In order to be able to intelligently monitor their investments, shareholders often need information that is best provided by the company in which they have invested on behalf of their end beneficiaries. Qualified requests satisfying the aforementioned criteria usually merit support.

Proposals requesting that the company cease certain actions that the proponent believes are harmful to society or some segment of society will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Special attention will be made to the company's legal and ethical obligations, its ability to remain profitable, and potential negative publicity if the company fails to honor the request. A high standard will need to be met by proponents requesting specific action like divestiture of a business line or operation, legal remuneration, or withdrawal from certain high-risk markets.

I. GENERAL CSR RELATED

Special Policy Review and Shareholder Advisory Committees

These resolutions propose the establishment of special committees of the board to address broad corporate policy and provide forums for ongoing dialogue on issues including, but not limited to shareholder relations, the environment, occupational health and safety, and executive compensation.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Support these proposals when they appear to offer a potentially effective method for enhancing shareholder value.

International Operations

The rise of globalization has put increasing importance on the need for U.S. companies to periodically monitor their business operations abroad. As a means to preserve brand integrity and protect against potentially costly litigation and negative public relations, Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally supports shareholder proposals which call for a report on the company's core business policies and procedures of its operations outside the United States.

Many of the resolutions which address a company's international policies can include: impact of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in emerging market economies; corporate safeguards against money laundering; terrorist financing; economic de-stabilization concerns; relationships with international financial institutions (IFIs); and product sales/marketing abroad (i.e., tobacco, pharmaceutical drug pricing).

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support proposals asking for policy clarification and reporting on international operations that can materially impact the company's short and long-term bottom-line.

Affirm Political Non-Partisanship

Employees should not be put in a position where professional standing and goodwill within the corporation could be jeopardized as a result of political beliefs. Responsible employment practices should protect workers from an environment characterized by political indoctrination or intimidation. Corporations should not devote resources to partisan political activities, nor should they compel their employees to contribute to or support particular causes. Moreover, it is wise for a corporation to maintain a politically neutral stance as to avoid potentially embarrassing conflicts of interests that could negatively impact the company's brand name with consumers.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support proposals affirming political non-partisanship within the company.

Political Contributions, Lobbying Reporting & Disclosure

Changes in legislation that governs corporate political giving have, rather than limiting such contributions, increased the complexity of tracking how much money corporations contribute to the political process and where that money ultimately ends up. In January 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* lifted restrictions on corporate spending in federal elections. A company's involvement in the political process could impact shareholder value if such activities are not properly overseen and managed.

Shareholders have the right to know about corporate political activities, and management's knowledge that such information can be made publicly available should encourage a company's lawful and responsible use of political contributions.

Moreover, it is critical that shareholders understand the internal controls that are in place at a company to adequately manage political contributions and lobbying practices. Given the significant reputational and financial risk involved in political giving, shareholders should expect management to have the necessary capabilities to monitor and track all monies distributed toward political groups and causes. These internal controls should be fully consistent with Section 404 requirements of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002.

While political contributions, lobbying and other corporate political activity can benefit the strategic interests of a company, it is important that accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure that monies disbursed in support of political objectives actually generate identifiable returns on shareholder wealth. Such mechanisms serve to insure against the use of shareholder funds in the furtherance of narrow management agendas.

When analyzing the proposals, special consideration will be made if the target company has been the subject of significant controversy stemming from its contributions or political activities, if the company fails to disclose a policy to shareholders that outlines the process by which the company considers its political contributions and lobbying activities, or if the company has recently been involved in significant controversy or litigation related to the company's political contributions or governmental affairs.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Support reporting of political and political action committee (PAC) contributions.
- Support establishment of corporate political contributions guidelines and internal reporting provisions or controls.
- Generally support shareholder proposals requesting companies to review and report on their political lobbying activities including efforts to influence governmental legislation.
- Vote against shareholder proposals asking to publish in newspapers and public media the company's political contributions as such publications could present significant cost to the company without providing commensurate value to shareholders.
- Generally vote case-by-case on proposals requesting comparison of a company's political spending to objectives that can mitigate material risks for the company, such as limiting global warming.

Military Sales

Shareholder proposals from church groups and other community organizations have asked companies for detailed reports on foreign military sales. These proposals often can be created at reasonable cost to the company and contain no proprietary data. Large companies can supply this information without undue burden and provide shareholders with information affecting corporate performance and decision-making.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally support reports on foreign military sales and economic conversion of facilities and where such reporting will not disclose sensitive information that could impact the company adversely or increase its legal exposure.
- Generally vote against proposals asking a company to develop specific military contracting criteria.

Report on Operations in Sensitive Regions or Countries

Over the past decade, a number of public companies – especially within the extractive sector – have withdrawn from geopolitically sensitive regions as a result of being associated with political controversies involving their host countries (i.e. Myanmar, the Sudan, China, Iran, etc.). Oil and natural gas companies, in particular, continue to be the largest investors in many countries involved in human rights abuse and terrorist activities. As such, these companies become targets of consumer boycotts, public relations backlash and even governmental intervention.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally support shareholder proposals to adopt labor standards in connection with involvement in a certain market and other potentially sensitive geopolitical regions.
- Generally support shareholder proposals seeking a report on operations within a certain market and documentation of costs of continued involvement in a given country or region.
- Generally support requests for establishment of a board committee to review and report on the reputational risks and legal compliance with U.S. sanctions as a result of the company's continued operations in countries associated with terrorist sponsored activities.
- Consider shareholder proposals to pull out of a certain market on a case-by-case basis considering factors such as overall cost, FDI exposure, level of disclosure for investors, magnitude of controversy, and the current business focus of the company.

Tax Transparency

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose on tax transparency and country-by-country reporting (CbCR), in alignment with internationally-accepted frameworks, such as the Global Reporting Initiative Tax Standard (GRI 207: Tax 2019) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) BEPS Action 13 (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting).

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Companies have received shareholder proposals requesting increased disclosure of responsible AI policies, procedures, and practices with respect to board oversight, environmental sustainability, and human rights risk mitigation.

AI and data center issues are wide-ranging. Some areas where companies may face AI-related risks that could materially impact their operations include:

- How high levels of AI-driven energy use may impact GHG emissions targets, climate goals, and climate transition plans;
- How using AI to increase fossil fuel development and production may impact climate targets, and may pose legal and reputational risks;
- Data centers exacerbating water stress, especially in drought-prone areas;
- Child safety;
- End use due diligence (how use of AI for surveillance and censorship, especially in conflict-affected and high-risk areas, may impact legal and reputational risk);
- Data acquisition and usage (privacy, safety, intellectual property);
- Human capital management (bias, discrimination, workplace monitoring, health and safety, automation, and other workforce impacts);
- Just AI transition;
- Misinformation and disinformation;
- Privacy concerns, and potential promotion of hate speech and discrimination, related to targeted advertising; and
- Potential human rights impacts related to weapons development and deployment.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting companies to prepare reports or adopt policies in line with internationally accepted frameworks. The scope of this policy takes

into consideration the entire AI lifecycle and value chain, from upstream components and data sourcing, to downstream applications, safety and security issues, and other broader societal and environmental impacts.

II. ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE

Shareholder proposals addressing environmental and energy concerns have been plentiful in recent years and generally seek greater disclosure on an issue or seek to improve a company's environmental practices in order to protect the world's natural resources. In addition, some proponents cite the negative financial implications for companies with poor environmental practices, including liabilities associated with site clean-ups and lawsuits, as well as arguments that energy efficient products and clean environmental practices are sustainable business practices that will contribute to long-term shareholder value. Shareholders say the majority of independent atmospheric scientists agree that global warming poses a serious problem to the health and welfare of all countries, citing the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's most authoritative scientific body on the subject. Shareholder proponents argue that companies can report on their greenhouse gas emissions within a few months at reasonable cost.

Environmental Justice

Companies have faced proposals addressing environmental justice concerns, focused on vulnerable stakeholders – particularly communities of color and low-income communities – who are disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution. These heightened risks can be exacerbated by climate change.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting disclosure of an environmental justice report, as well as a third-party environmental justice assessment.

Financed Emissions

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: For financial institutions and companies that provide financial services, generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to increase disclosure of its financed emissions and/or to adopt a policy to reduce its financed emissions. Financed emissions (scope 3, category 15) are emissions associated with a company's investments, not already covered under scopes 1 and 2 – including but not limited to equity investments, debt investments, and project finance. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of the company's financed emissions disclosure;
- Whether the company's decarbonization targets and climate transition plan are in alignment with the Paris Agreement, the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario, and other internationally recognized frameworks;
- Whether the company's methodology is in alignment with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHG Protocol), the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF), and other generally accepted calculation and reporting methodologies; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Scientists generally agree that gases released by chemical reactions including the burning of fossil fuels contribute to a "greenhouse effect" that traps the planet's heat. Environmentalists claim that the greenhouse gases produced by the industrial age have caused recent weather crises such as heat waves, rainstorms, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and receding coastlines. With notable exceptions, a number of business leaders have described

the rise and fall of global temperatures as naturally occurring phenomena and depicted corporate impact on climate change as minimal.

Shareholder proposals asking a company to issue a report to shareholders – at reasonable cost and omitting proprietary information – on greenhouse gas emissions ask that the report include descriptions of efforts within companies to reduce emissions, their financial exposure and potential liability from operations that contribute to global warming, and their direct or indirect efforts to promote the view that global warming is not a threat. Proponents argue that there is scientific proof that the burning of fossil fuels causes global warming, that future legislation may make companies financially liable for their contributions to global warming, changing market dynamics and consumer preferences may impact demand for fossil fuels, and thus shareholder value, and that a report on the company's role in global warming can be assembled at reasonable cost.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling for a company to commit to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions under a reasonable timeline.
- Generally vote for resolutions requesting that a company disclose information on the financial, physical, or regulatory risks related to climate change on its operations and investments, or on how the company identifies, measures, and manages such risks.
- Generally vote for proposals requesting a report on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from company operations and/or products and operations.
- Generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report on reducing methane emissions and to assess the reliability of the company's methane emission disclosures.

Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan¹⁸, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions in line with Paris Agreement goals (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
- Whether the company has sought and received third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
- Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
- Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
- Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
- Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
- Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and
- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

¹⁸ Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report providing its GHG emissions levels and reduction targets and/or its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan, taking into account information such as the following:

- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- The company's alignment with relevant internationally recognized frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and IEA's Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Investment in Renewable Energy

Filers of proposals on renewable energy ask companies to increase their investment in renewable energy sources and to work to develop products that rely more on renewable energy sources. Increased use of renewable energy is expected to reduce the negative environmental impact of energy companies. In addition, as supplies of oil and coal exist in the earth in limited quantities, renewable energy sources represent a competitive, and some would even argue essential, long-term business strategy.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support shareholder proposals seeking increased investment in renewable energy sources, taking into account whether the terms of the resolution are realistic or overly restrictive for management to pursue.

Just Transition

Companies have faced proposals requesting disclosure on the just transition – addressing stakeholder concerns within a company's value chain with regards to the effects of climate change and the energy transition. Relevant stakeholder groups can include employees, suppliers (and workers in supply chains), communities impacted by operations, and other vulnerable groups potentially affected by a company's climate change strategy. Just transition disclosure should adequately assess, consult on, and address impacts on affected stakeholders regarding climate change risks.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting just transition and labor protection disclosure, in alignment with the International Labour Organization, the World Benchmarking Alliance, and other generally accepted guidelines and indicators.

Natural Capital

Natural capital disclosure has moved into the mainstream of climate change reporting. The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework have mobilized widespread recognition of the fact that Paris Agreement-aligned targets can only be achieved by integrating natural capital-related concerns. As such, there has been increased market uptake around natural capital disclosures and commitments, particularly around TNFD-aligned reporting, as well as alignment with other internationally accepted reporting frameworks.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting disclosure of TNFD-aligned reporting, including but not limited to a biodiversity impact and dependency assessment. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of the company's natural capital-related disclosure;
- Whether the company's natural capital disclosure adequately incorporate governance, strategy, risk and impact management, and metrics and targets;
- Whether the company's targets and climate transition plan are in alignment with TNFD, the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement, and other internationally recognized frameworks; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Natural capital-related shareholder proposals also encompass a broad range of industries. Various market-led initiatives have identified key sectors for investor-issuer engagement, including but not limited to: chemicals, consumer goods, food and agriculture, forestry, mining, oil and gas, packaging, and pharmaceuticals. Some proposals also address indigenous peoples' rights, which is also a key consideration for natural capital frameworks.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting companies to increase disclosure and/or to adopt sustainable sourcing policies with regards to natural capital-related risks, dependencies, and impacts.

Sustainability Reporting and Planning

The concept of sustainability is commonly understood as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Indeed, the term sustainability is complex and poses significant challenges for companies on many levels. Many in the investment community have termed this broader responsibility the "triple bottom line," referring to the triad of performance goals related to economic prosperity, social responsibility and environmental quality. In essence, the concept requires companies to balance the needs and interests of their various stakeholders while operating in a manner that sustains business growth for the long-term, supports local communities and protects the environment and natural capital for future generations.

Reporting and enhanced disclosure addressing sustainable development is important to companies namely because it offers a formal structure for decision making that helps management teams anticipate and address important global trends that can have serious consequences for business and society. Shareholders may request general sustainability reports on a specific location or operation, often requesting that the company detail the environmental, social, legal and other risks and/or potential liabilities of the specific project in question.

A number of companies have begun to report on sustainability issues using established standards in the marketplace. Such reporting focuses on corporate compliance and measurement regarding key economic, environmental, and social performance indicators. As a best practice, companies release annual sustainability reports in conjunction to regular annual statement of operations.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support shareholder proposals seeking greater disclosure on the company's environmental and social practices, and/or associated risks and liabilities.

Operations in Protected or Sensitive Areas

Operating in regions protected or established under national or international categorization guidelines, including wildlife refuges, national forests, and International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) categorized areas, expose companies to increased oversight and the potential for associated risk and controversy. While it is important for a company to have the flexibility to operate in these regions to take advantage of strategic placement or growth, additional disclosure could be an important mitigating factor to address increased risk and oversight. Restrictions to the company's operations, damaging public relations, and costly litigation resulting from failure to comply with the requirements associated with protected or categorized regions could have a significant impact on shareholder value.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support shareholder requests for reports outlining potential environmental damage from operations in protected regions, including wildlife refuges, unless the company does not currently have operations or plans to develop operations in these protected regions.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Shareholder proponents have elevated concerns on the use of hydraulic fracturing, an increasingly controversial process in which water, sand, and a mix of chemicals is blasted horizontally into tight layers of shale rock to extract natural gas. As this practice has gained more widespread use, environmentalists have raised concerns that the chemicals mixed with sand and water to aid the fracturing process can contaminate ground water supplies. Proponents of resolutions at companies that employ hydraulic fracturing are also concerned that wastewater produced by the process could overload the waste treatment plants to which it is shipped. Shareholders have asked companies that utilize hydraulic fracturing to report on the environmental impact of the practice and to disclose policies designed to reduce hazards from the process.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for requests seeking greater transparency on the practice of hydraulic fracturing and its associated risks.

Recycling Policy

A number of companies have received proposals to step-up their recycling efforts, with the goal of reducing the company's negative impact on the environment and reducing costs over the long-term.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that ask companies to increase their recycling efforts or to adopt a formal recycling policy.

Endorsement of Ceres Roadmap to 2030

These resolutions call for the adoption of principles that encourage the company to protect the environment and the safety and health of its employees. The Ceres Roadmap 2030, formulated by Ceres (formerly known as the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies, CERES), require signing companies to address environmental issues, including protection of the biosphere, sustainable use of natural resources, reduction and disposal of wastes, energy conservation, and employee and community risk reduction. A signatory to the Ceres Roadmap 2030 would disclose its efforts in such areas through a standardized report submitted to Ceres and made available to the public.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services supports proposals that improve a company's public image, reduce exposure to liabilities, and establish standards so that environmentally responsible companies and markets are not at a competitive financial disadvantage.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for requests asking a company to formally adopt the Ceres Roadmap 2030.
- Vote for adoption of reports to shareholders on environmental issues.

Land Use

Many large retail stores and real estate development firms have received criticism over their policies and processes for acquiring and developing land. Often, in such cases, there are organizations that support as well as those that oppose the proposed development.

Many of these requests brought forth by the respective stakeholders raise serious issues that can have a real impact on short-term shareholder value. However, in some cases, additional reporting may be duplicative of

existing disclosure or may fail to provide added benefit to shareholders commensurate with the associated cost or burden of providing additional information. Some of the companies targeted with such resolutions have been subject to recent litigation, significant fines stemming from their land use practices, and/or recent community boycotts.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support shareholder resolutions that request better disclosure of detailed information on a company's policies related to land use or development or compliance with local and national laws and zoning requirements.

Water Use

Shareholders may ask for a company to prepare a report evaluating the business risks linked to water use and impacts on the company's supply chain, including subsidiaries and bottling partners. Such proposals also ask companies to disclose current policies and procedures for mitigating the impact of operations on local communities in areas of water scarcity.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals seeking the preparation of a report on a company's risks linked to water use.

III. WORKPLACE PRACTICES & HUMAN RIGHTS

Equal Employment Opportunity

These proposals generally request that a company establish a policy of reporting to shareholders its progress with equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. The costs of violating federal laws that prohibit discrimination by corporations are high and can affect corporate earnings.

The Equal Opportunities Employment Commission (EEOC) does not release the company's filings to the public unless it is involved in litigation, and it is difficult to obtain from other sources. Companies need to be sensitive to minority employment issues as the work force becomes increasingly diverse. This information can be provided with little cost to the company and does not create an unreasonable burden on management.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals calling for action on equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination.
- Vote for proposals requesting legal and regulatory compliance and public reporting related to non-discrimination, affirmative action, workplace health and safety, environmental issues, and labor policies and practices that affect long-term corporate performance.
- Vote for proposals advocating for non-discrimination in salary, wages, and all benefits.

High-Performance Workplace

High-performance workplace practices emphasize employee training, participation, and feedback. The concept of a high-performance workplace has been endorsed by the U.S. Department of Labor and refers to a workplace that is designed to provide workers with the information, skills, incentives, and responsibility to make decisions essential for innovation, quality improvement and rapid response to changes in the marketplace. These standards embrace a "what is good for the worker is good for the company" philosophy. Studies have shown that improvement in human resources practices is associated with increases in total return to shareholders. High-performance workplace standards proposals can include linking compensation to social measures such as employee training, morale and safety, environmental performance and workplace lawsuits.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support proposals that incorporate high-performance workplace standards.

Workplace Safety

In light of fatal accidents at oil refineries (Tesoro – Anacortes refinery, April 2010; and BP – Texas City refinery, March 2005), the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon incident in the Gulf of Mexico, and the explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch mine in 2010, shareholders have sought greater transparency and accountability regarding workplace safety by filing resolutions at a number of corporations.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting workplace safety reports, including reports on accident risk reduction efforts.

Non-Discrimination in Retirement Benefits

A cash balance plan is a defined benefit plan that treats an earned retirement benefit as if it were a credit from a defined contribution plan, but which provides a stated benefit at the end of its term. Because employer contributions to these plans are credited evenly over the life of a plan and not based on a seniority formula, they may reduce payouts to long-term employees who are currently vested in plans.

Cash-balance pension conversions have undergone significant congressional and federal agency scrutiny in the wake of high-profile EEOC complaints on age discrimination and employee anger at several large blue-chip companies. While significant policy reform is unlikely in the short-term, business interests are worried enough that the National Association of Manufacturers and other pro-business lobbies have formed a coalition on Capitol Hill to preserve the essential features of the plans and to overturn an IRS ruling.

Driving the push behind conversions from traditional pension plans to cash-balance plans are the substantial savings that companies generate in the process. Critics point out that this savings is gained at the expense of the most senior employees. Shareholder resolutions may call on corporate boards to establish a committee of outside directors to prepare a report to shareholders on the potential impact of pension-related proposals being considered by national policymakers in reaction to the controversy spawned by the plans.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Support proposals calling for a non-discrimination policy with regard to retirement benefits and pension management at a company.

Gender, Race/Ethnicity Pay Gaps

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's pay data by gender or race/ ethnicity, or a report on a company's policies and goals to reduce any gender or race/ethnicity pay gaps, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and disclosure related to both its diversity and inclusion policies and practices and its compensation philosophy on fair and equitable compensation practices;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap issues;
- The company's disclosure regarding gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers; and
- Local laws regarding categorization of race and/or ethnicity and definitions of ethnic and/or racial minorities.

Racial Equity and/or Civil Rights Audit Guidelines

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company conduct an independent racial equity and/or civil rights audit, considering company disclosures, policies, actions, and engagements.

Sexual Harassment

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on company actions taken to strengthen policies and oversight to prevent workplace sexual harassment, or a report on risks posed by a company's failure to prevent workplace sexual harassment, taking into account:

- The company's current policies, practices, oversight mechanisms related to preventing workplace sexual harassment;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to workplace sexual harassment issues; and
- The company's disclosure regarding workplace sexual harassment policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers.

Mandatory Arbitration

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on a company's use of mandatory arbitration on employment-related claims, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims; and
- The company's disclosure of its policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements compared to its peers.

Fair Lending Reporting and Compliance

These resolutions call for financial institutions to comply with fair lending laws and statutes while avoiding predatory practices in their sub-prime lending. These predatory practices include: lending to borrowers with inadequate income, who will then default; not reporting on payment performances of borrowers to credit agencies; implying that credit life insurance is necessary to obtain the loan (packing); unnecessarily high fees; refinancing with high additional fees rather than working out a loan that is in arrears (flipping); and high pre-payment fees.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Support proposals calling for full compliance with fair-lending laws.
- Support reporting on overall lending policies and data.

MacBride Principles

These resolutions have called for the adoption of the MacBride Principles for operations located in Northern Ireland. They request companies operating abroad to support the equal employment opportunity policies that apply in facilities they operate domestically. The principles were established to address the sectarian hiring problems between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. It is well documented that Northern Ireland's Catholic community faced much higher unemployment figures than the Protestant community. In response to this

problem, the U.K. government instituted the New Fair Employment Act of 1989 (and subsequent amendments) to address the sectarian hiring problems.

Many companies believe that the Act adequately addresses the problems and that further action, including adoption of the MacBride Principles, only duplicates the efforts already underway. In evaluating a proposal to adopt the MacBride Principles, shareholders must decide whether the principles will cause companies to divest, and therefore worsen the unemployment problem, or whether the principles will promote equal hiring practices. Proponents believe that the Fair Employment Act does not sufficiently address the sectarian hiring problems. They argue that the MacBride Principles serve to stabilize the situation and promote further investment.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Support the MacBride Principles for operations in Northern Ireland that request that companies abide by equal employment opportunity policies.

Contract Supplier Standards

These resolutions call for compliance with governmental mandates and corporate policies regarding nondiscrimination, affirmative action, work place safety and health, and other basic labor protections.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support proposals that:

- Seek publication of a “Worker Code of Conduct” to be implemented by the company’s foreign suppliers and licensees, requiring they satisfy all applicable labor standards and laws protecting employees’ wages, benefits, working conditions, freedom of association, right to collectively bargain, and other rights;
- Request a report summarizing the company’s current practices for enforcement of its Worker Code of Conduct;
- Seek to establish independent monitoring mechanism in conjunction with local and respected religious and human rights groups to monitor supplier and licensee compliance with the Worker Code of Conduct;
- Create incentives to encourage suppliers to raise standards rather than terminate contracts;
- Implement policies for ongoing wage adjustments, ensuring adequate purchasing power and a sustainable living wage for employees of foreign suppliers and licensees;
- Request public disclosure of contract supplier reviews on a regular basis; and
- Adopt labor standards for foreign and domestic suppliers to ensure that the company will not do business with foreign suppliers that manufacture products for sale in the U.S. using forced or child labor or with suppliers that fail to comply with applicable laws protecting employees’ wages and working conditions.

Corporate and Supplier Codes of Conduct

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services generally supports proposals that call for the adoption and/or enforcement of clear principles or codes of conduct relating to countries in which there are systematic violations of human rights. These conditions include the use of slave, child, or prison labor, undemocratically elected governments, widespread reports by human rights advocates, fervent pro-democracy protests, or economic sanctions and boycotts.

Many proposals refer to the seven core conventions, commonly referred to as the “Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights At Work,” ratified by the International Labor Organization (ILO). The seven conventions fall under four broad categories: i) right to organize and bargain collectively; ii) non-discrimination in employment; iii) abolition of forced labor; and iv) end of child labor. Each member nation of the ILO body is bound to respect and promote these rights to the best of their abilities.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Support the principles and codes of conduct relating to company investment and/or operations in countries with patterns of human rights abuses or pertaining to geographic regions experiencing political turmoil (Northern Ireland, Columbia, Burma, former Soviet Union, and China).
- Support the implementation and reporting on ILO codes of conduct.
- Support independent monitoring programs in conjunction with local and respected religious and human rights groups to monitor supplier and licensee compliance with Codes.
- Support requests that a company conduct an assessment of the human rights risks in its operation or in its supply chain, or report on its human rights risk assessment process.

IV. CONSUMER HEALTH & PUBLIC SAFETY

Phase-out or Label Products Containing Genetically Engineered Ingredients

Shareholder activists request companies engaged in the development of genetically modified agricultural products (GMOs) to adopt a policy of not marketing or distributing such products until long term safety testing demonstrates that they are not harmful to humans, animals or the environment. Until further long term testing demonstrates that these products are not harmful, companies in the restaurant, prepared foods and packaging industries are being asked to remove genetically altered ingredients from products they manufacture, distribute or sell, and label such products in the interim. Shareholders are asking supermarket companies to do the same for their own private label brands.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals to label products that contain genetically engineered products.
- Generally vote against proposals calling for a full phase out of product lines containing GMO ingredients.

Tobacco-Related Proposals

Shareholders file resolutions annually asking that companies with ties to the tobacco industry account for their marketing and distribution strategies, particularly as they impact smoking by young people. While the specific resolutions for shareholder proponents vary from year to year, activist shareholders consistently make the tobacco industry a prominent target. Examples of tobacco proposals include: attempting to link executive compensation with teen smoking rates; the placement of company tobacco products in retail outlets; the impact of second hand smoke; and a review of advertising campaigns and their impact on children and minority groups.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking to limit the sale of tobacco products to minors.
- Generally vote against proposals calling for a full phase out of tobacco related product lines.

Toxic Emissions

Shareholder proposals asking companies to take steps to minimize their emissions of toxic chemicals or release of toxic wastes into the environment can vary greatly. Some focus on reporting on the impact of these chemicals on the communities in which the company operates. Still others ask for a review of the company's efforts to minimize pollution.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals calling on the company to establish a plan to reduce toxic emissions.

Toxic Chemicals

The use of toxic chemicals in cosmetics, consumables, and household products has become a growing issue of concern for shareholders as international regulations on this topic continue to expand, providing increased scrutiny over potentially toxic materials or compounds used or emitted in the conduct of operations or as an ingredient in consumer goods. Shareholders must recognize the impact that changing regulation and consumer expectations could have on shareholder value and should encourage companies to disclose their policies regarding the use or emission of toxic chemicals. Specific considerations should be made for a company's geographic markets and the appearance of historical difficulties with controversy, fines, or litigation, requests for disclosure on the potential financial and legal risk associated with toxic chemicals.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally support resolutions requesting that a company disclose its policies related to toxic chemicals.
- Generally support shareholder resolutions requesting that companies evaluate and disclose the potential financial and legal risks associated with utilizing certain chemicals.
- Consider shareholder proposals requesting companies to substitute or replace existing products on a case-by-case basis, with consideration for applicable regulations and standards in the markets in which the company participates.

Nuclear Safety

These resolutions are filed at companies that manage nuclear power facilities or produce components for nuclear reactors to request disclosure on the risks to the company associated with these operations, including physical security and the potential for environmental damage. Current reporting requirements for companies that operate nuclear facilities are managed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and include detailed reports on safety and security that are available to the public.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support shareholder resolutions requesting that companies report on risks associated with their nuclear reactor designs and/or the production and interim storage of irradiated fuel rods.

Concentrated Area Feeding Operations (CAFOs)

The level of pollution resulting from CAFOs has drawn increased attention in recent years as certain legal decisions have established the precedent that a company can be held liable for the actions of the contract farms it sources

from. Fines and remediation expenses stemming from these cases have been significant and could have a notable impact on the companies' operations and shareholder value.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation: Generally support resolutions requesting that companies report to shareholders on the risks and liabilities associated with concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) unless the company has publicly disclosed guidelines for its corporate and contract farming operations (including compliance monitoring), or if the company does not directly source from CAFOs.

Pharmaceutical Product Reimportation

One of the most visible aspects of the legal and political debate over rising health care costs in the United States can be seen through prescription drug reimportation through Canada. While U.S. and Canadian regulations limit reimportation, several states have taken steps to encourage employees to actively seek less expensive medications through reimportation.

Shareholder action at major pharmaceutical companies has hinged around requesting increased disclosure of the financial and legal risks associated with company policies, or called on companies to change distribution limits to increase product availability in Canada, thereby encouraging product reimportation to the United States. The level of public concern over this issue and associated impact that a poorly developed policy could have on the companies suggest that additional disclosure of company policies related to reimportation could be beneficial to shareholders and generally merits support.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Generally support shareholder proposals requesting that companies report on the financial and legal impact of their policies regarding prescription drug reimportation, unless such information is already publicly disclosed.
- Generally support shareholder proposals requesting that companies adopt specific policies to encourage or not constrain prescription drug reimportation.

Pharmaceutical Product Pricing

Pharmaceutical drug pricing, both within the United States and internationally, has raised many questions of the companies that are responsible for creating and marketing these treatments. Shareholder proponents, activists and even some legislators have called upon drug companies to restrain pricing of prescription drugs.

The high cost of prescription drugs is a vital issue for senior citizens across the country. Seniors have the greatest need for prescription drugs, accounting for a significant portion of all prescription drug sales, but they often live on fixed incomes and are underinsured.

Proponents note that efforts to reign-in pharmaceutical costs will not negatively impact research and development (R&D) costs and that retail drug prices are consistently higher in the U.S. than in other industrialized nations. Pharmaceutical companies often respond that adopting a formal drug pricing policy could put the company at a competitive disadvantage.

Against the backdrop of the AIDS crisis in Africa, many shareholders have called on companies to address the issue of affordable drugs for the treatment of AIDS, as well as TB and Malaria throughout the developing world. When analyzing such resolutions, consideration should be made of the strategic implications of pricing policies in the market.

Taft-Hartley Advisory Services Recommendation:

- Proposals asking a company to implement price restraints on its pharmaceutical products will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the following factors:

- Whether the proposal focuses on a specific drug and region;
 - Whether the economic benefits of providing subsidized drugs (e.g., public goodwill) outweigh the costs in terms of reduced profits, lower R&D spending, and harm to competitiveness;
 - The extent that reduced prices can be offset through the company's marketing expenditures without significantly impacting R&D spending;
 - Whether the company already limits price increases of its products;
 - Whether the company already contributes life-saving pharmaceuticals to the needy and Third World countries; and
 - The extent to which peer companies implement price restraints.
- Generally support proposals requesting that companies implement specific price restraints for its pharmaceutical products in developing markets or targeting certain population groups.
 - Generally support proposals requesting that companies evaluate their global product pricing strategy, considering the existing level of disclosure on pricing policies, any deviation from established industry pricing norms, and the company's existing philanthropic initiatives.
 - Vote for shareholder proposals that call on companies to develop a policy to provide affordable HIV, AIDS, TB and Malaria drugs to citizens in the developing world.

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INTERNATIONAL

SUSTAINABILITY PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES

2026 Policy Recommendations

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INTRODUCTION

ISS recognizes the view among many investment professionals that sustainability or environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) factors could present material risks to portfolio investments. Whereas investment managers have traditionally analyzed topics such as board accountability and executive compensation to mitigate risks related to poor corporate governance, incorporating ESG performance factors into investment decisions can give a more comprehensive understanding of the overall risk profile of the companies and ensure sustainable long-term value for their beneficiaries.

Investors concerned with portfolio value preservation and enhancement through the incorporation of sustainability factors can also carry out this active ownership approach through their proxy voting activity. In voting their shares, sustainability-minded investors are generally concerned with ensuring corporate activities are aligned with best practices of disclosure and practice, because they believe that doing so is an effective way to achieve and protect long-term value for their beneficiaries. These investors will tend to support requests for information regarding an issuer's adoption of, or adherence to, relevant norms, standards, codes of conduct or universally recognized international initiatives.

ISS' Sustainability Proxy Voting Guidelines

ISS has therefore developed proxy voting guidelines that are consistent with the objectives of sustainability-minded investors and fiduciaries. On ESG matters, ISS' Sustainability Policy seeks to promote support for recognized global governing bodies promoting sustainable business practices advocating for stewardship of environment, fair labor practices, non-discrimination, and the protection of human rights. Generally, ISS' Sustainability Policy takes as its frame of reference internationally recognized sustainability-related initiatives such as the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI, formerly UNPRI), United Nations Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Carbon Principles, International Labour Organization Conventions (ILO), Ceres Roadmap 2030, Global Sullivan Principles, MacBride Principles, and environmental and social European Union Directives. Such initiatives seek to promote a fair, unified and productive reporting and compliance environment in order to mitigate related financial and reputational risks.

These guidelines provide an overview of how ISS approaches proxy voting issues for subscribers of the Sustainability Policy. We consider the merits of each proposal in the context of company-specific circumstances and industry norms. ISS updates the guidelines on an annual basis to take into account emerging issues and trends on environmental, social and corporate governance topics, as well as the evolution of market standards, regulatory changes and client feedback.

The Sustainability Policy guidelines are based on an objective to create and preserve economic value by incorporating awareness of a full range of governance and sustainability issues.

1. Operational Items

Financial Results/Director and Auditor Reports

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for approval of financial statements and director and auditor reports, unless:

- There are concerns about the accounts presented or audit procedures used; or
- The company is not responsive to shareholder questions about specific items that should be publicly disclosed.

Approval of Non-Financial Information Statement/Report

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for the approval of mandatory non-financial information statement/report, unless the independent assurance services provider has raised material concerns about the information presented.

Appointment of Auditors and Auditor Fees

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for the reelection of auditors and proposals authorizing the board to fix auditor fees, unless:

- The name of the proposed auditors has not been published;
- There are serious concerns about the effectiveness of the auditors;
- The lead audit partner(s) has been linked with a significant auditing controversy;
- There is reason to believe that the auditor has rendered an opinion which is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position;
- The lead audit partner(s) has previously served the company in an executive capacity or can otherwise be considered affiliated with the company;
- The auditors are being changed without explanation;
- Fees for non-audit services exceed either 100 percent of standard audit-related fees or any stricter limit set in local best practice recommendations or law; or
- Audit fees are undisclosed.
- For **Continental Europe**, the auditor has been engaged for more than 10 years without a public tender, or for more than 20 years (24 years in case of a joint audit) following a public tender after 10 years, for companies listed on a regulated market*. A public commitment to conduct a tender process will be considered a mitigating factor.

*A one-year transitional period will apply in 2025 and the policy will be applicable from Feb. 1, 2026.

In circumstances where fees for non-audit services include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events, such as initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergence, and spinoffs, and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees which are an exception to the standard "non-audit fee" category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit fees.

For concerns relating to the audit procedures, independence of auditors, audit fees disclosure, and/or name of auditors, the Sustainability policy will focus on the auditor election and/or the audit committee members. For concerns relating to fees paid to the auditors, the Sustainability policy will focus on remuneration of auditors if this is a separate voting item, otherwise the Sustainability policy would focus on the auditor election.

Appointment of Internal Statutory Auditors

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for the appointment or reelection of statutory auditors, unless:

- There are serious concerns about the statutory reports presented or the audit procedures used;
- Questions exist concerning any of the statutory auditors being appointed; or
- The auditors have previously served the company in an executive capacity or can otherwise be considered affiliated with the company.

Allocation of Income

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for approval of the allocation of income, unless:

- The dividend payout ratio has been consistently below 30 percent without adequate explanation; or
- The payout is excessive given the company's financial position.

Stock (Scrip) Dividend Alternative

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on stock (scrip) dividend proposals, considering factors such as:

- Whether the proposal allows for a cash option; and
- If the proposal is in line with market standards.

Amendments to Articles of Association (Bylaws)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote amendments to the articles of association on a case-by-case basis.

Virtual Meetings (UK/Ireland, Japan, Australia, and Continental Europe)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals allowing for the convening of hybrid¹ shareholder meetings.

Vote case-by-case on proposals concerning virtual-only meetings², considering:

- Whether the company has committed to ensuring shareholders will have the same rights participating electronically as they would have for an in-person meeting³;
- Assurance that a virtual-only meeting will only be convened in the case of extraordinary circumstances that necessitate restrictions on physical attendance;
- The use of past authorizations to hold virtual-only meetings and the accompanying rationale for doing so;
- In-person or hybrid meetings are not precluded; and

¹ The phrase "hybrid shareholder meeting" refers to an in-person meeting in which shareholders are also permitted to participate online.

² The phrase "virtual-only shareholder meeting" refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively through the use of online technology without a corresponding in-person meeting.

³ The phrase "in-person meeting" refers to a meeting in which participating shareholders and board members meet in a specified physical location together. At an in-person meeting, shareholders and board members are physically present, enabling direct, in-person interaction.

- Local laws and regulations concerning the convening of virtual meetings.

Change in Company Fiscal Term

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for resolutions to change a company's fiscal term unless a company's motivation for the change is to postpone its AGM.

Lower Disclosure Threshold for Stock Ownership

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against resolutions to lower the stock ownership disclosure threshold below 5 percent unless specific reasons exist to implement a lower threshold.

Amend Quorum Requirements

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote proposals to amend quorum requirements for shareholder meetings on a case-by-case basis.

Transact Other Business

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against other business when it appears as a voting item.

2. Board of Directors

Director Elections

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for management nominees in the election of directors, unless:

- Adequate disclosure has not been provided in a timely manner;
- There are clear concerns over questionable finances or restatements;
- There have been questionable transactions with conflicts of interest;
- There are any records of abuses against minority shareholder interests;
- The board fails to meet minimum corporate governance standards, including board independence standards;
- There are specific concerns about the individual, such as criminal wrongdoing or breach of fiduciary responsibilities; or
- Repeated absences at board and key committee⁴ meetings have not been explained (in countries where this information is disclosed).

Vote for employee and/or labor representatives if they sit on either the audit or compensation committee *and* are required by law to be on those committees. Vote against employee and/or labor representatives if they sit on either the audit or compensation committee, if they are not required to be on those committees.

Diversity

Sustainability Advisory Services will evaluate gender diversity on boards in international markets when reviewing director elections, to the extent that disclosures and market practices permit.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the Nominating Committee if the board lacks at least 20 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender⁵.

- For **Malaysia and New Zealand**, vote against or withhold from incumbent members of the nominating committee if the board is not comprised of at least 30 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender.
- For **India**, vote against or withhold from the incumbent nominating committee chair if the board is not comprised of at least 20 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender and where the board lacks at least one independent director of the underrepresented gender.
- For **Japan**, if the company has an audit-committee-board structure or a traditional two-tier board structure as opposed to three committees, vote against incumbent representative directors if the board lacks at least 20 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender.
- For **Canada**, vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee if:
 - the board is not comprised of at least 30 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender; or
 - the board lacks at least one racially or ethnically diverse director.
- For the **UK and Ireland**, generally vote against or withhold from the incumbent chair of the nominating committee if:
 - the board is not comprised of at least 40 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender; or
 - the board lacks at least one racially or ethnically diverse director;
 - the company does not have at least one gender-diverse director in a senior management position (CEO, CFO, Board Chair, or Senior Independent Director).
- For **Australia**, vote against or withhold votes from the chair of the nominating committee if the board is not comprised of at least 30 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender.

⁴ Key committees are usually the ones performing the functions of audit, remuneration and nomination (plus risk for financial institutions).

⁵ The underrepresented gender includes directors who identify as women or as non-binary.

- For **Continental European** markets, generally vote against or withhold from incumbent members of the nominating committee if the board is not comprised of at least 40 percent of directors of the underrepresented gender.

Vote against or withhold from other director nominees on a case-by-case basis.

Material ESG Failures

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against or withhold from directors individually, on a committee, or potentially the entire board due to:

- Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight⁶, or fiduciary responsibilities at the company, including failure to adequately manage or mitigate environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks;
- A lack of sustainability reporting in the company's public documents and/or website in conjunction with a failure to adequately manage or mitigate ESG risks;
- Failure to replace management as appropriate; or
- Egregious actions related to the director(s)' service on the boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company.

Climate Risk Mitigation and Net Zero

For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters⁷, through their operations or value chain, generally vote against or withhold from the incumbent chair of the responsible committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) in cases where Sustainability Advisory Services determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory.

Minimum steps needed to be considered to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory are (all minimum criteria will be required to be in alignment with policy):

- Detailed disclosure of climate-related risks, such as according to the framework established by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), including:
 - Board governance measures;
 - Corporate strategy;
 - Risk management analyses; and
 - Metrics and targets.
- The company has declared a target of Net Zero by 2050 or sooner and the target includes scope 1, 2, and relevant scope 3 emissions.
- The company has set a medium-term target for reducing its GHG emissions and the target includes scope 1, 2, and relevant scope 3 emissions.
- The company has a decarbonization strategy in place, with a defined set of quantitative and qualitative actions to reach Net Zero targets.

Expectations about what constitutes "minimum steps needed to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory" will increase over time.

⁶ Examples of failure of risk oversight include but are not limited to: bribery; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies; demonstrably poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant environmental incidents including spills and pollution; large scale or repeat workplace fatalities or injuries; significant adverse legal judgments or settlements; or hedging of company stock.

⁷ Companies defined as "significant GHG emitters" will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

For director elections, Sustainability Advisory Services will also take into consideration market-specific provisions which are listed below:

Canadian Guidelines

Board Structure and Independence (TSX)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote withhold for any Executive Director or Non-Independent, Non-Executive Director where:

- The board is less than majority independent; or
- The board lacks a separate compensation or nominating committee.

Non-Independent Directors on Key Committees (TSX)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote withhold for members of the audit, compensation, or nominating committee who:

- Are Executive Directors;
- Are Controlling Shareholders; or
- Is a Non-employee officer of the company or its affiliates if he/she is among the five most highly compensated.

Non-Independent Directors on Key Committees -TSX-V

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote withhold for Executive Directors, Controlling Shareholders or a Non-employee officer of the company or its affiliates if he/she is among the five most highly compensated who:

- Are members of the audit committee;
- Are members of the compensation committee or the nominating committee and the committee is not majority independent; or
- Are board members and the entire board fulfills the role of a compensation committee or a nominating committee and the board is not majority independent.

Overboarding -TSX and Venture-Listed

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote withhold for individual director nominees who:

- Are non-CEO directors and serve on more than five public company boards; or
- Are CEOs of public companies who serve on the boards of more than two public companies besides their own – withhold only at their outside boards⁸.
- **Transitioning directors:** It is preferable for a director to step down from a board at the annual meeting to ensure orderly transitions, which may result in a director being temporarily overboarded (e.g. joining a new board in March but stepping off another board in June). Sustainability Advisory Services will generally not count a board for policy application purposes when it is publicly-disclosed that the director will be stepping off that board at its next annual meeting. This disclosure must be included within the company's proxy circular to

⁸ Although a CEO's subsidiary boards will be counted as separate boards, Sustainability Advisory Services will not recommend a withhold vote for the CEO of a parent company board or any of the controlled (>50 percent ownership) subsidiaries of that parent but may do so at subsidiaries that are less than 50 percent controlled and boards outside the parent/subsidiary relationship.

be taken into consideration. Conversely, Sustainability Advisory Services will include the new boards that the director is joining even if the shareholder meeting with his or her election has not yet taken place.

Externally-Managed Issuers (EMIs) –TSX and TSXV

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on say-on-pay resolutions where provided, or on individual directors, committee members, or the entire board as appropriate, when an issuer is externally-managed and has provided minimal or no disclosure about their management services agreements and how senior management is compensated. Factors taken into consideration may include but are not limited to:

- The size and scope of the management services agreement;
- Executive compensation in comparison to issuer peers and/or similarly structured issuers;
- Overall performance;
- Related party transactions;
- Board and committee independence;
- Conflicts of interest and process for managing conflicts effectively;
- Disclosure and independence of the decision-making process involved in the selection of the management services provider;
- Risk mitigating factors included within the management services agreement such as fee recoupment mechanisms;
- Historical compensation concerns;
- Executives' responsibilities; and
- Other factors that may reasonably be deemed appropriate to assess an externally-managed issuer's governance framework.

Unilateral Adoption of an Advance Notice Provision

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally withhold from individual directors, committee members, or the entire board as appropriate in situations where an advance notice policy has been adopted by the board but has not been included on the voting agenda at the next shareholders' meeting. Continued lack of shareholder approval of the advanced notice policy in subsequent years may result in further withhold recommendations.

European Guidelines

In **European markets**, Sustainability Advisory Services looks at different factors to make determinations regarding director elections. The following factors are taken into account:

Director Terms

Generally vote against the election or re-election of any director when his/her term is not disclosed or when it exceeds four years and adequate explanation for non-compliance has not been provided. Under best practice recommendations, companies should shorten the terms for directors when the terms exceed the limits suggested by best practices. The policy will be applied to all companies, for bundled as well as unbundled items.

Beyond that, as directors should be accountable to shareholders on a more regular basis, the Sustainability policy may consider moving to maximum board terms of less than four years in the future.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against article amendment proposals to extend board terms.

In cases where a company's articles provide for a shorter limit and where the company wishes to extend director terms from three or fewer years to four years, for example, the Sustainability policy will recommend a vote

against, based on the general principle that director accountability is maximized by elections with a short period of renewal.

Bundling of Proposals to Elect Directors

Bundling proposals that could be presented as separate voting items is not considered good market practice, because bundled resolutions leave shareholders with an all-or-nothing choice, skewing power disproportionately towards the board and away from shareholders. As director elections are one of the most important voting decisions that shareholders make, directors should be elected individually.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For the markets of **Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia** and **Spain** vote against the election or reelection of any directors if the company proposes a single slate of directors.

Bundled director elections in Poland may be supported for companies that go beyond market practice by disclosing the names of nominees on a timely basis.

Board Independence

Widely-held companies

A. Non-controlled companies

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against the election or reelection of any non-independent directors (excluding the CEO) if:

- Fewer than 50 percent of the board members elected by shareholders – excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives – would be independent; or
- Fewer than one-third of all board members would be independent.

Portugal is excluded from Provision (1.) in the above-mentioned voting policy.

B. Controlled companies

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against the election or reelection of any non-independent directors (excluding the CEO) if less than one-third of the board members are independent.

Board Leadership

Given the importance of board leadership, Sustainability Advisory Services may consider that the chair of the board should be an independent non-executive director according to the Sustainability Advisory Services' Classification of Directors.

Non-widely held companies

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against the election or reelection of any non-independent directors (excluding the CEO) if less than one-third of the board members are independent.

Definition of terms

‘Widely-held companies’ are determined based on their membership in a major index and/or the number of Sustainability Advisory Services clients holding the securities. For Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, this is based on membership on a local blue-chip market index and/or either the Nasdaq Nordic Large Cap list or Oslo Børs Benchmark GI index..

A company is considered to be controlled for the purposes of the above-mentioned voting policies if a shareholder, or multiple shareholders acting in concert, control a majority of the company’s equity capital (i.e. 50 percent + one share). If a company is majority-controlled by virtue of a shareholder structure in which shareholders' voting rights do not accrue in accordance with their equity capital commitment (e.g. unequal or multi-class share structures), the company will not be classified as controlled unless the majority shareholder/majority shareholding group also holds a majority of the company's equity capital.

Disclosure of Nominee Names

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against the election or reelection of any and all director nominees when the names of the nominees are not available at the time the proxy analysis is being written.

This policy will be applied to all companies in these markets, for bundled and unbundled items.

Combined Chair/CEO

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally, vote against the (re)election of combined chair/CEOs at widely-held European companies.

When the company provides assurance that the chair/CEO would only serve in the combined role on an interim basis (no more than two years), the vote recommendation would be made on a case-by-case basis.

In the above-mentioned situation, Sustainability Advisory Services will consider the rationale provided by the company and whether it has set up adequate control mechanisms on the board (such as a lead independent director, a high overall board independence, and a high level of independence on the board's key committees).

Election of Former CEO as Chair of the Board

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against the (re)election of a former CEO to the supervisory board or board of directors in **Austria, Germany,** and the **Netherlands** if the former CEO is to be chair of the relevant board. To this end, companies are expected to confirm prior to the general meeting that the former CEO will not be (re)appointed as chair of the relevant board.

Given the importance of board leadership, Sustainability Advisory Services may consider that the chair of the board should be an independent non-executive director according to Sustainability Advisory Services’ Classification of Directors.

Overboarded Directors

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: In **Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland,** Sustainability Advisory Services will generally recommend a vote against a candidate when they hold an excessive number of board appointments, as referenced by the more stringent of the provisions prescribed in local law or best practice governance codes, or the following guidelines:

- Any director or candidate who holds more than five mandates at listed companies will be classified as overboarded. For the purposes of calculating this limit, a non-executive directorship counts as one mandate, a non-executive chair position counts as two mandates, and a position as executive director (or a comparable role) is counted as three mandates.
- Also, any director or candidate who holds the position of executive director (or a comparable role) at one company and serves as a non-executive chair at a different company will be classified as overboarded.

CEOs and Board Chairs

- An adverse vote recommendation will not be applied to a director within a company where they serve as CEO; instead, any adverse vote recommendations will be applied to their additional seats on other company boards. For chairs, negative recommendations would first be applied towards non-executive positions held, but the chair position itself would be targeted where they are being elected as chair for the first time or, when in aggregate their chair positions are three or more in number, or if the chair holds an outside executive position.

One Board Seat per Director

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: In cases where a director holds more than one board seat on a single board and the corresponding votes, manifested as one seat as a physical person plus an additional seat(s) as a representative of a legal entity, vote against the election/re-election of such legal entities and in favor of the physical person.

However, an exception is made if the representative of the legal entity holds the position of CEO. In such circumstances, the Sustainability policy will typically recommend a vote in favor of the legal entity and against the election/re-election of the physical person.

While such occurrences are rare, there have been cases where a board member may have multiple board seats and corresponding votes. Holding several board seats concurrently within one board increases this person's direct influence on board decisions and creates an inequality among board members.

This situation has manifested in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. This is not a good corporate governance practice, as it places disproportionate influence and control in one person.

Composition of Committees

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

For widely-held companies, generally vote against the (re)election of any non-independent members of the audit committee if fewer than 50 percent of the audit committee members, who are elected by shareholders in such capacity or another – excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives – would be independent.

Generally vote against the election or re-election of the non-independent member of the audit committee designated as chair of that committee.

For widely-held companies, generally vote against the (re)election of any non-independent members of the remuneration committee if fewer than 50 percent of the remuneration committee members, who are elected by shareholders in such capacity or another - excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives - would be independent.

For all companies:

Generally vote against the (re)election of executives who serve on the company's audit or remuneration committee. Sustainability Advisory Services may recommend against if the disclosure is too poor to determine

whether an executive serves or will serve on a committee. If a company does not have an audit or a remuneration committee, Sustainability Advisory Services may consider that the entire board fulfills the role of a committee. In such case, Sustainability Advisory Services may recommend against the executives, including the CEO, up for election to the board.

Unequal Voting Rights

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For meetings held on or after Feb. 1, 2024, at widely-held companies, generally vote against directors or against the discharge of (non-executive) directors, if the company employs a stock structure with unequal voting rights⁹. Vote recommendations will generally be directed against the nominees primarily responsible for, or benefiting from, the unequal vote structure.

Exceptions to this policy will generally be limited to:

- Newly-public companies¹⁰ with a sunset provision of no more than seven years from the date of going public;
- Situations where the unequal voting rights are considered de minimis¹¹; or
- The company provides sufficient protections for minority shareholders, for example such as allowing minority shareholders a regular binding vote on whether the capital structure should be maintained or a commitment to abolish the structure by the next AGM.

Voto di Lista (Italy)

In Italy, director elections generally take place through the *voto di lista* mechanism (similar to slate elections). Since the Italian implementation of the European Shareholder Rights Directive (effective since Nov. 1, 2010), Italian issuers whose shares are listed on the Italian regulated market Euronext Milan must publish the various lists 21 days in advance of the meeting.

Since shareholders only have the option to support one such list, where lists are published in sufficient time, Sustainability Advisory Services will recommend a vote on a case-by-case basis, determining which list of nominees it considers is best suited to add value for shareholders.

Those companies that are excluded from the provisions of the European Shareholder Rights Directive generally publish lists of nominees seven days before the meeting. In the case where nominees are not published in sufficient time, Sustainability Advisory Services will recommend a vote against the director elections before the lists of director nominees are disclosed. Once the various lists of nominees are disclosed, Sustainability Advisory Services will issue an alert to its clients and, if appropriate, change its vote recommendation to support one particular list.

Composition of the Nominating Committee (Sweden/Norway/Finland)

Vote for proposals in **Finland**, **Iceland**, **Norway**, and **Sweden** to elect or appoint a nominating committee consisting mainly of non-board members.

⁹ This generally includes classes of common stock that have additional votes per share than other shares; classes of shares that are not entitled to vote on all the same ballot items or nominees; or stock with time-phased voting rights ("loyalty shares" or "double-voting" shares).

¹⁰ Newly-public companies generally include companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

¹¹ Distortion between voting and economic power does not exceed 10 percent, where this is calculated relative to the entire share capital for multiple share classes and on individual shareholder or concert level in case of loyalty share structures.

Vote for shareholder proposals calling for disclosure of the names of the proposed candidates at the meeting, as well as the inclusion of a representative of minority shareholders in the committee.

Vote against proposals where the names of the candidates (in the case of an election) or the principles for the establishment of the committee have not been disclosed in a timely manner.

Vote against proposals in **Sweden** to elect or appoint such a committee if the company is considered widely-held and the following conditions exist:

- A member of the executive management would be a member of the committee;
- More than one board member who is dependent on a major shareholder would be on the committee; or
- The chair of the board would also be the chair of the committee.

In cases where the principles for the establishment of the nominating committee, rather than the election of the committee itself, are being voted on, vote against the adoption of the principles if any of the above conditions are met for the current committee, and there is no publicly available information indicating that this would no longer be the case for the new nominating committee.

Election of Censors (France)

The Sustainability policy will generally recommend a vote against proposals seeking shareholder approval to elect a censor, to amend bylaws to authorize the appointment of censors, or to extend the maximum number of censors to the board.

However, the Sustainability policy will recommend a vote on a case-by-case basis when the company provides assurance that the censor would serve on a short-term basis (maximum one year) with the intent to retain the nominee before his/her election as director. In this case, consideration shall also be given to the nominee's situation (notably overboarding or other factors of concern).

In consideration of the principle that censors should be appointed on a short-term basis, vote against any proposal to renew the term of a censor or to extend the statutory term of censors.

Please see the International Classification of Directors on the following page.

Timely Disclosure of Meeting Materials

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally, vote against the re-election of the chair of the Audit Committee, another Audit Committee member, the board chair, or any other relevant nominee (on a case-by-case basis), if the company has frequently failed to disclose comprehensive meeting materials for shareholders in a timely manner.

Shareholder meeting materials should be published well in advance of the general meeting, ideally no later than 30 days ahead of the meeting date (or any more stringent market best practice), and ultimately no later than 21 days before the meeting date (or any more stringent market deadline). In certain cases, including meetings of issuers not listed on a regulated market, shareholder proposals, additional disclosures for the purpose of clarification, or exceptional/other market-specific circumstances, an exception may be made provided there is a reasonable explanation and the disclosure allows investors to adequately assess the proposals.

International Markets

Overboarding – Brazil and Americas Regional

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally, vote against management nominees who:

- Sit on more than five public company boards; or
- Are CEOs of public companies who sit on the boards of more than two public companies besides their own — recommend against only at their outside boards¹²Error! Bookmark not defined.

Generally, vote against the bundled election of directors if one or more nominees, if elected, would be overboarded.

Overboarding – Israel

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally, vote against management nominees who:

- Holds more than five mandates at listed companies. For the purposes of calculating this limit, a non-executive directorship counts as one mandate, a non-executive chair position counts as two mandates, and a position as executive director (or a comparable role) is counted as three mandates.
- Holds the position of executive director (or a comparable role) at one company and a non-executive chair at a different company.

Cumulative Voting – Middle East and Africa (MEA)

Under a cumulative voting system, each share represents a number of votes equal to the size of the board that will be elected. These votes may be apportioned equally among the candidates or, if a shareholder wishes to exclude some nominees, among the desired candidates.

For MEA markets, when directors are elected through a cumulative voting system, or when the number of nominees exceeds the number of board vacancies, vote case-by-case on directors, taking into consideration additional factors to identify the nominees best suited to add value for shareholders.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote to abstain from all candidates if the disclosure provided by the company is not sufficient to allow the assessment of independence and the support of all proposed candidates on equal terms.

If the disclosure is sufficient to allow an assessment of the independence of all proposed candidates, generally vote in favor of the following types of candidates:

- Candidates who can be identified as representatives of minority shareholders of the company, or independent candidates.
- Candidates whose professional background may have the following benefits:

¹² Although all of a CEO's subsidiary boards with publicly-traded common stock will be counted as separate boards, Sustainability Advisory Services will not recommend an against vote for the CEO of a parent company board or any of the controlled (>50 percent ownership) subsidiaries of that parent but may do so at subsidiaries that are less than 50 percent controlled and boards outside the parent/subsidiary relationships.

- Increasing the diversity of incumbent directors' professional profiles and skills (thanks to their financial expertise, international experience, executive positions/directorships at other listed companies, or other relevant factors).
- Bringing to the current board of directors relevant experience in areas linked to the company's business, evidenced by current or past board memberships or management functions at other companies.
- Incumbent board members and candidates explicitly supported by the company's management.

For Middle Eastern and North African markets, if overall board independence is less than one-third (excluding, where relevant, employee shareholder representatives), generally vote in favor of independent nominees only (per ISS' classification of directors).

Please see the International Classification of Directors on the following page.

Classification of Directors – International Policy

Executive Director

- Employee or executive of the company or a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company;

Non-Independent Non-Executive Director (NED)

- Any director who is attested by the board to be a non-independent NED;
- Any director specifically designated as a representative of a shareholder of the company;
- Any director who is also an employee or executive of a significant¹ shareholder of the company;
- Any director who is also an employee or executive of a subsidiary, associate, joint venture, or company that is affiliated with a significant¹ shareholder of the company;
- Any director who is nominated by a dissenting significant shareholder unless there is a clear lack of material² connection with the dissident, either currently or historically;
- Beneficial owner (direct or indirect) of at least 10 percent of the company's stock, either in economic terms or in voting rights (this may be aggregated if voting power is distributed among more than one member of a defined group, e.g., members of a family that beneficially own less than 10 percent individually, but collectively own more than 10 percent), unless market best practice dictates a lower ownership and/or disclosure threshold (and in other special market-specific circumstances);
- Government representative;
- Currently provides or has provided (or a relative³ provides) during the most recently concluded financial year under review professional services⁴ to the company, to an affiliate of the company, or to an individual officer of the company or of one of its affiliates in the latest fiscal year in excess of USD 10,000 per year;
- Represents customer, supplier, creditor, banker, or other entity with which the company maintains a transactional/commercial relationship (unless the company discloses information to apply a materiality test³);
- Any director who has a conflicting relationship with the company, including but not limited to cross-directorships with executive directors or the chair of the company;
- Relative³ of a current or former executive of the company or its affiliates;
- A new appointee elected other than by a formal process through the general meeting (such as a contractual appointment by a substantial shareholder);
- Founder/co-founder/member of founding family but not currently an employee or executive;
- Former executive or employee (five-year cooling off period);
- Years of service is generally not a determining factor unless it is recommended best practice in a market and/or in extreme circumstances, in which case it may be considered⁶.
- Any director who receives remuneration comparable to the top executives of the company⁷.
- Any additional relationship or principle considered to compromise independence under local corporate governance best practice guidance⁸.

Independent NED

- No material² connection, either direct or indirect, to the company (other than a board seat) or to a significant shareholder.

Employee Representative

- Represents employees or employee shareholders of the company (classified as "employee representative" and considered a non-independent NED).

Footnotes

¹ At least 10 percent of the company's stock, unless market best practice dictates a lower ownership and/or disclosure threshold.

² For purposes of Sustainability Advisory Services' director independence classification, "material" will be defined as a standard of relationship financial, personal, or otherwise that a reasonable person might conclude could potentially influence one's objectivity in the boardroom in a manner that would have a meaningful impact on an individual's ability to satisfy requisite fiduciary standards on behalf of shareholders.

³ "Relative" follows the definition of "immediate family members" which covers spouses, parents, children, stepparents, step-children, siblings, in-laws, and any person (other than a tenant or employee) sharing the household of any director, nominee for director, executive officer, or significant shareholder of the company.

⁴ Professional services can be characterized as advisory in nature and generally include the following: investment banking/financial advisory services; commercial banking (beyond deposit services); investment services; insurance services; accounting/audit services; consulting services; marketing services; and legal services. The case of participation in a banking syndicate by a non-lead bank should be considered a transaction (and hence subject to the associated materiality test) rather than a professional relationship.

⁵ A business relationship may be material if the transaction value (of all outstanding transactions) entered into between the company and the company or organization with which the director is associated is equivalent to either 1 percent of the company's turnover or 1 percent of the turnover of the company or organization with which the director is associated; or

A business relationship may be material if the transaction value (of all outstanding financing operations) entered into between the company and the company or organization with which the director is associated is more than 10 percent of the company's shareholder equity or the transaction value (of all outstanding financing operations) compared to the company's total assets is more than 5 percent.

⁶ For example, in continental Europe and Latin America, directors with a tenure exceeding 12 years will be considered non-independent. In the United Kingdom, Ireland, Hong Kong and Singapore, directors with a tenure exceeding nine years will be considered non-independent, unless the company provides sufficient and clear justification that the director is independent despite his long tenure. For purposes of independence classification of directors incorporated in the Middle East and Africa region, this criterion will be taken into account in accordance with market best practice and disclosure standards and availability.

⁷ However, if there is clear evidence of management duties, a classification as Executive Director may be considered.

⁸ For MEA markets, directors' past services as statutory auditor/partner of the statutory audit firm will be taken into account, with cooling-off periods in accordance with local market best practice.

Contested Director Elections

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For contested elections of directors, e.g. the election of shareholder nominees or the dismissal of incumbent directors, the Sustainability policy will make its recommendation on a case-by-case basis, determining which directors are considered best suited to add value for shareholders.

The analysis will generally be based on, but not limited to, the following major decision factors:

- Company performance relative to its peers;
- Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents;
- Independence of directors/nominees;
- Experience and skills of board candidates;
- Governance profile of the company;
- Evidence of management entrenchment;
- Responsiveness to shareholders;
- Whether a takeover offer has been rebuffed; and
- Whether minority or majority representation is being sought.

When analyzing a contested election of directors, Sustainability will generally focus on two central questions: (1) Have the proponents proved that board change is warranted? And if so, (2) Are the proponent board nominees likely to effect positive change (i.e., maximize long-term shareholder value).

Discharge of Board and Management

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for discharge of directors, including members of the management board and/or supervisory board, unless there is reliable information about significant and compelling controversies that the board is not fulfilling its fiduciary duties such as:

- A lack of oversight or actions by board members which invoke shareholder distrust related to malfeasance or poor supervision, such as operating in private or company interest rather than in shareholder interest;
- Any legal issues (e.g. civil/criminal) aiming to hold the board responsible for breach of trust in the past or related to currently alleged actions yet to be confirmed (and not only the fiscal year in question), such as price fixing, insider trading, bribery, fraud, and other illegal actions; or
- Other material failures of governance or fiduciary responsibilities at the company, including failure to adequately manage or mitigate environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks; or
- A lack of sustainability reporting in the company's public documents and/or website in conjunction with a failure to adequately manage or mitigate environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks.

For markets which do not routinely request discharge resolutions (e.g. common law countries or markets where discharge is not mandatory), analysts may voice concern in other appropriate agenda items, such as approval of the annual accounts or other relevant resolutions, to enable shareholders to express discontent with the board.

Vote against proposals to remove approval of discharge of board and management from the agenda.

Director, Officer, and Auditor Indemnification and Liability Provisions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote proposals seeking indemnification and liability protection for directors and officers on a case-by-case basis.
- Vote against proposals to indemnify auditors.

Board Structure

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote for proposals to fix board size.
- Vote against the introduction of classified boards and mandatory retirement ages for directors.
- Vote against proposals to alter board structure or size in the context of a fight for control of the company or the board.

3. Capital Structure

Share Issuance Requests

General Issuances:

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Evaluate share issuance requests on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration market-specific guidelines as applicable.

For *European markets*, vote for issuance authorities with preemptive rights to a maximum of 50 percent over currently issued capital and as long as the share issuance authorities' periods are clearly disclosed (or implied by the application of a legal maximum duration) and in line with market-specific practices and/or recommended guidelines (e.g. issuance periods limited to 18 months for the **Netherlands**).

Vote for issuance authorities without preemptive rights to a maximum of 10 percent (or a lower limit if local market best practice recommendations provide) of currently issued capital as long as the share issuance authorities' periods are clearly disclosed (or implied by the application of a legal maximum duration) and in line with market-specific practices and/or recommended guidelines (e.g. issuance periods limited to 18 months for the **Netherlands**).

These thresholds are mutually exclusive.

When calculating the defined limits, all authorized and conditional capital authorizations are considered, including existing authorizations that will remain valid beyond the concerned shareholders' meeting.

For **UK** and **Irish** companies, generally vote for a resolution to authorize the issuance of equity, unless:

- The general issuance authority exceeds one-third (33 percent) of the issued share capital. Assuming it is no more than one-third, a further one-third of the issued share capital may also be applied to a fully pre-emptive rights issue taking the acceptable aggregate authority to two-thirds (66 percent); or
- The routine authority to disapply pre-emption rights exceeds 20 percent of the issued share capital, provided that any amount above 10 percent is to be used for the purposes of an acquisition or a specified capital investment. For the general disapplication authority and specific disapplication authority, a further disapplication of up to 2 percent may be used for each authority for the purposes of a follow-on offer.

For **French** companies:

- Vote for general issuance requests with preemptive rights, including with a binding "priority right", for a maximum of 50 percent over currently issued capital.
- Generally vote for general authorities to issue shares without preemptive rights up to a maximum of 10 percent of share capital. When companies are listed on a regulated market, the discount on share issuance price proposed in the resolution must comply with a maximum of 10 percent for a vote for to be warranted.

For **Hong Kong** companies, generally vote for the general issuance mandate, being the issuance of additional shares and/or the resale or transfer of treasury shares (if permitted), for companies that:

- Limit the issuance request to 10 percent or less of the relevant class of issued share capital for cash and non-cash consideration;
- Limit the discount to 10 percent of the market price of shares (rather than the maximum 20 percent permitted by the Listing Rules) for issuance for cash and non-cash consideration; and

- Have no history of renewing the General Issuance Mandate several times within a period of one year which may result in the share issuance limit exceeding 10 percent of the relevant class of issued share capital for issuance for cash and non-cash consideration within the 12-month period.

Generally vote for a general issuance of equity or equity-linked securities without preemptive rights when the share issuance limit is not more than 10 percent of the company's issued share capital and 50 percent with preemptive rights for all **Singapore** companies, with the exception of Catalist-listed companies and Real Estate Investment Trusts.

For **Singapore** companies listed on the Catalist market of the SGX, generally vote for a general issuance of equity or equity-linked securities without preemptive rights when the share issuance limit is not more than 20 percent of the company's issued share capital and 100 percent with preemptive rights. For Real Estate Investment Trusts, generally vote for a general issuance of equity or equity-linked securities without preemptive rights when the unit issuance limit is not more than 20 percent of its issued unit capital and 50 percent with preemptive rights.

For companies listed on the Main Market and ACE Market of the Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd (Exchange), vote for issuance requests without preemptive rights to a maximum of 10 percent of currently issued capital. For real estate investment trusts (REITs), vote for issuance requests without preemptive rights to a maximum of 20 percent of currently issued capital.

For **Latin American** companies, generally vote for issuance requests with preemptive rights to a maximum of 100 percent over currently issued capital. Vote for issuance requests without preemptive rights to a maximum of 20 percent of currently issued capital. Specific Issuances requested will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

For shelf registration programs at Latin American companies (**Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, and Peru**), vote on a case-by-case basis on all requests, with or without preemptive rights. Approval of a multi-year authority for the issuance of securities under Shelf Registration Programs will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration, but not limited to, the following:

- Whether the company has provided adequate and timely disclosure including detailed information regarding the rationale for the proposed program;
- Whether the proposed amount to be approved under such authority, the use of the resources, the length of the authorization, the nature of the securities to be issued under such authority, including any potential risk of dilution to shareholders is disclosed; and
- Whether there are concerns regarding questionable finances, the use of the proceeds, or other governance concerns.

Increases in Authorized Capital

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to increase authorized capital on a case-by-case basis if such proposals do not include the authorization to issue shares from the (pre-)approved limit.

In case the proposals to increase authorized capital include the authorization to issue shares according to the (pre-) approved limit without obtaining separate shareholder approval, the general issuance policy applies.

Reduction of Capital

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to reduce capital for routine accounting purposes unless the terms are unfavorable to shareholders.

Vote proposals to reduce capital in connection with corporate restructuring on a case-by-case basis.

Capital Structures

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for resolutions that seek to maintain or convert to a one-share, one-vote capital structure.

Vote against requests for the creation or continuation of dual-class capital structures or the creation of new or additional supervoting shares.

Preferred Stock

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote for the creation of a new class of preferred stock or for issuances of preferred stock up to 50 percent of issued capital unless the terms of the preferred stock would adversely affect the rights of existing shareholders.
- Vote for the creation/issuance of convertible preferred stock as long as the maximum number of common shares that could be issued upon conversion meets the guidelines on equity issuance requests.
- Vote against the creation of a new class of preference shares that would carry superior voting rights to the common shares.
- Vote against the creation of blank check preferred stock unless the board clearly states that the authorization will not be used to thwart a takeover bid.
- Vote proposals to increase blank check preferred authorizations on a case-by-case basis.

Debt Issuance Requests

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote non-convertible debt issuance requests on a case-by-case basis, with or without pre-emptive rights.

Vote for the creation/issuance of convertible debt instruments as long as the maximum number of common shares that could be issued upon conversion meets the guidelines on equity issuance requests.

Vote for proposals to restructure existing debt arrangements unless the terms of the restructuring would adversely affect the rights of shareholders.

Pledging of Assets for Debt

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote proposals to approve the pledging of assets for debt on a case-by-case basis.

Increase in Borrowing Powers

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote proposals to approve increases in a company's borrowing powers on a case-by-case basis.

Share Repurchase Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for market repurchase authorities (share repurchase programs) if the terms comply with the following criteria:

- A repurchase limit of up to 10 percent of issued share capital;
- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- Duration of no more than 5 years, or such lower threshold as may be set by applicable law, regulation, or code of governance best practice.

Authorities to repurchase shares in excess of the 10 percent repurchase limit will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The Sustainability policy may support such share repurchase authorities under special circumstances, which are required to be publicly disclosed by the company, provided that, on balance, the proposal is in shareholders' interests. In such cases, the authority must comply with the following criteria:

- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- Duration of no more than 18 months.

In markets where it is normal practice not to provide a repurchase limit, the Sustainability policy will evaluate the proposal based on the company's historical practice. However, the Sustainability policy expects companies to disclose such limits and, in the future, may recommend a vote against companies that fail to do so. In such cases, the authority must comply with the following criteria:

- A holding limit of up to 10 percent of a company's issued share capital in treasury ("on the shelf"); and
- Duration of no more than 18 months.

In addition, the Sustainability policy will recommend against any proposal where:

- The repurchase can be used for takeover defenses;
- There is clear evidence of abuse;
- There is no safeguard against selective buybacks;
- Pricing provisions and safeguards are deemed to be unreasonable in light of market practice.

Market-Specific Exceptions

For **Singapore**, generally vote for resolutions authorizing the company to repurchase its own shares, unless the premium over the average trading price of the shares as implied by the maximum price paid exceeds 5 percent for on-market repurchases and 20 percent for off-market repurchases.

Reissuance of Shares Repurchased

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for requests to reissue any repurchased shares unless there is clear evidence of abuse of this authority in the past.

Capitalization of Reserves for Bonus Issues/Increase in Par Value

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for requests to capitalize reserves for bonus issues of shares or to increase par value.

Private Placement

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For Canadian companies, vote case-by-case on private placement issuances taking into account:

- Whether other resolutions are bundled with the issuance;

- Whether the rationale for the private placement issuance is disclosed;
- Dilution to existing shareholders' position:
 - issuance that represents no more than 30 percent of the company's outstanding shares on a non-diluted basis is considered generally acceptable;
- Discount/premium in issuance price to the unaffected share price before the announcement of the private placement;
- Market reaction: The market's response to the proposed private placement since announcement; and
- Other applicable factors, including conflict of interest, change in control/management, evaluation of other alternatives.

Generally vote for the private placement issuance if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved or the company's auditor/management has indicated that the company has going concern issues.

4. Compensation

Preamble

The assessment of compensation follows the Sustainability Global Principles on Executive and Director Compensation which are detailed below. These principles take into account global corporate governance best practice.

The Global Principles on Compensation underlie market-specific policies in all markets:

- Provide shareholders with clear, comprehensive compensation disclosures;
- Maintain appropriate pay structure with emphasis on long-term shareholder value;
- Avoid arrangements that risk “pay for failure;”
- Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee;
- Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors.

European Guidelines

Pursuant to the European Directive 2017/828 (a.k.a. the Shareholder Rights Directive II or SRDII), companies which have their registered office in a Member State and the shares of which are admitted to trading on a regulated market situated or operating within a Member State must (i) submit their director remuneration policy to shareholder (binding or advisory) vote at every material change and in any case at least every four years, and (ii) submit a director remuneration report to discussion or shareholder vote on an annual basis.

In applying the Five Global Principles, the Sustainability policy has formulated European Compensation Guidelines which take into account local codes of governance, market best practice, and the Recommendations published by the European Commission. The Sustainability policy analyzes compensation-related proposals based on the role of the beneficiaries and has therefore divided its executive and director compensation policy into two domains:

- Executive compensation-related proposals; and
- Non-executive director compensation-related proposals

Executive Compensation-Related Proposals

Sustainability Advisory Services will evaluate management proposals seeking ratification of a company's executive compensation-related items on a case-by-case basis, and, where relevant, will take into account the European Pay for Performance (EP4P) model¹³ outcomes within a qualitative review of a company's remuneration practices.

¹³ Definition of Pay-for-Performance Evaluation:

Sustainability Advisory Services annually conducts a pay-for-performance analysis to measure the alignment between pay and performance over a sustained period. With respect to companies in the European Main Indices, this analysis considers the following:

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Sustainability Advisory Services will generally recommend a vote against a company's compensation-related proposal if such proposal fails to comply with one or a combination of several of the global principles and their corresponding rules:

- Provide shareholders with clear and comprehensive compensation disclosures:
 - Information on compensation-related proposals shall be made available to shareholders in a timely manner;
 - The level of disclosure of the proposed compensation policy and remuneration report shall be sufficient for shareholders to make an informed decision and shall be in line with what local market best practice standards dictate;
 - Remuneration report disclosure is expected to include amongst others: amounts paid to executives, alignment between company performance and payout to executives, disclosure of variable incentive targets and according levels of achievement and performance awards made, after the relevant performance period (ex-post), and disclosure and explanation of use of any discretionary authority or derogation clause by the board or remuneration committee to adjust pay outcomes.
 - Companies are expected to provide meaningful information regarding the average remuneration of employees of the company, in a manner which permits comparison with directors' remuneration.
 - Companies shall adequately disclose all elements of the compensation, including:
 - Any short- or long-term compensation component must include a maximum award limit.
 - Long-term incentive plans must provide sufficient disclosure of (i) the exercise price/strike price (options); (ii) discount on grant; (iii) grant date/period; (iv) exercise/vesting period; and, if applicable, (v) performance criteria.
 - Discretionary payments, if applicable.
 - The derogation policy, if applicable, which shall clearly define and limit any elements (e.g., base salary, STI, LTI, etc.) and extent (e.g., caps, weightings, etc.) to which derogations may apply.
 - Maintain appropriate pay structure with emphasis on long-term shareholder value:
 - The structure of the company's short-term incentive plan shall be appropriate.
 - The compensation policy must notably avoid guaranteed or discretionary compensation.
 - The structure of the company's long-term incentives shall be appropriate, including, but not limited to, dilution, vesting period, and, if applicable, performance conditions.
 - Equity-based plans or awards that are linked to long-term company performance will be evaluated using Sustainability Advisory Services' general policy for equity-based plans; and
 - For awards granted to executives, Sustainability Advisory Services will generally require a clear link between shareholder value and awards, and stringent performance-based elements.
 - The balance between short- and long-term variable compensation shall be appropriate.
 - The company's executive compensation policy must notably avoid disproportionate focus on short-term variable element(s)
 - Avoid arrangements that risk "pay for failure":
 - The board shall demonstrate good stewardship of investor's interests regarding executive compensation practices (principle being supported by Pay for Performance Evaluation).
 - There shall be a clear link between the company's performance and variable incentives. Financial and non-financial conditions, including ESG criteria, are relevant as long as they reward an effective performance in line with the purpose, strategy, and objectives adopted by the company.
 - There shall not be significant discrepancies between the company's performance, financial and non-financial, and real executive payouts.
-
- Peer Group Alignment:
 - ✓ The degree of alignment between the company's annualized TSR rank and the CEO's annualized total pay rank within a peer group, each measured over a three-year period.
 - ✓ The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median.
 - Absolute Alignment – the absolute alignment between the trend in CEO pay and company TSR over the prior five fiscal years – i.e., the difference between the trend in annual pay changes and the trend in annualized TSR during the period.

- The level of pay for the CEO and members of executive management should not be excessive relative to peers, company performance, and market practices.
- Significant pay increases shall be explained by a detailed and compelling disclosure.
- Termination payments¹⁴ must not be in excess of (i) 24 months' pay or of (ii) any more restrictive provision pursuant to local legal requirements and/or market best practices.
- Arrangements with a company executive regarding pensions and post-mandate exercise of equity-based awards must not result in an adverse impact on shareholders' interests or be misaligned with good market practices.
- Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee:
 - No executives may serve on the compensation committee.
 - In certain markets the compensation committee shall be composed of a majority of independent members, as per Sustainability Advisory Services policies on director election and board or committee composition.
- Compensation committees should use the discretion afforded them by shareholders to ensure that rewards properly reflect business performance¹⁵.

In addition to the above, Sustainability Advisory Services will generally recommend a vote against a compensation-related proposal if such proposal is in breach of any other supplemental market-specific voting policies.

Non-Executive Director Compensation

- Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to award cash fees to non-executive directors.

Vote against where:

- Documents (including general meeting documents, annual report) provided prior to the general meeting do not mention fees paid to non-executive directors.
- Proposed amounts are excessive relative to other companies in the country or industry.
- The company intends to increase the fees excessively in comparison with market/sector practices, without stating compelling reasons that justify the increase.
- Proposals provide for the granting of stock options, performance-based equity compensation (including stock appreciation rights and performance-vesting restricted stock), and performance-based cash to non-executive directors.
- Proposals introduce retirement benefits for non-executive directors.

Vote on a case-by-case basis where:

¹⁴ Termination payments' means any payment linked to early termination of contracts for executive or managing directors, including payments related to the duration of a notice period or a non-competition clause included in the contract.

¹⁵ In cases where a remuneration committee uses its discretion to determine payments, it should provide a clear explanation of its reasons, which are expected to be clearly justified by the financial results and the underlying performance of the company.

The remuneration committee should disclose how it has taken into account any relevant environmental, social, and governance (ESG) matters when determining remuneration outcomes. Such factors may include (but are not limited to): workplace fatalities and injuries, significant environmental incidents, large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies and/or significant adverse legal judgments or settlements.

It is relatively rare that a remuneration committee chooses to amend the targets used for either the annual bonus or the LTIP following the start of the performance period, but where this has occurred, it is good practice for the company to demonstrate how the revised targets are in practice no less challenging than the targets which were originally set.

- Proposals include both cash and share-based components to non-executive directors.
- Proposals bundle compensation for both non-executive and executive directors into a single resolution.

Equity-Based Compensation Guidelines

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for equity-based compensation proposals or the like if the plan(s) is(are) in line with long-term shareholder interests and align the award with shareholder value. This assessment includes, but is not limited to, the following factors:

- The volume of awards (to be) transferred to participants under all outstanding plans must not be excessive: the awards must not exceed 5 percent of a company's issued share capital. This number can be up to 10 percent for high-growth companies or particularly well-designed plans (e.g., with challenging performance criteria, extended vesting/performance period, etc.);
- The plan(s) must be sufficiently long-term in nature/structure: the vesting of awards (i) must occur no less than three years from the grant date, and (ii) if applicable, should be conditioned on meeting performance targets that are measured over a continuous period of at least three years;
- If applicable, performance criteria must be fully disclosed, measurable, quantifiable, and long-term oriented;
- The awards must be granted at market price. Discounts, if any, must be mitigated by performance criteria or other features that justify such discount.

Employee Share Purchase Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for employee stock purchase plans if the number of shares allocated to the plan is 10 percent or less of the company's issued share capital.

Compensation-Related Voting Sanctions

Should a company be deemed:

- To have egregious remuneration practices;
- To have failed to follow market practice by not submitting expected resolutions on executive compensation; or
- To have failed to respond to significant shareholder dissent on remuneration-related proposals;

an adverse vote recommendation could be applied to any of the following on a case-by case basis:

- The reelection of the chair of the remuneration committee or, where relevant, any other members of the remuneration committee;
- The reelection of the board chair;
- The discharge of directors; or
- The annual report and accounts.

This recommendation could be made in addition to other adverse recommendations under existing remuneration proposals (if any).

Share Matching Plans (Sweden and Norway)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

The Sustainability policy considers the following factors when evaluating share matching plans:

- For every share matching plan, Sustainability requires a holding period.
- For plans without performance criteria, the shares must be purchased at market price.
- For broad-based share matching plans directed at all employees, Sustainability accepts an arrangement up to a 1:1 ratio, i.e. no more than one free share is awarded for every share purchased at market value.

In addition, for plans directed at executives, we require that sufficiently challenging performance criteria be attached to the plan. Higher discounts demand proportionally higher performance criteria.

The dilution of the plan when combined with the dilution from any other proposed or outstanding employee stock purchase/stock matching plans, must comply with the Sustainability guidelines.

Canadian Guidelines

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Evaluate executive pay and practices, as well as certain aspects of outside director compensation on a case-by-case basis.

Vote against management say on pay (MSOP) proposals, withhold from compensation committee members (or in rare cases where the full board is deemed responsible, all directors including the CEO), and/or against an equity-based incentive plan proposal if:

- There is a misalignment between CEO pay and company performance (pay for performance);
- The company maintains problematic pay practices; or
- The board exhibits poor communication and responsiveness to shareholders.

Pay for Performance:

- Rationale for determining compensation (e.g., why certain elements and pay targets are used, how they are used in relation to the company's business strategy, and specific incentive plan goals, especially retrospective goals) and linkage of compensation to long-term performance;
- Evaluation of peer group benchmarking used to set target pay or award opportunities;
- Analysis of company performance and executive pay trends over time, taking into account our Pay-for-Performance policy;
- Mix of fixed versus variable and performance versus non-performance-based pay.

Pay Practices:

- Assessment of compensation components included in the Problematic Pay Practices policy such as: perks, severance packages, employee loans, supplemental executive pension plans, internal pay disparity and equity plan practices (including option backdating, repricing, option exchanges, or cancellations/surrenders and re-grants, etc.);
- Existence of measures that discourage excessive risk taking which include but are not limited to: clawbacks, holdbacks, stock ownership requirements, deferred compensation practices etc.

Board Communications and Responsiveness:

- Clarity of disclosure (e.g. whether the company's Form 51-102F6 disclosure provides timely, accurate, clear information about compensation practices in both tabular format and narrative discussion);
- Assessment of board's responsiveness to investor concerns on compensation issues (e.g., whether the company engaged with shareholders and / or responded to majority-supported shareholder proposals relating to executive pay).

Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay) Management Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals for an advisory shareholder vote on executive compensation. Vote against these resolutions in cases where boards have failed to demonstrate good stewardship of investors' interests regarding executive compensation practices.

In general, the management say on pay (MSOP) ballot item is the primary focus of voting on executive pay practices-- dissatisfaction with compensation practices can be expressed by voting against MSOP rather than withholding or voting against the compensation committee. However, if there is no MSOP on the ballot, then the negative vote will apply to members of the compensation committee. In addition, in egregious cases, or if the board fails to respond to concerns raised by a prior MSOP proposal, then vote against or withhold from compensation committee members (or, if the full board is deemed accountable, all directors). If the negative factors involve equity-based compensation, then vote against an equity-based plan proposal presented for shareholder approval.

Equity Compensation Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on equity-based compensation plans using an "equity plan scorecard" (EPSC) approach. Under this approach, certain features and practices related to the plan¹⁶ are assessed in combination, with positively-assessed factors potentially counterbalancing negatively-assessed factors and vice-versa. Factors are grouped into three pillars:

- **Plan Cost:** The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) in relation to peers and considering both:
 - SVT based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants; and
 - SVT based only on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants.
- **Plan Features:**
 - Absence of problematic change-in-control (CIC) provisions, including:
 - Single-trigger acceleration of award vesting in connection with a CIC; and
 - Settlement of performance-based equity at target or above in the event of a CIC-related acceleration of vesting regardless of performance.
 - No financial assistance to plan participants for the exercise or settlement of awards;
 - Public disclosure of the full text of the plan document; and
 - Reasonable share dilution from equity plans relative to market best practices.
- **Grant Practices:**
 - Reasonable three-year average burn rate relative to market best practices;
 - Meaningful time vesting requirements for the CEO's most recent equity grants (three-year lookback);
 - The issuance of performance-based equity to the CEO;
 - A clawback provision applicable to equity awards; and
 - Post-exercise or post-settlement share-holding requirements (S&P/TSX Composite Index only).

¹⁶In cases where certain historic grant data are unavailable (e.g. following an IPO or emergence from bankruptcy), Special Cases models will be applied which omit factors requiring these data.

Generally vote against the plan proposal if the combination of above factors, as determined by an overall score, indicates that the plan is not in shareholders' interests. In addition, vote against the plan if any of the following unacceptable factors have been identified:

- Discretionary or insufficiently limited non-employee director participation;
- An amendment provision which fails to adequately restrict the company's ability to amend the plan without shareholder approval;
- A history of repricing stock options without shareholder approval (three-year look-back);
- The plan is a vehicle for problematic pay practices or a significant pay-for-performance disconnect under certain circumstances; or
- Any other plan features that are determined to have a significant negative impact on shareholder interests.

Director Compensation- TSX

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: On a case-by-case basis, generally vote withhold for members of the committee responsible for director compensation (or, where no such committee has been identified, the board chair or full board) where director compensation practices which pose a risk of compromising a non-employee director's independence or which otherwise appear problematic from the perspective of shareholders have been identified, including:

- Excessive (relative to standard market practice) inducement grants issued upon the appointment or election of a new director to the board (consideration will be given to the form in which the compensation has been issued and the board's rationale for the inducement grant);
- Performance-based equity grants to non-employee directors which could pose a risk of aligning directors' interests away from those of shareholders and toward those of management; and
- Other significant problematic practices relating to director compensation.

Other Compensation Plans

Employee Stock Purchase Plans (ESPPs, ESOPs)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for broadly based (preferably all employees of the company with the exclusion of individuals with 5 percent or more beneficial ownership of the company) employee stock purchase plans where the following apply:

- Reasonable limit on employee contribution (may be expressed as a fixed dollar amount or as a percentage of base salary excluding bonus, commissions and special compensation);
- Employer contribution of up to 25 percent of employee contribution and no purchase price discount or employer contribution of more than 25 percent of employee contribution and SVT cost of the company's equity plans is within the allowable cap for the company;
- Purchase price is at least 80 percent of fair market value with no employer contribution;
- Potential dilution together with all other equity-based plans is 10 percent of outstanding common shares or less; and
- The Plan Amendment Provision requires shareholder approval for amendments to:
 - The number of shares reserved for the plan;
 - The allowable purchase price discount;
 - The employer matching contribution amount.

Treasury funded ESPPs, as well as market purchase funded ESPPs requesting shareholder approval, will be considered to be incentive based compensation if the employer match is greater than 25 percent of the employee contribution. In this case, the plan will be run through the Sustainability compensation model to assess the Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) cost of the plan together with the company's other equity-based compensation plans.

Eligibility and administration are also key factors in determining the acceptability of an ESPP/ESOP plan.

The Sustainability policy will also take into account other compensation and benefit programs, in particular pensions.

Deferred Share Unit Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for Deferred Compensation Plans if:

- Potential dilution together with all other equity-based compensation is ten percent of the outstanding common shares or less.

Other elements of director compensation to evaluate in conjunction with deferred share units include:

- Director stock ownership guidelines of a minimum of three times annual cash retainer;
- Vesting schedule or mandatory deferral period which requires that shares in payment of deferred units may not be paid out until the end of three years;
- The mix of remuneration between cash and equity; and
- Other forms of equity-based compensation, i.e. stock options, restricted stock.

International Guidelines

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Evaluate executive and director compensation proposals on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the Global Principles as applicable.

5. Environmental and Social Issues

Social and Environmental Proposals - Overall Approach

ISS' Sustainability Policy generally supports standards-based ESG shareholder proposals that enhance long-term shareholder and stakeholder value while aligning the interests of the company with those of society at large. In particular, the policy will focus on resolutions seeking greater transparency and/or adherence to internationally recognized standards and principles.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote in favor of social and environmental shareholder proposals that seek to promote good corporate citizenship while enhancing long-term shareholder and stakeholder value. Vote for disclosure reports that seek additional information particularly when it appears companies have not adequately addressed shareholders' social, workforce, and environmental concerns. In determining votes on shareholder social and environmental proposals, the following factors are considered:

- Whether the proposal itself is well framed and reasonable;
- Whether adoption of the proposal would have either a positive or negative impact on the company's short-term or long-term share value;
- The percentage of sales, assets and earnings affected;
- Whether the company has already responded in some appropriate manner to the request embodied in a proposal;
- Whether the company's analysis and voting recommendation to shareholders is persuasive;
- What other companies have done in response to the issue;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental or social practices;
- Whether implementation of the proposal would achieve the objectives sought in the proposal; and
- Whether the proposal addresses substantive matters that may impact shareholders' interests, including how the proposal may impact shareholders' rights.

Climate Change

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking information on the financial, physical, or regulatory risks it faces related to climate change- on its operations and investments, or on how the company identifies, measures, and manage such risks.
- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for the reduction of GHG emissions.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on responses to regulatory and public pressures surrounding climate change, and for disclosure of research that aided in setting company policies around climate change.
- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting a report/disclosure of goals on GHG emissions from company operations and/or products.
- Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the company to its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan. Factors such as the completeness and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure, the company's actual GHG emissions performance, whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions, and whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive will be taken into account.

Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan¹⁷, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions in line with Paris Agreement goals (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
- Whether the company has sought and received third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
- Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
- Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
- Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
- Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
- Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and
- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

¹⁷ Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

6. Other Items

Reorganizations/Restructurings

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote reorganizations and restructurings on a case-by-case basis.

Mergers and Acquisitions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

For every M&A analysis, the Sustainability policy reviews publicly available information as of the date of the report and evaluates the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction, balancing various and sometimes countervailing factors including:

- Valuation - Is the value to be received by the target shareholders (or paid by the acquirer) reasonable? While the fairness opinion may provide an initial starting point for assessing valuation reasonableness, Sustainability places emphasis on the offer premium, market reaction, and strategic rationale;
- Market reaction - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction will cause Sustainability to scrutinize a deal more closely;
- Strategic rationale - Does the deal make sense strategically? From where is the value derived? Cost and revenue synergies should not be overly aggressive or optimistic, but reasonably achievable. Management should also have a favorable track record of successful integration of historical acquisitions;
- Conflicts of interest - Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders? Sustainability will consider whether any special interests may have influenced these directors and officers to support or recommend the merger;
- Governance - Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction? If the governance profile is to change for the worse, the burden is on the company to prove that other issues (such as valuation) outweigh any deterioration in governance.
- Stakeholder impact - Impact on community stakeholders including impact on workforce, environment, etc.

Vote against if the companies do not provide sufficient information upon request to make an informed voting decision.

Mandatory Takeover Bid Waivers

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote proposals to waive mandatory takeover bid requirements on a case-by-case basis.

Reincorporation Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote reincorporation proposals on a case-by-case basis.

Expansion of Business Activities

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for resolutions to expand business activities unless the new business takes the company into risky areas.

Related-Party Transactions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote related-party transactions on a case-by-case basis considering factors including, but not limited to, the following:

- The parties on either side of the transaction;
- The nature of the asset to be transferred/service to be provided;
- The pricing of the transaction (and any associated professional valuation);
- The views of independent directors (where provided);
- The views of an independent financial adviser (where appointed);
- Whether any entities party to the transaction (including advisers) is conflicted; and
- The stated rationale for the transaction, including discussions of timing.

Commonly seen related-party transactions include (but are not limited to):

- Transactions involving the sale or purchase of property and/or assets;
- Transactions involving the lease of property and/or assets;
- Transactions involving the provision or receipt of services or leases; and
- Transactions involving the acquisition or transfer of intangible items (e.g., research and development, trademarks, license agreements).

If there is a transaction that is deemed problematic and that was not put to a shareholder vote, Sustainability may recommend against the election of the director(s) involved in the related-party transaction or against the full board.

In the case of Nigerian companies, vote for proposals relating to renewal of the general mandate for the company to enter into recurrent transactions with related parties necessary for its day-to-day operations in the absence of any concerns with the related party transactions concluded pursuant to this general mandate.

Antitakeover Mechanisms

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against all antitakeover proposals unless they are structured in such a way that they give shareholders the ultimate decision on any proposal or offer.

Following the Florange act of 2016, for French companies listed on a regulated market, generally vote against any general authorities impacting the share capital (i.e. authorities for share repurchase plans and any general share issuances with or without preemptive rights) if they can be used for antitakeover purposes without shareholders' prior explicit approval.

Exclusive Forum Proposals (TSX-Listed Companies and Venture Companies)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to adopt an exclusive forum by-law or to amend by-laws to add an exclusive forum provision, taking the following into consideration:

- Jurisdiction of incorporation;
- Board rationale for adopting exclusive forum;
- Legal actions subject to the exclusive forum provision;
- Evidence of past harm as a result of shareholder legal action against the company originating outside of the jurisdiction of incorporation;
- Company corporate governance provisions and shareholder rights;
- Any other problematic provisions that raise concerns regarding shareholder rights.

7. Foreign Private Issuers

Foreign private issuers ("FPIs") are defined as companies whose business is administered principally outside the U.S., with more than 50 percent of assets located outside the U.S.; a majority of whose directors/officers are not U.S. citizens or residents; and a majority of whose outstanding voting shares are held by non-residents of the U.S. Companies that are incorporated outside of the U.S. and listed solely on U.S. exchanges, where they qualify as FPIs, will be subject to the following policy:

Vote against or withhold from non-independent director nominees at companies which fail to meet the following criteria: a majority-independent board, and the presence of an audit, compensation, and a nomination committee, each of which is entirely composed of independent directors. Where the design and disclosure levels of equity compensation plans are comparable to those seen at U.S. companies, U.S. compensation policy will be used to evaluate the compensation plan proposals. All other voting items will be evaluated using the relevant regional or market proxy voting guidelines.

While a firm's country of incorporation will remain the primary basis for evaluating companies, Sustainability Advisory Services will generally apply its U.S. policies to the extent possible with respect to issuers that file DEF 14As, 10-K annual reports, and 10-Q quarterly reports, and are thus considered domestic issuers by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). U.S. policies will also apply to companies listed on U.S. exchanges as Foreign Private Issuers (FPIs) and that may be exempt from the disclosure and corporate governance requirements that apply to most companies traded on U.S. exchanges, including a number of SEC rules and stock market listing requirements. Corporations that have reincorporated outside the U.S. have found themselves subject to a combination of governance regulations and best practice standards that may not be entirely compatible with an evaluation framework based solely on the country of incorporation.

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UNITED STATES

SUSTAINABILITY PROXY VOTING GUIDELINES

2026 Policy Recommendations

Effective for Meetings on or after February 1, 2026

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Consideration of Certain Diversity Factors in Making Vote Recommendations Is Suspended
(for more information, see pp. 18-19)

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Introduction

ISS recognizes the view among many investment professionals that sustainability or environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) factors could present material risks to portfolio investments. Whereas investment managers have traditionally analyzed topics such as board accountability and executive compensation to mitigate risks related to poor corporate governance, incorporating ESG performance factors into investment decisions can give a more comprehensive understanding of the overall risk profile of the companies and ensure sustainable long-term value for their beneficiaries.

Investors concerned with portfolio value preservation and enhancement through the incorporation of sustainability factors can also carry out this active ownership approach through their proxy voting activity. In voting their shares, sustainability-minded investors are generally concerned with ensuring corporate activities are aligned with best practices of disclosure and practice, because they believe that doing so is an effective way to achieve and protect long-term value for their beneficiaries. These investors will tend to support requests for information regarding an issuer's adoption of, or adherence to, relevant norms, standards, codes of conduct or universally recognized international initiatives.

ISS' Sustainability Proxy Voting Guidelines

ISS has therefore developed proxy voting guidelines that are consistent with the objectives of sustainability-minded investors and fiduciaries. On ESG matters, ISS' Sustainability Policy seeks to promote support for recognized global governing bodies promoting sustainable business practices advocating for stewardship of environment, fair labor practices, non-discrimination, and the protection of human rights. Generally, ISS' Sustainability Policy takes as its frame of reference internationally recognized sustainability-related initiatives such as the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI, previously UNPRI), United Nations Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Carbon Principles, International Labour Organization Conventions (ILO), Ceres Roadmap 2030, Global Sullivan Principles, MacBride Principles, and environmental and social European Union Directives. Such initiatives seek to promote a fair, unified and productive reporting and compliance environment in order to mitigate related financial and reputational risks.

These guidelines provide an overview of how ISS approaches proxy voting issues for subscribers of the Sustainability Policy. We consider the merits of each proposal in the context of company-specific circumstances and industry norms. ISS updates the guidelines on an annual basis to take into account emerging issues and trends on environmental, social and corporate governance topics, as well as the evolution of market standards, regulatory changes and client feedback.

The Sustainability Policy guidelines are based on an objective to create and preserve economic value by incorporating awareness of a full range of governance and sustainability issues.

1. Routine/Miscellaneous

Adjourn Meeting

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals to provide management with the authority to adjourn an annual or special meeting absent compelling reasons to support the proposal.

- Vote for proposals that relate specifically to soliciting votes for a merger or transaction if supporting that merger or transaction.
- Vote against proposals if the wording is too vague or if the proposal includes "other business."

Amend Quorum Requirements

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to reduce quorum requirements for shareholder meetings below a majority of the shares outstanding, taking into consideration:

- The new quorum threshold requested;
- The rationale presented for the reduction;
- The market capitalization of the company (size, inclusion in indices);
- The company's ownership structure;
- Previous voter turnout or attempts to achieve quorum;
- Any provisions or commitments to restore quorum to a majority of shares outstanding, should voter turnout improve sufficiently; and
- Other factors as appropriate.

In general, a quorum threshold kept as close to a majority of shares outstanding as is achievable is preferred.

Vote case-by-case on directors who unilaterally lower the quorum requirements below a majority of the shares outstanding, taking into consideration the factors listed above.

Amend Minor Bylaws

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for bylaw or charter changes that are of a housekeeping nature (updates or corrections).

Change Company Name

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to change the corporate name unless there is compelling evidence that the change would adversely impact shareholder value.

Change Date, Time, or Location of Annual Meeting

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to change the date, time, or location of the annual meeting unless the proposed change is unreasonable.

Vote against shareholder proposals to change the date, time, or location of the annual meeting unless the current scheduling or location is unreasonable.

Other Business

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to approve other business when it appears as voting item.

Audit-Related

Auditor Indemnification and Limitation of Liability

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the issue of auditor indemnification and limitation of liability. Factors to be assessed include, but are not limited to:

- The terms of the auditor agreement--the degree to which these agreements impact shareholders' rights;
- The motivation and rationale for establishing the agreements;
- The quality of the company's disclosure; and
- The company's historical practices in the audit area.

Vote against or withhold from members of an audit committee in situations where there is persuasive evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

Auditor Ratification

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to ratify auditors unless any of the following apply:

- An auditor has a financial interest in or association with the company, and is therefore not independent;
- There is reason to believe that the independent auditor has rendered an opinion that is neither accurate nor indicative of the company's financial position;
- Poor accounting practices are identified that rise to a serious level of concern, such as: fraud; misapplication of GAAP; and material weaknesses identified in Section 404 disclosures; or
- Fees for non-audit services ("Other" fees) are excessive.

Non-audit fees are excessive if:

- Non-audit ("other") fees > audit fees + audit-related fees + tax compliance/preparation fees

Tax compliance and preparation include the preparation of original and amended tax returns and refund claims, and tax payment planning. All other services in the tax category, such as tax advice, planning, or consulting, should be added to "Other" fees. If the breakout of tax fees cannot be determined, add all tax fees to "Other" fees.

In circumstances where "Other" fees include fees related to significant one-time capital structure events (such as initial public offerings, bankruptcy emergence, and spin-offs) and the company makes public disclosure of the amount and nature of those fees that are an exception to the standard "non-audit fee" category, then such fees may be excluded from the non-audit fees considered in determining the ratio of non-audit to audit/audit-related fees/tax compliance and preparation for purposes of determining whether non-audit fees are excessive.

Shareholder Proposals Limiting Non-Audit Services

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to prohibit or limit their auditors from engaging in non-audit services.

Shareholder Proposals on Audit Firm Rotation

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking for audit firm rotation, taking into account:

- The tenure of the audit firm;
- The length of rotation specified in the proposal;
- Any significant audit-related issues at the company;
- The number of audit committee meetings held each year;
- The number of financial experts serving on the committee; and
- Whether the company has a periodic renewal process where the auditor is evaluated for both audit quality and competitive price.

2. Board of Directors

Voting on Director Nominees in Uncontested Elections

Four fundamental principles apply when determining votes on director nominees:

- **Accountability**: Boards should be sufficiently accountable to shareholders, including through transparency of the company's governance practices and regular board elections, by the provision of sufficient information for shareholders to be able to assess directors and board composition, and through the ability of shareholders to remove directors.
- **Responsiveness**: Directors should respond to investor input, such as that expressed through significant opposition to management proposals, significant support for shareholder proposals (whether binding or non-binding), and tender offers where a majority of shares are tendered.
- **Composition**: Companies should seek directors who can add value to the board through specific skills or expertise and who can devote sufficient time and commitment to serve effectively. Boards should be of a size appropriate to accommodate diversity, expertise, and independence, while ensuring active and collaborative participation by all members. Boards should be sufficiently diverse to ensure consideration of a wide range of perspectives.
- **Independence**: Boards should be sufficiently independent from management (and significant shareholders) so as to ensure that they are able and motivated to effectively supervise management's performance for the benefit of all shareholders, including in setting and monitoring the execution of corporate strategy, with appropriate use of shareholder capital, and in setting and monitoring executive compensation programs that support that strategy. The chair of the board should ideally be an independent director, and all boards should have an independent leadership position or a similar role in order to help provide appropriate counterbalance to executive management, as well as having sufficiently independent committees that focus on key governance concerns such as audit, compensation, and nomination of directors.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for director nominees, except under the following circumstances (with new nominees¹ considered on a case-by-case basis):

Accountability

Problematic Takeover Defenses, Capital Structure, and Governance Structures

Classified Board Structure: The board is classified, and a continuing director responsible for a problematic governance issue at the board/committee level that would warrant a withhold/against vote recommendation is not up for election. All appropriate nominees (except new) may be held accountable.

Removal of Shareholder Discretion on Classified Boards: The company has opted into, or failed to opt out of, state laws requiring a classified board structure.

Director Performance Evaluation: The board lacks mechanisms to promote accountability and oversight, coupled with sustained poor performance relative to peers. Sustained poor performance is measured by one-, three-, and five-year total shareholder returns in the bottom half of a company's four-digit GICS industry group (Russell 3000

¹ A "new nominee" is a director who is being presented for election by shareholders for the first time. Recommendations on new nominees who have served for less than one year are made on a case-by-case basis depending on the timing of their appointment and the problematic governance issue in question.

companies only). Take into consideration the company's operational metrics and other factors as warranted. Problematic provisions include but are not limited to:

- A classified board structure;
- A supermajority vote requirement;
- Either a plurality vote standard in uncontested director elections or a majority vote standard with no plurality carve-out for contested elections;
- The inability of shareholders to call special meetings;
- The inability of shareholders to act by written consent;
- A multi-class capital structure; and/or
- A non-shareholder-approved poison pill.

Poison Pills: Generally vote against or withhold from all nominees (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case) if:

- The company has a poison pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature²;
- The board makes a material adverse modification to an existing pill, including, but not limited to, extension, renewal, or lowering the trigger, without shareholder approval; or
- The company has a long-term poison pill (with a term of over one year) that was not approved by the public shareholders³.

Vote case-by-case on nominees if the board adopts an initial short-term pill³ (with a term of one year or less) without shareholder approval, taking into consideration:

- The trigger threshold and other terms of the pill;
- The disclosed rationale for the adoption;
- The context in which the pill was adopted, (e.g.) industry factors such as the company's size and stage of development, sudden changes in its market capitalization, and extraordinary industry-wide or macroeconomic events);
- A commitment to put any renewal to a shareholder vote;
- The company's overall track record on corporate governance and responsiveness to shareholders; and
- Other factors as relevant.

Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments: Generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees², who should be considered case-by-case) if the board amends the company's bylaws or charter without shareholder approval in a manner that materially diminishes shareholders' rights or that could adversely impact shareholders, considering the following factors:

- The board's rationale for adopting the bylaw/charter amendment without shareholder ratification;
- Disclosure by the company of any significant engagement with shareholders regarding the amendment;
- The level of impairment of shareholders' rights caused by the board's unilateral amendment to the bylaws/charter;
- The board's track record with regard to unilateral board action on bylaw/charter amendments or other entrenchment provisions;
- The company's ownership structure;
- The company's existing governance provisions;

² If a short-term pill with a deadhand or slowhand feature is enacted but expires before the next shareholder vote, Sustainability Advisory Services will generally still recommend withhold/against nominees at the next shareholder meeting following its adoption.

³ Approval prior to, or in connection, with a company's becoming publicly-traded, or in connection with a de-SPAC transaction, is insufficient.

- The timing of the board's amendment to the bylaws/charter in connection with a significant business development; and,
- Other factors, as deemed appropriate, that may be relevant to determine the impact of the amendment on shareholders.

Unless the adverse amendment is reversed or submitted to a binding shareholder vote, in subsequent years vote case-by-case on director nominees.

Generally vote against (except new nominees, who should be considered case-by-case) if the directors:

- Classified the board;
- Adopted supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- Eliminated shareholders' ability to amend bylaws;
- Adopted a fee-shifting provision; or
- Adopted another provision deemed egregious.

Problematic Governance Structure: For companies that hold or held their first annual meeting⁷ of public shareholders after Feb. 1, 2015, generally vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case) if, prior to or in connection with the company's public offering, the company or its board adopted the following bylaw or charter provisions that are considered to be materially adverse to shareholder rights

- Supermajority vote requirements to amend the bylaws or charter;
- A classified board structure; or
- Other egregious provisions.

A provision which specifies that the problematic structure(s) will be sunset within seven years of the date of going public will be considered a mitigating factor.

Unless the adverse provision is reversed or removed, vote case-by-case on director nominees in subsequent years.

Unequal Voting Rights: Generally vote withhold or against directors individually, committee members, or the entire board (except new nominees¹, who should be considered case-by-case), if the company employs a multi-class capital structure with unequal voting rights⁵.

Exceptions to this policy will generally be limited to:

- Newly-public companies⁶ with a sunset provision of no more than seven years from the date of going public;
- Limited Partnerships and the Operating Partnership (OP) unit structure of REITs;
- Convertible preferred shares that vote on an "as-converted" basis;
- Situations where the enhanced voting rights are limited in duration and applicability, such as where they are intended to overcome low voting turnout and ensure approval of a specific non-controversial agenda item and "mirrored voting" applies;

⁴ Includes companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

⁵ This generally includes classes of common or preferred stock that have more votes per share than other shares; classes of shares that are not entitled to vote on all the same ballot items or nominees; or stock with time-phased voting rights ("loyalty shares"). Preferred shares that have voting rights only with respect to items that affect the rights of their holders as a class are not generally considered a problematic capital structure.

⁶ Newly-public companies generally include companies that emerge from bankruptcy, SPAC transactions, spin-offs, direct listings, and those who complete a traditional initial public offering.

- Situations where the unequal voting rights are considered *de minimis*; or
- The company provides sufficient protections for minority shareholders, such as allowing minority shareholders a regular binding vote on whether the capital structure should be maintained.

Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions: Vote against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board, where boards ask shareholders to ratify existing charter or bylaw provisions considering the following factors:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

Restricting Binding Shareholder Proposals: Generally vote against or withhold from members of the governance committee if:

- The company's governing documents impose undue restrictions on shareholders' ability to amend the bylaws. Such restrictions include but are not limited to: outright prohibition on the submission of binding shareholder proposals, or share ownership requirements, subject matter restrictions, or time holding requirement in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8. Vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis.
- Submission of management proposals to approve or ratify requirements in excess of SEC Rule 14a-8 for the submission of binding bylaw amendments will generally be viewed as an insufficient restoration of shareholders' rights. Generally, continue to vote against or withhold on an ongoing basis until shareholders are provided with an unfettered ability to amend the bylaws or a proposal providing for such unfettered right is submitted for shareholder approval.

Problematic Audit-Related Practices

Generally, vote against or withhold from the members of the audit committee if:

- The non-audit fees paid to the auditor are excessive (see discussion under "Auditor Ratification");
- The company receives an adverse opinion on the company's financial statements from its auditor; or
- There is persuasive evidence that the audit committee entered into an inappropriate indemnification agreement with its auditor that limits the ability of the company, or its shareholders, to pursue legitimate legal recourse against the audit firm.

Vote case-by-case on members of the audit committee and potentially the full board if:

- Poor accounting practices are identified that rise to a level of serious concern, such as: fraud; misapplication of GAAP; and material weaknesses identified in Section 404 disclosures. Examine the severity, breadth, chronological sequence, and duration, as well as the company's efforts at remediation or corrective actions, in determining whether withhold/against votes are warranted.

Problematic Compensation Practices

In the absence of an Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation (Say on Pay) ballot item or in egregious situations, vote against or withhold from the members of the compensation committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is a significant misalignment between CEO pay and company performance ([pay for performance](#));
- The company maintains significant [problematic pay practices](#);
- The board exhibits a significant level of [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders;
- The company fails to include a Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions, or under the company's declared frequency of say on pay; or
- The company fails to include a Frequency of Say on Pay ballot item when required under SEC provisions.

High Non-Employee Director Pay: Generally vote against members of the board committee responsible for approving/setting non-employee director compensation if there is a pattern (i.e. two or more consecutive or non-consecutive years/across multiple years) of awarding excessive or otherwise problematic⁷ non-employee director compensation without disclosing a compelling rationale or other mitigating factors.

Adverse recommendations may be warranted in the first year for director pay issues that are considered egregious.

Problematic Pledging of Company Stock: Vote against the members of the committee that oversees risks related to pledging, or the full board, where a significant level of pledged company stock by executives or directors raises concerns. The following factors will be considered:

- The presence of an anti-pledging policy, disclosed in the proxy statement, that prohibits future pledging activity;
- The magnitude of aggregate pledged shares in terms of total common shares outstanding, market value, and trading volume;
- Disclosure of progress or lack thereof in reducing the magnitude of aggregate pledged shares over time;
- Disclosure in the proxy statement that shares subject to stock ownership and holding requirements do not include pledged company stock; and
- Any other relevant factors.

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Failures

Under extraordinary circumstances, vote against or withhold from directors individually, committee members, or the entire board, due to:

- Material failures of governance, stewardship, risk oversight⁸, or fiduciary responsibilities at the company, including failure to adequately guard against or manage ESG risks;
- A lack of sustainability reporting in the company's public documents and/or website in conjunction with a failure to adequately manage or mitigate ESG risks;
- Failure to replace management as appropriate; or
- Egregious actions related to a director's service on other boards that raise substantial doubt about his or her ability to effectively oversee management and serve the best interests of shareholders at any company.

⁷ May include performance awards, retirement benefits, or problematic perquisites.

⁸ Examples of failure of risk oversight include, but are not limited to: bribery; large or serial fines or sanctions from regulatory bodies; demonstrably poor risk oversight of environmental and social issues, including climate change; significant environmental incidents including spills and pollution; large scale or repeat workplace fatalities or injuries; significant adverse legal judgments or settlements; or hedging of company stock.

Climate Risk Mitigation and Net Zero

For companies that are significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, through their operations or value chain⁹, generally vote against or withhold from the incumbent chair of the responsible committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) in cases where Sustainability Advisory Services determines that the company is not taking the minimum steps needed to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory.

Minimum steps needed to be considered to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory are (all minimum criteria will be required to be in alignment with the policy):

- The company has detailed disclosure of climate-related risks, such as according to the framework established by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), including:
 - Board governance measures;
 - Corporate strategy;
 - Risk management analyses; and
 - Metrics and targets.
- The company has declared a Net Zero target by 2050 or sooner and the target includes scope 1, 2, and relevant scope 3 emissions.
- The company has set a medium-term target for reducing its GHG emissions and the targets include scope 1, 2, and relevant scope 3 emissions.
- The company has a decarbonization strategy in place, with a defined set of quantitative and qualitative actions to reach Net Zero targets.
- Expectations about what constitutes "minimum steps needed to be aligned with a Net Zero by 2050 trajectory" will increase over time.

Responsiveness

Vote case-by-case on individual directors, committee members, or the entire board of directors as appropriate if:

- The board failed to act on a shareholder proposal that received the support of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year or failed to act on a management proposal seeking to ratify an existing charter/bylaw provision that received opposition of a majority of the shares cast in the previous year. Factors that will be considered are:
 - Disclosed outreach efforts by the board to shareholders in the wake of the vote;
 - Rationale provided in the proxy statement for the level of implementation;
 - The subject matter of the proposal;
 - The level of support for and opposition to the resolution in past meetings;
 - Actions taken by the board in response to the majority vote and its engagement with shareholders;
 - The continuation of the underlying issue as a voting item on the ballot (as either shareholder or management proposals); and
 - Other factors as appropriate.
- The board failed to act on takeover offers where the majority of shares are tendered;
- At the previous board election, any director received more than 50 percent withhold/against votes of the shares cast and the company has failed to address the issue(s) that caused the high withhold/against vote.

⁹ Companies defined as "significant GHG emitters" will be those on the current Climate Action 100+ Focus Group list.

Vote case-by-case on Compensation Committee members (or, in exceptional cases, the full board) and/or the say-on-pay proposal when the company's previous say-on-pay received support of less than 70 percent of votes cast. Factors that will be considered in assessing board responsiveness include:

- Disclosure of engagement efforts with major institutional investors regarding the issues that contributed to the low level of support (including the timing and frequency of engagements and whether independent directors participated);
- Disclosure of the specific concerns voiced by dissenting shareholders that led to the say-on-pay opposition;
- Disclosure of specific and meaningful actions taken to address shareholders' concerns;

If the company discloses meaningful engagement efforts, but in addition states that it was unable to obtain specific feedback, Sustainability Advisory Services will assess company actions taken in response to the say-on-pay vote as well as the company's explanation as to why such actions are beneficial for shareholders.

Additional factors that may be considered include:

- Whether the issues raised are recurring or isolated;
- The company's ownership structure
- Significant corporate activity, such as a recent merger or proxy contest; and
- Any other compensation action or factor considered relevant to assessing board responsiveness.

If the say-on-pay support level was less than 50 percent of votes cast, this would warrant the highest degree of responsiveness, as assessed under the factors noted above.

Vote case-by-case on Compensation Committee members (or, in exceptional cases, the full board) if the board implements an advisory vote on executive compensation on a less frequent basis than the frequency that received the plurality of votes cast.

Composition

Attendance at Board and Committee Meetings: Generally vote against or withhold from directors (except nominees who served only part of the fiscal year¹⁰) who attend less than 75 percent of the aggregate of their board and committee meetings for the period for which they served, unless an acceptable reason for absences is disclosed in the proxy or another SEC filing. Acceptable reasons for director absences are generally limited to the following:

- Medical issues/illness;
- Family emergencies; and
- Missing only one meeting (when the total of all meetings is three or fewer).
- In cases of chronic poor attendance without reasonable justification, in addition to voting against the director(s) with poor attendance, generally vote against or withhold from appropriate members of the nominating/governance committees or the full board.

If the proxy disclosure is unclear and insufficient to determine whether a director attended at least 75 percent of the aggregate of his/her board and committee meetings during his/her period of service, vote against or withhold from the director(s) in question.

¹⁰ Nominees who served for only part of the fiscal year are generally exempted from the attendance policy.

Overboarded Directors: Generally, vote against or withhold from individual directors who:

- Sit on more than five public company boards; or
- Are CEOs of public companies who sit on the boards of more than two public companies besides their own — withhold only at their outside boards¹¹.

Gender Diversity

NOTE: For shareholder meeting reports published on or after February 25th, 2025, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) has indefinitely halted the consideration of the gender diversity of a company's board when making vote recommendations with respect to the election or re-election of directors at U.S. companies covered by these guidelines under its proprietary ISS U.S. Sustainability Specialty policy.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee, or other nominees on a case-by-case basis, if the board lacks at least one director of an underrepresented gender identity¹².

Racial and/or Ethnic Diversity

NOTE: For shareholder meeting reports published on or after February 25th, 2025, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) has indefinitely halted the consideration of the racial and/or ethnic diversity of a company's board when making vote recommendations with respect to the election or re-election of directors at U.S. companies covered by these guidelines under its proprietary ISS U.S. Sustainability Specialty policy.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against or withhold from the chair of the nominating committee (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) where the board has no apparent racially or ethnically diverse members¹³.

Independence

Vote against or withhold from non-independent directors (Executive Directors and Non-Independent Non-Executive Directors per Sustainability Advisory Services' [Classification of Directors](#)) when:

- Independent directors comprise 50 percent or less of the board;
- The non-independent director serves on the audit, compensation, or nominating committee;
- The company lacks an audit, compensation, or nominating committee so that the full board functions as that committee; or
- The company lacks a formal nominating committee, even if the board attests that the independent directors fulfill the functions of such a committee.

¹¹ Although all of a CEO's subsidiary boards will be counted as separate boards, Sustainability Advisory Services will not recommend a withhold vote for the CEO of a parent company board or any of the controlled (>50 percent ownership) subsidiaries of that parent, but may do so at subsidiaries that are less than 50 percent controlled and boards outside the parent/subsidiary relationships.

¹² Underrepresented gender identity includes directors who identify as women or as non-binary.

¹³ Aggregate diversity statistics provided by the board will only be considered if specific to racial and/or ethnic diversity.

Sustainability Policy Classification of Directors – U.S.

1. **Executive Director**
 - 1.1. Current officer^[1] of the company or one of its affiliates^[2].
2. **Non-Independent Non-Executive Director**

Board Identification

 - 2.1. Director identified as not independent by the board.

Controlling/Significant Shareholder

 - 2.2. Beneficial owner of more than 50 percent of the company's voting power (this may be aggregated if voting power is distributed among more than one member of a group).

Current Employment at Company or Partnership

 - 2.3. Non-officer employee of the firm (including employee representatives).
 - 2.4. Officer^[1], former officer, or general or limited partner of a joint venture or partnership with the company.

Former Employment

 - 2.5. Former CEO of the company.^{[3],[4]}
 - 2.6. Former non-CEO officer^[1] of the company or an affiliate^[2] within the past five years.
 - 2.7. Former officer^[1] of an acquired company within the past five years^[4].
 - 2.8. Officer^[1] of a former parent or predecessor firm at the time the company was sold or split off within the past five years.
 - 2.9. Former interim officer if the service was longer than 18 months. If the service was between 12 and 18 months an assessment of the interim officer's employment agreement will be made.^[5]

Family Members

 - 2.10. Immediate family member^[6] of a current or former officer^[1] of the company or its affiliates^[2] within the last five years.
 - 2.11. Immediate family member^[6] of a current employee of company or its affiliates^[2] where additional factors raise concern (which may include, but are not limited to, the following: a director related to numerous employees; the company or its affiliates employ relatives of numerous board members; or a non-Section 16 officer in a key strategic role).

Professional, Transactional, and Charitable Relationships

 - 2.12. Director who (or whose immediate family member^[6]) currently provides professional services^[7] in excess of \$10,000 per year to: the company, an affiliate^[2], or an individual officer of the company or an affiliate; either directly or is (or whose family member is) a partner, employee, or controlling shareholder of an organization which provides the services.
 - 2.13. Director who (or whose immediate family member^[6]) currently has any material transactional relationship^[8] with the company or its affiliates^[2]; or who is (or whose immediately family member^[6] is) a partner in, or a controlling shareholder or an executive officer of, an organization which has the material transactional relationship^[8] (excluding investments in the company through a private placement).
 - 2.14. Director who (or whose immediate family member^[6]) is a trustee, director, or employee of a charitable or non-profit organization that receives material grants or endowments^[8] from the company or its affiliates^[2].

Other Relationships

 - 2.15. Party to a voting agreement^[9] to vote in line with management on proposals being brought to shareholder vote.
 - 2.16. Has (or an immediate family member^[6] has) an interlocking relationship as defined by the SEC involving members of the board of directors or its Compensation Committee^[10].
 - 2.17. Founder^[11] of the company but not currently an employee.

2.18. Director with pay comparable to Named Executive Officers.

2.19. Any material^[12] relationship with the company.

3. Independent Director

3.1. No material^[12] connection to the company other than a board seat.

Footnotes:

^[1]The definition of officer will generally follow that of a “Section 16 officer” (officers subject to Section 16 of the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934) and includes the chief executive, operating, financial, legal, technology, and accounting officers of a company (including the president, treasurer, secretary, controller, or any vice president in charge of a principal business unit, division, or policy function). Current interim officers are included in this category. For private companies, the equivalent positions are applicable. A non-employee director serving as an officer due to statutory requirements (e.g. corporate secretary) will be classified as an Affiliated Outsider under “Any material relationship with the company.” However, if the company provides explicit disclosure that the director is not receiving additional compensation in excess of \$10,000 per year for serving in that capacity, then the director will be classified as an Independent Outsider.

^[2] “Affiliate” includes a subsidiary, sibling company, or parent company. Sustainability Advisory Services uses 50 percent control ownership by the parent company as the standard for applying its affiliate designation. The manager/advisor of an externally managed issuer (EMI) is considered an affiliate.

^[3] Includes any former CEO of the company prior to the company’s initial public offering (IPO).

^[4] When there is a former CEO of a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) serving on the board of an acquired company, Sustainability Advisory Services will generally classify such directors as independent unless determined otherwise taking into account the following factors: the applicable listing standards determination of such director’s independence; any operating ties to the firm; and the existence of any other conflicting relationships or related party transactions.

^[5] Sustainability Advisory Services will look at the terms of the interim officer’s employment contract to determine if it contains severance pay, long-term health and pension benefits, or other such standard provisions typically contained in contracts of permanent, non-temporary CEOs. Sustainability Advisory Services will also consider if a formal search process was under way for a full-time officer at the time.

^[6] “Immediate family member” follows the SEC’s definition of such and covers spouses, parents, children, step-parents, step-children, siblings, in-laws, and any person (other than a tenant or employee) sharing the household of any director, nominee for director, executive officer, or significant shareholder of the company.

^[7] Professional services can be characterized as advisory in nature, generally involve access to sensitive company information or to strategic decision-making, and typically have a commission- or fee-based payment structure. Professional services generally include, but are not limited to the following: investment banking/financial advisory services; commercial banking (beyond deposit services); investment services; insurance services; accounting/audit services; consulting services; marketing services; legal services; property management services; realtor services; lobbying services; executive search services; and IT consulting services. The following would generally be considered transactional relationships and not professional services: deposit services; IT tech support services; educational services; and construction services. The case of participation in a banking syndicate by a non-lead bank should be considered a transactional (and hence subject to the associated materiality test) rather than a professional relationship. “Of Counsel” relationships are only considered immaterial if the individual does not receive any form of compensation (in excess of \$10,000 per year) from, or is a retired partner of, the firm providing the professional service. The case of a company providing a professional service to one of its directors or to an entity with which one of its directors is affiliated, will be considered a transactional rather than a professional relationship. Insurance services and marketing services are assumed to be professional services unless the company explains why such services are not advisory.

^[8] A material transactional relationship, including grants to non-profit organizations, exists if the company makes annual payments to, or receives annual payments from, another entity exceeding the greater of \$200,000 or 5 percent of the recipient's gross revenues, in the case of a company which follows NASDAQ listing standards; or the greater of \$1,000,000 or 2 percent of the recipient's gross revenues, in the case of a company which follows NYSE listing standards. In the case of a company which follows neither of the preceding standards, Sustainability Advisory Services will apply the NASDAQ-based materiality test. (The recipient is the party receiving the financial proceeds from the transaction).

^[9] Dissident directors who are parties to a voting agreement pursuant to a settlement or similar arrangement may be classified as independent outsiders if an analysis of the following factors indicates that the voting agreement does not compromise their alignment with all shareholders' interests: the terms of the agreement; the duration of the standstill provision in the agreement; the limitations and requirements of actions that are agreed upon; if the dissident director nominee(s) is subject to the standstill; and if there any conflicting relationships or related party transactions.

^[10] Interlocks include: executive officers serving as directors on each other's compensation or similar committees (or, in the absence of such a committee, on the board); or executive officers sitting on each other's boards and at least one serves on the other's compensation or similar committees (or, in the absence of such a committee, on the board).

^[11] The operating involvement of the founder with the company will be considered; if the founder was never employed by the company, Sustainability Advisory Services may deem him or her an independent outsider.

^[12] For purposes of Sustainability Advisory Services' director independence classification, "material" will be defined as a standard of relationship (financial, personal or otherwise) that a reasonable person might conclude could potentially influence one's objectivity in the boardroom in a manner that would have a meaningful impact on an individual's ability to satisfy requisite fiduciary standards on behalf of shareholders.

Other Board-Related Proposals

Board Refreshment

Board refreshment is best implemented through an ongoing program of individual director evaluations, conducted annually, to ensure the evolving needs of the board are met and to bring in fresh perspectives, skills, and diversity as needed.

Term/Tenure Limits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals regarding director term/tenure limits, considering:

- The rationale provided for adoption of the term/tenure limit;
- The robustness of the company's board evaluation process;
- Whether the limit is of sufficient length to allow for a broad range of director tenures;
- Whether the limit would disadvantage independent directors compared to non-independent directors; and
- Whether the board will impose the limit evenly, and not have the ability to waive it in a discriminatory manner.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking for the company to adopt director term/tenure limits, considering:

- The scope of the shareholder proposal; and
- Evidence of problematic issues at the company combined with, or exacerbated by, a lack of board refreshment.

Age Limits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against management and shareholder proposals to limit the tenure of independent directors through mandatory retirement ages. Vote for proposals to remove mandatory age limits.

Board Size

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals seeking to fix the board size or designate a range for the board size.

Vote against proposals that give management the ability to alter the size of the board outside of a specified range without shareholder approval.

Classification/Declassification of the Board

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to classify (stagger) the board.

Vote for proposals to repeal classified boards and to elect all directors annually.

CEO Succession Planning

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking disclosure on a CEO succession planning policy, considering, at a minimum, the following factors:

- The reasonableness/scope of the request; and
- The company's existing disclosure on its current CEO succession planning process.

Cumulative Voting

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against management proposals to eliminate cumulative voting, and for shareholder proposals to restore or provide for cumulative voting, unless:

- The company has proxy access, thereby allowing shareholders to nominate directors to the company's ballot; and
- The company has adopted a majority vote standard, with a carve-out for plurality voting in situations where there are more nominees than seats, and a director resignation policy to address failed elections.

Vote for proposals for cumulative voting at controlled companies (insider voting power > 50%).

Director and Officer Indemnification, Liability Protection, and Exculpation

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals on director and officer indemnification liability protection, and exculpation¹⁴.

Consider the stated rationale for the proposed change. Also consider, among other factors, the extent to which the proposal would:

- Eliminate entirely directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of care.
- Eliminate directors' and officers' liability for monetary damages for violating the duty of loyalty.
- Expand coverage beyond just legal expenses to liability for acts that are more serious violations of fiduciary obligation than mere carelessness.
- Expand the scope of indemnification to provide for mandatory indemnification of company officials in connection with acts that previously the company was permitted to provide indemnification for, at the discretion of the company's board (i.e., "permissive indemnification"), but that previously the company was not required to indemnify.

Vote for only those proposals providing such expanded coverage in cases when a director's or officer's legal defense was unsuccessful if both of the following apply:

- If the individual was found to have acted in good faith and in a manner that the individual reasonably believed was in the best interests of the company; and
- If only the director's legal expenses would be covered.

Establish/Amend Nominee Qualifications

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals that establish or amend director qualifications. Votes should be based on the reasonableness of the criteria and the degree to which they may preclude dissident nominees from joining the board.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder resolutions seeking a director nominee who possesses a particular subject matter expertise, considering:

- The company's board committee structure, existing subject matter expertise, and board nomination provisions relative to that of its peers;
- The company's existing board and management oversight mechanisms regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- The company's disclosure and performance relating to the issue for which board oversight is sought and any significant related controversies; and
- The scope and structure of the proposal.

¹⁴ **Indemnification:** the condition of being secured against loss or damage.

Limited liability: a person's financial liability is limited to a fixed sum, or personal financial assets are not at risk if the individual loses a lawsuit that results in financial award/damages to the plaintiff.

Exculpation: to eliminate or limit the personal liability of a director or officer to the corporation or its shareholders for monetary damages for breach of fiduciary duty as a director or officer.

Establish Other Board Committee Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against shareholder proposals to establish a new board committee, as such proposals seek a specific oversight mechanism/structure that potentially limits a company's flexibility to determine an appropriate oversight mechanism for itself. However, the following factors will be considered:

- Existing oversight mechanisms (including current committee structure) regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Level of disclosure regarding the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Company performance related to the issue for which board oversight is sought;
- Board committee structure compared to that of other companies in its industry sector; and
- The scope and structure of the proposal.

Filling Vacancies/Removal of Directors

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals that provide that directors may be removed only for cause.

- Vote for proposals to restore shareholders' ability to remove directors with or without cause.
- Vote against proposals that provide that only continuing directors may elect replacements to fill board vacancies.
- Vote for proposals that permit shareholders to elect directors to fill board vacancies.

Independent Board Chair

One of the principal functions of the board is to monitor and evaluate the performance of the CEO and other executive officers. The board chair's duty to oversee management may be compromised when he/she is connected to or a part of the management team. Generally, Sustainability Advisory Services recommends supporting shareholder proposals that would require that the position of board chair be held by an individual with no materials ties to the company other than their board seat.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally, support shareholder proposals that would require the board chair to be independent of management.

Majority of Independent Directors/Establishment of Independent Committees

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals asking that a majority or more of directors be independent unless the board composition already meets the proposed threshold by the Sustainability policy's definition of independent outsider. (See

Sustainability Policy Classification of Directors – U.S.)

Vote for shareholder proposals asking that board audit, compensation, and/or nominating committees be composed exclusively of independent directors unless they currently meet that standard.

Majority Vote Standard for the Election of Directors

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals to adopt a majority of votes cast standard for directors in uncontested elections. Vote against if no carve-out for a plurality vote standard in contested elections is included.

Generally vote for precatory and binding shareholder resolutions requesting that the board change the company's bylaws to stipulate that directors need to be elected with an affirmative majority of votes cast, provided it does not conflict with the state law where the company is incorporated. Binding resolutions need to allow for a carve-out for a plurality vote standard when there are more nominees than board seats.

Companies are strongly encouraged to also adopt a post-election policy (also known as a director resignation policy) that will provide guidelines so that the company will promptly address the situation of a holdover director.

Proxy Access

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for management and shareholder proposals for proxy access with the following provisions:

- **Ownership threshold:** maximum requirement not more than three percent (3%) of the voting power;
- **Ownership duration:** maximum requirement not longer than three (3) years of continuous ownership for each member of the nominating group;
- **Aggregation:** minimal or no limits on the number of shareholders permitted to form a nominating group;
- **Cap:** cap on nominees of generally twenty-five percent (25%) of the board.

Review for reasonableness any other restrictions on the right of proxy access.

Generally vote against proposals that are more restrictive than these guidelines.

Require More Nominees than Open Seats

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against shareholder proposals that would require a company to nominate more candidates than the number of open board seats.

Shareholder Engagement Policy (Shareholder Advisory Committee)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting that the board establish an internal mechanism/process, which may include a committee, in order to improve communications between directors and shareholders, unless the company has the following features, as appropriate:

- Established a communication structure that goes beyond the exchange requirements to facilitate the exchange of information between shareholders and members of the board;
- Effectively disclosed information with respect to this structure to its shareholders;
- Company has not ignored majority-supported shareholder proposals or a majority withhold vote on a director nominee; and
- The company has an independent chair or a lead director, according to Sustainability Advisory Services' policy definition. This individual must be made available for periodic consultation and direct communication with major shareholders.

Proxy Contests/Proxy Access -Voting for Director Nominees in Contested Elections

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the election of directors in contested elections, considering the following factors:

- Long-term financial performance of the company relative to its industry;
- Management's track record;
- Background to the contested election;
- Nominee qualifications and any compensatory arrangements;
- Strategic plan of dissident slate and quality of the critique against management;
- Likelihood that the proposed goals and objectives can be achieved (both slates); and
- Stock ownership positions.

In the case of candidates nominated pursuant to proxy access, vote case-by-case considering any applicable factors listed above or additional factors which may be relevant, including those that are specific to the company, to the nominee(s) and/or to the nature of the election (such as whether or not there are more candidates than board seats).

Vote-No Campaigns

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: In cases where companies are targeted in connection with public "vote-no" campaigns, evaluate director nominees under the existing governance policies for voting on director nominees in uncontested elections. Take into consideration the arguments submitted by shareholders and other publicly available information.

3. Shareholder Rights & Defenses

Advance Notice Requirements for Shareholder Proposals/Nominations

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on advance notice proposals, giving support to those proposals which allow shareholders to submit proposals/nominations as close to the meeting date as reasonably possible and within the broadest window possible, recognizing the need to allow sufficient notice for company, regulatory, and shareholder review.

To be reasonable, the company's deadline for shareholder notice of a proposal/nominations must be no earlier than 120 days prior to the anniversary of the previous year's meeting and have a submittal window of no shorter than 30 days from the beginning of the notice period (also known as a 90-120 day window). The submittal window is the period under which shareholders must file their proposal/nominations prior to the deadline.

In general, support additional efforts by companies to ensure full disclosure in regard to a proponent's economic and voting position in the company so long as the informational requirements are reasonable and aimed at providing shareholders with the necessary information to review such proposals.

Amend Bylaws without Shareholder Consent

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals giving the board exclusive authority to amend the bylaws.

Vote for proposals giving the board the ability to amend the bylaws in addition to shareholders.

Control Share Acquisition Provisions

Control share acquisition statutes function by denying shares their voting rights when they contribute to ownership in excess of certain thresholds. Voting rights for those shares exceeding ownership limits may only be restored by approval of either a majority or supermajority of disinterested shares. Thus, control share acquisition statutes effectively require a hostile bidder to put its offer to a shareholder vote or risk voting disenfranchisement if the bidder continues buying up a large block of shares.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of control share acquisition statutes unless doing so would enable the completion of a takeover that would be detrimental to shareholders.

Vote against proposals to amend the charter to include control share acquisition provisions.

Vote for proposals to restore voting rights to the control shares.

Control Share Cash-Out Provisions

Control share cash-out statutes give dissident shareholders the right to "cash-out" of their position in a company at the expense of the shareholder who has taken a control position. In other words, when an investor crosses a preset threshold level, remaining shareholders are given the right to sell their shares to the acquirer, who must buy them at the highest acquiring price.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of control share cash-out statutes.

Disgorgement Provisions

Disgorgement provisions require an acquirer or potential acquirer of more than a certain percentage of a company's stock to disgorge, or pay back, to the company any profits realized from the sale of that company's stock purchased 24 months before achieving control status. All sales of company stock by the acquirer occurring within a certain period of time (between 18 months and 24 months) prior to the investor's gaining control status are subject to these recapture-of-profits provisions.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of state disgorgement provisions.

Fair Price Provisions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to adopt fair price provisions (provisions that stipulate that an acquirer must pay the same price to acquire all shares as it paid to acquire the control shares), evaluating factors such as the vote required to approve the proposed acquisition, the vote required to repeal the fair price provision, and the mechanism for determining the fair price.

Generally vote against fair price provisions with shareholder vote requirements greater than a majority of disinterested shares.

Freeze-Out Provisions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to opt out of state freeze-out provisions. Freeze-out provisions force an investor who surpasses a certain ownership threshold in a company to wait a specified period of time before gaining control of the company.

Greenmail

Greenmail payments are targeted share repurchases by management of company stock from individuals or groups seeking control of the company. Since only the hostile party receives payment, usually at a substantial premium over the market value of its shares, the practice discriminates against all other shareholders.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to adopt anti-greenmail charter or bylaw amendments or otherwise restrict a company's ability to make greenmail payments.

Vote case-by-case on anti-greenmail proposals when they are bundled with other charter or bylaw amendments.

Shareholder Litigation Rights

Federal Forum Selection Provisions

Federal forum selection provisions require that U.S. federal courts be the sole forum for shareholders to litigate claims arising under federal securities law.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for federal forum selection provisions in the charter or bylaws that specify "the district courts of the United States" as the exclusive forum for federal securities law matters, in the absence of serious concerns about corporate governance or board responsiveness to shareholders.

Vote against provisions that restrict the forum to a particular federal district court; unilateral adoption (without a shareholder vote) of such a provision will generally be considered a one-time failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments](#) policy.

Exclusive Forum Provisions for State Law Matters

Exclusive forum provisions in the charter or bylaws restrict shareholders' ability to bring derivative lawsuits against the company, for claims arising out of state corporate law, to the courts of a particular state (generally the state of incorporation).

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for charter or bylaw provisions that specify courts located within the state of Delaware as the exclusive forum for corporate law matters for Delaware corporations, in the absence of serious concerns about corporate governance or board responsiveness to shareholders.

For states other than Delaware, vote case-by-case on exclusive forum provisions, taking into consideration:

- The company's stated rationale for adopting such a provision;
- Disclosure of past harm from duplicative shareholder lawsuits in more than one forum;
- The breadth of application of the charter or bylaw provision, including the types of lawsuits to which it would apply and the definition of key terms; and
- Governance features such as shareholders' ability to repeal the provision at a later date (including the vote standard applied when shareholders attempt to amend the charter or bylaws) and their ability to hold directors accountable through annual director elections and a majority vote standard in uncontested elections.

Generally vote against provisions that specify a state other than the state of incorporation as the exclusive forum for corporate law matters, or that specify a particular local court within the state; unilateral adoption of such a provision will generally be considered a one-time failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments policy](#).

Fee Shifting

Fee-shifting provisions in the charter or bylaws require that a shareholder who sues a company unsuccessfully pay all litigation expenses of the defendant corporation and its directors and officers.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against provisions that mandate fee-shifting whenever plaintiffs are not completely successful on the merits (i.e., including cases where the plaintiffs are partially successful).

Unilateral adoption of a fee-shifting provision will generally be considered an ongoing failure under the [Unilateral Bylaw/Charter Amendments and Problematic Capital Structures](#) policy.

Net Operating Loss (NOL) Protective Amendments

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to adopt a protective amendment for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses (NOL) if the effective term of the protective amendment would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote case-by-case, considering the following factors, for management proposals to adopt an NOL protective amendment that would remain in effect for the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold (NOL protective amendments generally prohibit stock ownership transfers that would result in a new 5-percent holder or increase the stock ownership percentage of an existing 5-percent holder);
- The value of the NOLs;
- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision or commitment to cause expiration of the protective amendment upon exhaustion or expiration of the NOL);
- The company's existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns; and
- Any other factors that may be applicable.

Poison Pills (Shareholder Rights Plans)

Shareholder Proposals to Put Pill to a Vote and/or Adopt a Pill Policy

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals requesting that the company submit its poison pill to a shareholder vote or redeem it unless the company has: (1) A shareholder approved poison pill in place; or (2) The company has adopted a policy concerning the adoption of a pill in the future specifying that the board will only adopt a shareholder rights plan if either:

- Shareholders have approved the adoption of the plan; or
- The board, in its exercise of its fiduciary responsibilities, determines that it is in the best interest of shareholders under the circumstances to adopt a pill without the delay in adoption that would result from seeking stockholder approval (*i.e.*, the “fiduciary out” provision). A poison pill adopted under this fiduciary out will be put to a shareholder ratification vote within 12 months of adoption or expire. If the pill is not approved by a majority of the votes cast on this issue, the plan will immediately terminate.

If the shareholder proposal calls for a time period of less than 12 months for shareholder ratification after adoption, vote for the proposal, but add the caveat that a vote within 12 months would be considered sufficient implementation.

Management Proposals to Ratify a Poison Pill

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals on poison pill ratification, focusing on the features of the shareholder rights plan. Rights plans should contain the following attributes:

- No lower than a 20% trigger, flip-in or flip-over;
- A term of no more than three years;
- No dead-hand, slow-hand, no-hand or similar feature that limits the ability of a future board to redeem the pill;
- Shareholder redemption feature (qualifying offer clause); if the board refuses to redeem the pill 90 days after a qualifying offer is announced, 10 percent of the shares may call a special meeting or seek a written consent to vote on rescinding the pill.

In addition, the rationale for adopting the pill should be thoroughly explained by the company. In examining the request for the pill, take into consideration the company's existing governance structure, including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, and any problematic governance concerns.

Management Proposals to Ratify a Pill to Preserve Net Operating Losses (NOLs)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to adopt a poison pill for the stated purpose of protecting a company's net operating losses (NOL) if the term of the pill would exceed the shorter of three years and the exhaustion of the NOL.

Vote case-by-case on management proposals for poison pill ratification, considering the following factors, if the term of the pill would be the shorter of three years (or less) and the exhaustion of the NOL:

- The ownership threshold to transfer (NOL pills generally have a trigger slightly below 5 percent);
- The value of the NOLs;
- Shareholder protection mechanisms (sunset provision, or commitment to cause expiration of the pill upon exhaustion or expiration of NOLs);
- The company's existing governance structure including: board independence, existing takeover defenses, track record of responsiveness to shareholders, and any other problematic governance concerns; and
- Any other factors that may be applicable.

Proxy Voting Disclosure, Confidentiality, and Tabulation

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding proxy voting mechanics, taking into consideration whether implementation of the proposal is likely to enhance or protect shareholder rights. Specific issues covered under the policy include, but are not limited to, confidential voting of individual proxies and ballots, confidentiality of running vote tallies, and the treatment of abstentions and/or broker non-votes in the company's vote-counting methodology.

While a variety of factors may be considered in each analysis, the guiding principles are: transparency, consistency, and fairness in the proxy voting process. The factors considered, as applicable to the proposal, may include:

- The scope and structure of the proposal;
- The company's stated confidential voting policy (or other relevant policies) and whether it ensures a "level playing field" by providing shareholder proponents with equal access to vote information prior to the annual meeting;
- The company's vote standard for management and shareholder proposals and whether it ensures consistency and fairness in the proxy voting process and maintains the integrity of vote results;
- Whether the company's disclosure regarding its vote counting method and other relevant voting policies with respect to management and shareholder proposals are consistent and clear;
- Any recent controversies or concerns related to the company's proxy voting mechanics;
- Any unintended consequences resulting from implementation of the proposal; and
- Any other factors that may be relevant.

Ratification Proposals: Management Proposals to Ratify Existing Charter or Bylaw Provisions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against management proposals to ratify provisions of the company's existing charter or bylaws, unless these governance provisions align with best practice.

In addition, voting against/withhold from individual directors, members of the governance committee, or the full board may be warranted, considering:

- The presence of a shareholder proposal addressing the same issue on the same ballot;
- The board's rationale for seeking ratification;
- Disclosure of actions to be taken by the board should the ratification proposal fail;
- Disclosure of shareholder engagement regarding the board's ratification request;
- The level of impairment to shareholders' rights caused by the existing provision;
- The history of management and shareholder proposals on the provision at the company's past meetings;
- Whether the current provision was adopted in response to the shareholder proposal;
- The company's ownership structure; and
- Previous use of ratification proposals to exclude shareholder proposals.

Reimbursing Proxy Solicitation Expenses

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses.

When voting in conjunction with support of a dissident slate, vote for the reimbursement of all appropriate proxy solicitation expenses associated with the election.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling for the reimbursement of reasonable costs incurred in connection with nominating one or more candidates in a contested election where the following apply:

- The election of fewer than 50% of the directors to be elected is contested in the election;
- One or more of the dissident's candidates is elected;
- Shareholders are not permitted to cumulate their votes for directors; and
- The election occurred, and the expenses were incurred, after the adoption of this bylaw.

Reincorporation Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Management or shareholder proposals to change a company's state of incorporation should be evaluated case-by-case, giving consideration to both financial and corporate governance concerns including the following:

- Reasons for reincorporation;
- Comparison of company's governance practices and provisions prior to and following the reincorporation; and
- Comparison of corporation laws of original state and destination state.

Vote for reincorporation when the economic factors outweigh any neutral or negative governance changes.

Shareholder Ability to Act by Written Consent

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against management and shareholder proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to act by written consent.

Generally vote for management and shareholder proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to act by written consent, taking into account the following factors:

- Shareholders' current right to act by written consent;
- The consent threshold;
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language;
- Investor ownership structure; and
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals if, in addition to the considerations above, the company has the following governance and antitakeover provisions:

- An unfettered¹⁵ right for shareholders to call special meetings at a 10 percent threshold;
- A majority vote standard in uncontested director elections;
- No non-shareholder-approved pill; and
- An annually elected board.

Shareholder Ability to Call Special Meetings

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against management or shareholder proposals to restrict or prohibit shareholders' ability to call special meetings.

Generally vote for management or shareholder proposals that provide shareholders with the ability to call special meetings taking into account the following factors:

- Shareholders' current right to call special meetings;
- Minimum ownership threshold necessary to call special meetings (10% preferred);
- The inclusion of exclusionary or prohibitive language;
- Investor ownership structure; and
- Shareholder support of, and management's response to, previous shareholder proposals.

Stakeholder Provisions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals that ask the board to consider non-shareholder constituencies or other non-financial effects when evaluating a merger or business combination.

State Antitakeover Statutes

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to opt in or out of state takeover statutes (including fair price provisions, stakeholder laws, poison pill endorsements, severance pay and labor contract provisions, and anti-greenmail provisions).

Supermajority Vote Requirements

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to require a supermajority shareholder vote.

Vote for management or shareholder proposals to reduce supermajority vote requirements. However, for companies with shareholder(s) who have significant ownership levels, vote case-by-case, taking into account:

- Ownership structure;
- Quorum requirements; and
- Vote requirements.

¹⁵ "Unfettered" means no restrictions on agenda items, no restrictions on the number of shareholders who can group together to reach the 10 percent threshold, and only reasonable limits on when a meeting can be called: no greater than 30 days after the last annual meeting and no greater than 90 prior to the next annual meeting.

Virtual Shareholder Meetings

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals allowing for the convening of shareholder meetings by electronic means, so long as they do not preclude in-person meetings. Companies are encouraged to disclose the circumstances under which virtual-only¹⁶ meetings would be held, and to allow for comparable rights and opportunities for shareholders to participate electronically as they would have during an in-person meeting.

Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals concerning virtual-only meetings, considering:

- Scope and rationale of the proposal; and
- Concerns identified with the company's prior meeting practices.

¹⁶ Virtual-only shareholder meeting" refers to a meeting of shareholders that is held exclusively using technology without a corresponding in-person meeting.

4. Capital/Restructuring

Capital

Adjustments to Par Value of Common Stock

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to reduce the par value of common stock unless the action is being taken to facilitate an anti-takeover device or some other negative corporate governance action.

Vote for management proposals to eliminate par value.

Common Stock Authorization

General Authorization Requests

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of common stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes:

- If share usage (outstanding plus reserved) is less than 50% of the current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to **50%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is 50% to 100% of the current authorized, vote for an increase of up to **100%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is greater than current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to the current share usage.
- In the case of a stock split, the allowable increase is calculated (per above) based on the post-split adjusted authorization.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if within the above ratios, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- The proposal seeks to increase the number of authorized shares of the class of common stock that has superior voting rights to other share classes;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;
- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); or
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases beyond the above ratios or problematic situations when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In, or subsequent to, the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.

For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

Specific Authorization Requests

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized common shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support. For such transactions, the allowable increase will be the greater of:

- twice the amount needed to support the transactions on the ballot, and
- the allowable increase as calculated for general issuances above.

Unequal Voting Rights/Dual Class Structure

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals to create a new class of common stock unless:

- The company discloses a compelling rationale for the dual-class capital structure, such as:
 - The company's auditor has concluded that there is substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern; or
 - The new class of shares will be transitory;
- The new class is intended for financing purposes with minimal or no dilution to current shareholders in both the short term and long term; and
- The new class is not designed to preserve or increase the voting power of an insider or significant shareholder.

Generally vote against proposals to create a new class of preferred stock with voting rights superior to the common stock unless:

- The preferred shares are convertible into common shares and vote on an “as converted” basis prior to conversion, or
- The enhanced voting rights of the preferred shares have limited duration and applicability and the shares are voted in a way that mirrors the votes of the common shares (i.e., where such shares are intended to overcome low voting turnout and ensure approval of a specific non-controversial agenda item such as a reverse stock split needed to avoid a delisting).

Issue Stock for Use with Rights Plan

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals that increase authorized common stock for the explicit purpose of implementing a non-shareholder- approved shareholder rights plan (poison pill).

Preemptive Rights

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that seek preemptive rights, taking into consideration:

- The size of the company;
- The shareholder base; and
- The liquidity of the stock.

Preferred Stock Authorization

General Authorization Requests

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase the number of authorized shares of preferred stock that are to be used for general corporate purposes:

- If share usage (outstanding plus reserved) is less than 50% of the current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to **50%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is 50% to 100% of the current authorized, vote for an increase of up to **100%** of current authorized shares.
- If share usage is greater than current authorized shares, vote for an increase of up to the current share usage.
- In the case of a stock split, the allowable increase is calculated (per above) based on the post-split adjusted authorization.
- If no preferred shares are currently issued and outstanding, vote against the request, unless the company discloses a specific use for the shares.

Generally vote against proposed increases, even if within the above ratios, if the proposal or the company's prior or ongoing use of authorized shares is problematic, including, but not limited to:

- If the shares requested are blank check preferred shares that can be used for antitakeover purposes;¹⁷
- The company seeks to increase a class of non-convertible preferred shares entitled to more than one vote per share on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders "supervoting shares");
- The company seeks to increase a class of convertible preferred shares entitled to a number of votes greater than the number of common shares into which they're convertible ("supervoting shares") on matters that do not solely affect the rights of preferred stockholders;
- The stated intent of the increase in the general authorization is to allow the company to increase an existing designated class of supervoting preferred shares;
- On the same ballot is a proposal for a reverse split for which support is warranted despite the fact that it would result in an excessive increase in the share authorization;
- The company has a non-shareholder approved poison pill (including an NOL pill); or
- The company has previous sizeable placements (within the past 3 years) of stock with insiders at prices substantially below market value, or with problematic voting rights, without shareholder approval.

However, generally vote for proposed increases beyond the above ratios or problematic situations when there is disclosure of specific and severe risks to shareholders of not approving the request, such as:

- In, or subsequent to, the company's most recent 10-K filing, the company discloses that there is substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern;
- The company states that there is a risk of imminent bankruptcy or imminent liquidation if shareholders do not approve the increase in authorized capital; or
- A government body has in the past year required the company to increase its capital ratios.

For companies incorporated in states that allow increases in authorized capital without shareholder approval, generally vote withhold or against all nominees if a unilateral capital authorization increase does not conform to the above policies.

¹⁷ To be acceptable, appropriate disclosure would be needed that the shares are "declawed": i.e., representation by the board that it will not, without prior stockholder approval, issue or use the preferred stock for any defensive or anti-takeover purpose or for the purpose of implementing any stockholder rights plan.

Specific Authorization Requests

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to increase the number of authorized preferred shares where the primary purpose of the increase is to issue shares in connection with transaction(s) (such as acquisitions, SPAC transactions, private placements, or similar transactions) on the same ballot, or disclosed in the proxy statement, that warrant support. For such transactions, the allowable increase will be the greater of:

- twice the amount needed to support the transactions on the ballot, and
- the allowable increase as calculated for general issuances above.

Recapitalization Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on recapitalizations (reclassifications of securities), taking into account the following:

- More simplified capital structure;
- Enhanced liquidity;
- Fairness of conversion terms;
- Impact on voting power and dividends;
- Reasons for the reclassification;
- Conflicts of interest; and
- Other alternatives considered.

Reverse Stock Splits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for management proposals to implement a reverse stock split if:

- The number of authorized shares will be proportionately reduced; or
- The effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with Sustainability Advisory Services' Common Stock Authorization policy.

Vote case-by-case on proposals that do not meet either of the above conditions, taking into consideration the following factors:

- Stock exchange notification to the company of a potential delisting;
- Disclosure of substantial doubt about the company's ability to continue as a going concern without additional financing;
- The company's rationale; or
- Other factors as applicable.

Share Repurchase Programs

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For U.S.-incorporated companies, and foreign-incorporated U.S. Domestic Issuers that are traded solely on U.S. exchanges, vote for management proposals to institute open-market share repurchase plans in which all shareholders may participate on equal terms, or to grant the board authority to conduct open-market repurchases, in the absence of company-specific concerns regarding:

- Greenmail;
- The use of buybacks to inappropriately manipulate incentive compensation metrics;
- Threats to the company's long-term viability; or

- Other company-specific factors as warranted.

Vote case-by-case on proposals to repurchase shares directly from specified shareholders, balancing the stated rationale against the possibility for the repurchase authority to be misused, such as to repurchase shares from insiders at a premium to market price.

Stock Distributions: Splits and Dividends

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for management proposals to increase the common share authorization for stock split or stock dividend, provided that the effective increase in authorized shares is equal to or is less than the allowable increase calculated in accordance with Sustainability Advisory Services' Common Stock Authorization policy.

Tracking Stock

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the creation of tracking stock, weighing the strategic value of the transaction against such factors as:

- Adverse governance changes;
- Excessive increases in authorized capital stock;
- Unfair method of distribution;
- Diminution of voting rights;
- Adverse conversion features;
- Negative impact on stock option plans; and
- Alternatives such as spin-off.

Share Issuance Mandates at U.S. Domestic Issuers Incorporated Outside the U.S.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For U.S. domestic issuers incorporated outside the U.S. and listed solely on a U.S. exchange, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 20 percent of currently issued common share capital, where not tied to a specific transaction or financing proposal.

For pre-revenue or other early-stage companies that are heavily reliant on periodic equity financing, generally vote for resolutions to authorize the issuance of common shares up to 50 percent of currently issued common share capital. The burden of proof will be on the company to establish that it has a need for the higher limit.

Renewal of such mandates should be sought at each year's annual meeting.

Vote case-by-case on share issuances for a specific transaction or financing proposal.

Restructuring

Appraisal Rights

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to restore or provide shareholders with rights of appraisal.

Asset Purchases

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on asset purchase proposals, considering the following factors:

- Purchase price;
- Fairness opinion;
- Financial and strategic benefits;
- How the deal was negotiated;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives for the business; and
- Non-completion risk.

Asset Sales

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on asset sales, considering the following factors:

- Impact on the balance sheet/working capital;
- Potential elimination of diseconomies;
- Anticipated financial and operating benefits;
- Anticipated use of funds;
- Value received for the asset;
- Fairness opinion;
- How the deal was negotiated; and
- Conflicts of interest.

Bundled Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on bundled or “conditional” proxy proposals. In the case of items that are conditioned upon each other, examine the benefits and costs of the packaged items. In instances when the joint effect of the conditioned items is not in shareholders’ best interests, vote against the proposals. If the combined effect is positive, support such proposals.

Conversion of Securities

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding conversion of securities. When evaluating these proposals, the investor should review the dilution to existing shareholders, the conversion price relative to market value, financial issues, control issues, termination penalties, and conflicts of interest.

Vote for the conversion if it is expected that the company will be subject to onerous penalties or will be forced to file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

Corporate Reorganization/Debt Restructuring/Prepackaged Bankruptcy Plans/Reverse Leveraged Buyouts/Wrap Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to increase common and/or preferred shares and to issue shares as part of a debt restructuring plan, after evaluating:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' positions;
- Terms of the offer - discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion; termination penalties; exit strategy;
- Financial issues - company's financial situation; degree of need for capital; use of proceeds; effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives;
- Control issues - change in management; change in control, guaranteed board and committee seats; standstill provisions; voting agreements; veto power over certain corporate actions; and
- Conflict of interest - arm's length transaction, managerial incentives.

Vote for the debt restructuring if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

Formation of Holding Company

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding the formation of a holding company, taking into consideration the following:

- The reasons for the change;
- Any financial or tax benefits;
- Regulatory benefits;
- Increases in capital structure; and
- Changes to the articles of incorporation or bylaws of the company.

Absent compelling financial reasons to recommend for the transaction, vote against the formation of a holding company if the transaction would include either of the following:

- Increases in common or preferred stock in excess of the allowable maximum (see discussion under "Capital"); or
- Adverse changes in shareholder rights.

Going Private and Going Dark Transactions (LBOs and Minority Squeeze-outs)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on going private transactions, taking into account the following:

- Offer price/premium;
- Fairness opinion;
- How the deal was negotiated;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives/offers considered; and
- Non-completion risk.

Vote case-by-case on going dark transactions, determining whether the transaction enhances shareholder value by taking into consideration:

- Whether the company has attained benefits from being publicly-traded (examination of trading volume, liquidity, and market research of the stock);
- Balanced interests of continuing vs. cashed-out shareholders, taking into account the following:
 - Are all shareholders able to participate in the transaction?
 - Will there be a liquid market for remaining shareholders following the transaction?
 - Does the company have strong corporate governance?
 - Will insiders reap the gains of control following the proposed transaction?
 - Does the state of incorporation have laws requiring continued reporting that may benefit shareholders?

Joint Ventures

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to form joint ventures, taking into account the following:

- Percentage of assets/business contributed;
- Percentage ownership;
- Financial and strategic benefits;
- Governance structure;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Other alternatives; and
- Non-completion risk.

Liquidations

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on liquidations, taking into account the following:

- Management's efforts to pursue other alternatives;
- Appraisal value of assets; and
- The compensation plan for executives managing the liquidation.

Vote for the liquidation if the company will file for bankruptcy if the proposal is not approved.

Mergers and Acquisitions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on mergers and acquisitions. Review and evaluate the merits and drawbacks of the proposed transaction, balancing various and sometimes countervailing factors including:

- Valuation - Is the value to be received by the target shareholders (or paid by the acquirer) reasonable? While the fairness opinion may provide an initial starting point for assessing valuation reasonableness, emphasis is placed on the offer premium, market reaction and strategic rationale.
- Market reaction - How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction should cause closer scrutiny of a deal.
- Strategic rationale - Does the deal make sense strategically? From where is the value derived? Cost and revenue synergies should not be overly aggressive or optimistic, but reasonably achievable. Management should also have a favorable track record of successful integration of historical acquisitions.
- Negotiations and process - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's-length? Was the process fair and equitable? A fair process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Significant negotiation "wins"

can also signify the deal makers' competency. The comprehensiveness of the sales process (*e.g.*, full auction, partial auction, no auction) can also affect shareholder value.

- **Conflicts of interest** - Are insiders benefiting from the transaction disproportionately and inappropriately as compared to non-insider shareholders? As the result of potential conflicts, the directors and officers of the company may be more likely to vote to approve a merger than if they did not hold these interests. Consider whether these interests may have influenced these directors and officers to support or recommend the merger.
- **Governance** - Will the combined company have a better or worse governance profile than the current governance profiles of the respective parties to the transaction? If the governance profile is to change for the worse, the burden is on the company to prove that other issues (such as valuation) outweigh any deterioration in governance.

Private Placements/Warrants/Convertible Debentures

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding private placements, warrants, and convertible debentures taking into consideration:

- Dilution to existing shareholders' position: The amount and timing of shareholder ownership dilution should be weighed against the needs and proposed shareholder benefits of the capital infusion. Although newly issued common stock, absent preemptive rights, is typically dilutive to existing shareholders, share price appreciation is often the necessary event to trigger the exercise of "out of the money" warrants and convertible debt. In these instances from a value standpoint, the negative impact of dilution is mitigated by the increase in the company's stock price that must occur to trigger the dilutive event.
- Terms of the offer (discount/premium in purchase price to investor, including any fairness opinion, conversion features, termination penalties, exit strategy):
 - The terms of the offer should be weighed against the alternatives of the company and in light of company's financial condition. Ideally, the conversion price for convertible debt and the exercise price for warrants should be at a premium to the then prevailing stock price at the time of private placement.
 - When evaluating the magnitude of a private placement discount or premium, consider factors that influence the discount or premium, such as, liquidity, due diligence costs, control and monitoring costs, capital scarcity, information asymmetry and anticipation of future performance.
- Financial issues:
 - The company's financial condition;
 - Degree of need for capital;
 - Use of proceeds;
 - Effect of the financing on the company's cost of capital;
 - Current and proposed cash burn rate;
 - Going concern viability and the state of the capital and credit markets.
- Management's efforts to pursue alternatives and whether the company engaged in a process to evaluate alternatives: A fair, unconstrained process helps to ensure the best price for shareholders. Financing alternatives can include joint ventures, partnership, merger or sale of part or all of the company.
- Control issues:
 - Change in management;
 - Change in control;
 - Guaranteed board and committee seats;
 - Standstill provisions;
 - Voting agreements;
 - Veto power over certain corporate actions; and
 - Minority versus majority ownership and corresponding minority discount or majority control premium

- Conflicts of interest:
 - Conflicts of interest should be viewed from the perspective of the company and the investor.
 - Were the terms of the transaction negotiated at arm's length? Are managerial incentives aligned with shareholder interests?
- Market reaction:
 - The market's response to the proposed deal. A negative market reaction is a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one day impact on the unaffected stock price.

Vote for the private placement, or for the issuance of warrants and/or convertible debentures in a private placement, if it is expected that the company will file for bankruptcy if the transaction is not approved.

Reorganization/Restructuring Plan (Bankruptcy)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to common shareholders on bankruptcy plans of reorganization, considering the following factors including, but not limited to:

- Estimated value and financial prospects of the reorganized company;
- Percentage ownership of current shareholders in the reorganized company;
- Whether shareholders are adequately represented in the reorganization process (particularly through the existence of an official equity committee);
- The cause(s) of the bankruptcy filing, and the extent to which the plan of reorganization addresses the cause(s);
- Existence of a superior alternative to the plan of reorganization; and
- Governance of the reorganized company.

Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on SPAC mergers and acquisitions taking into account the following:

- Valuation—Is the value being paid by the SPAC reasonable? SPACs generally lack an independent fairness opinion and the financials on the target may be limited. Compare the conversion price with the intrinsic value of the target company provided in the fairness opinion. Also, evaluate the proportionate value of the combined entity attributable to the SPAC IPO shareholders versus the pre-merger value of SPAC. Additionally, a private company discount may be applied to the target, if it is a private entity.
- Market reaction—How has the market responded to the proposed deal? A negative market reaction may be a cause for concern. Market reaction may be addressed by analyzing the one-day impact on the unaffected stock price.
- Deal timing—A main driver for most transactions is that the SPAC charter typically requires the deal to be complete within 18 to 24 months, or the SPAC is to be liquidated. Evaluate the valuation, market reaction, and potential conflicts of interest for deals that are announced close to the liquidation date.
- Negotiations and process—What was the process undertaken to identify potential target companies within specified industry or location specified in charter? Consider the background of the sponsors.
- Conflicts of interest—How are sponsors benefiting from the transaction compared to IPO shareholders? Potential conflicts could arise if a fairness opinion is issued by the insiders to qualify the deal rather than a third party or if management is encouraged to pay a higher price for the target because of an 80% rule (the charter requires that the fair market value of the target is at least equal to 80% of net assets of the SPAC). Also, there may be sense of urgency by the management team of the SPAC to close the deal since its charter typically requires a transaction to be completed within the 18-24 month timeframe.

- **Voting agreements**—Are the sponsors entering into any voting agreements/ tender offers with shareholders who are likely to vote against the proposed merger or exercise conversion rights?
- **Governance**—What is the impact of having the SPAC CEO or founder on key committees following the proposed merger?

Special Purpose Acquisition Corporations (SPACs) - Proposals for Extensions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally support requests to extend the termination date by up to one year from the SPAC's original termination date (inclusive of any built-in extension option, and accounting for prior extension requests).

Other factors that may be considered include: any added incentives, business combination status, other amendment terms, and, if applicable, use of money in the trust fund to pay excise taxes on redeemed shares.

Spin-offs

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on spin-offs, considering:

- Tax and regulatory advantages;
- Planned use of the sale proceeds;
- Valuation of spinoff;
- Fairness opinion;
- Benefits to the parent company;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Managerial incentives;
- Corporate governance changes;
- Changes in the capital structure.

Value Maximization Shareholder Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals seeking to maximize shareholder value by:

- Hiring a financial advisor to explore strategic alternatives;
- Selling the company; or
- Liquidating the company and distributing the proceeds to shareholders.

These proposals should be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Prolonged poor performance with no turnaround in sight;
- Signs of entrenched board and management (such as the adoption of takeover defenses);
- Strategic plan in place for improving value;
- Likelihood of receiving reasonable value in a sale or dissolution; and
- The company actively exploring its strategic options, including retaining a financial advisor.

5. Compensation

Executive Pay Evaluation

Underlying all evaluations are five global principles that most investors expect corporations to adhere to in designing and administering executive and director compensation programs:

1. Maintain appropriate pay-for-performance alignment, with emphasis on long-term shareholder value: This principle encompasses overall executive pay practices, which must be designed to attract, retain, and appropriately motivate the key employees who drive shareholder value creation over the long term. It will take into consideration, among other factors, the link between pay and performance; the mix between fixed and variable pay; performance goals; and equity-based plan costs;
2. Avoid arrangements that risk “pay for failure”: This principle addresses the appropriateness of long or indefinite contracts, excessive severance packages, and guaranteed compensation;
3. Maintain an independent and effective compensation committee: This principle promotes oversight of executive pay programs by directors with appropriate skills, knowledge, experience, and a sound process for compensation decision-making (*e.g.*, including access to independent expertise and advice when needed);
4. Provide shareholders with clear, comprehensive compensation disclosures: This principle underscores the importance of informative and timely disclosures that enable shareholders to evaluate executive pay practices fully and fairly;
5. Avoid inappropriate pay to non-executive directors: This principle recognizes the interests of shareholders in ensuring that compensation to outside directors does not compromise their independence and ability to make appropriate judgments in overseeing managers’ pay and performance. At the market level, it may incorporate a variety of generally accepted best practices.

Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation—Management Proposals (Management Say-on-Pay)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on ballot items related to executive pay and practices, as well as certain aspects of outside director compensation.

Vote against Advisory Votes on Executive Compensation (Say-on-Pay or “SOP”) if:

- There is an unmitigated misalignment between CEO pay and company performance ([pay for performance](#));
- The company maintains significant [problematic pay practices](#);
- The board exhibits a significant level of [poor communication and responsiveness](#) to shareholders.

Vote against or withhold from the members of the compensation committee and potentially the full board if:

- There is no SOP on the ballot, and an against vote on an SOP is warranted due to pay for performance misalignment, problematic pay practices, or the lack of adequate responsiveness on compensation issues raised previously, or a combination thereof;
- The board fails to respond adequately to a previous SOP proposal that received less than 70 percent support of votes cast;
- The company has recently practiced or approved problematic pay practices, such as option repricing or option backdating; or
- The situation is egregious.

PRIMARY EVALUATION FACTORS FOR EXECUTIVE PAY

Pay-for-Performance Evaluation

Sustainability Advisory Services annually conducts a pay-for-performance analysis to identify strong or satisfactory alignment between pay and performance over a sustained period. With respect to companies in the Russell 3000 or Russell 3000E Indices, this analysis considers the following:

1. Peer Group¹⁸ Alignment:
 - The degree of alignment between the company's annualized TSR rank and the CEO's annualized total pay rank within a peer group, each measured over a five-year period.
 - The rankings of CEO total pay and company financial performance within a peer group, each measured over a five-year period.
 - The multiple of the CEO's total pay relative to the peer group median over one- and three-year periods.
2. Absolute Alignment¹⁹ – the absolute alignment between the trend in CEO pay and company TSR over the prior five fiscal years – i.e., the difference between the trend in annual pay changes and the trend in annualized TSR during the period.

If the above analysis demonstrates significant unsatisfactory long-term pay-for-performance alignment or, in the case of companies outside the Russell indices, misaligned pay and performance are otherwise suggested, our analysis may include any of the following qualitative factors, as relevant to evaluating how various pay elements may work to encourage or to undermine long-term value creation and alignment with shareholder interests:

- The overall ratio of performance-based compensation to fixed or discretionary pay;
- The ratio of performance- to time-based long-term incentive awards;
- Vesting and/or retention requirements for equity awards that demonstrate a long-term focus;
- The rigor of performance goals;
- The complexity and risks around pay program design;
- The transparency and clarity of disclosure;
- The company's peer group benchmarking practices;
- Financial/operational results, both absolute and relative to peers;
- Special circumstances related to, for example, a new CEO in the prior FY or anomalous equity grant practices (e.g., bi-annual awards);
- Realizable and/or realized pay compared to granted pay; and
- Any other factors deemed relevant.

Problematic Pay Practices

Problematic pay elements are generally evaluated case-by-case considering the context of a company's overall pay program and demonstrated pay-for-performance philosophy. The focus is on executive compensation practices that contravene the global pay principles, including:

- Problematic practices related to non-performance-based compensation elements;

¹⁸ The ISS peer group is generally comprised of 14-24 companies that are selected using factors such as market cap, revenue, assets, GICS industry group, and the company selected peers' GICS industry group. ISS' peer selection methodology is detailed in the U.S. Peer Group FAQ.

¹⁹ Russell 3000E Index companies (excluding S&P1500 and Russell 3000 companies) are not subject to the Absolute Alignment analysis.

- Incentives that may motivate excessive risk-taking or present a windfall risk; and
- Pay decisions that circumvent pay-for-performance, such as options backdating or waiving performance requirements.

The list of examples below highlights certain problematic practices that carry significant weight in this overall consideration and may result in adverse vote recommendations:

- Repricing or replacing of underwater stock options/SARs without prior shareholder approval (including cash buyouts and voluntary surrender of underwater options);
- Extraordinary perquisites or tax gross-ups;
- New or materially amended agreements that provide for:
 - Excessive termination or CIC severance payments (generally exceeding 3 times base salary and average/target/most recent bonus);
 - CIC severance payments without involuntary job loss or substantial diminution of duties ("single" or "modified single" triggers) or in connection with a problematic Good Reason definition;
 - CIC excise tax gross-up entitlements (including "modified" gross-ups);
 - Multi-year guaranteed awards that are not at risk due to rigorous performance conditions;
- Liberal CIC definition combined with any single-trigger CIC benefits;
- Severance payments made when the termination is not clearly disclosed as involuntary (for example, a termination without cause or resignation for good reason);
- Insufficient executive compensation disclosure by externally-managed issuers (EMIs) such that a reasonable assessment of pay programs and practices applicable to the EMI's executives is not possible;
- Any other provision or practice deemed to be egregious and present a significant risk to investors.

The above examples are not an exhaustive list. Please refer to [ISS' U.S. Compensation Policies FAQ](#) document for additional detail on specific pay practices that have been identified as problematic and may lead to negative vote recommendations.

Options Backdating

The following factors should be examined case-by-case to allow for distinctions to be made between “sloppy” plan administration versus deliberate action or fraud:

- Reason and motive for the options backdating issue, such as inadvertent vs. deliberate grant date changes;
- Duration of options backdating;
- Size of restatement due to options backdating;
- Corrective actions taken by the board or compensation committee, such as canceling or re-pricing backdated options, the recouping of option gains on backdated grants; and
- Adoption of a grant policy that prohibits backdating, and creates a fixed grant schedule or window period for equity grants in the future.

Compensation Committee Communications and Responsiveness

Consider the following factors case-by-case when evaluating ballot items related to executive pay on the board’s responsiveness to investor input and engagement on compensation issues:

- Failure to respond to majority-supported shareholder proposals on executive pay topics; or
- Failure to adequately respond to the company's previous say-on-pay proposal that received low support, taking into account the factors identified under the Responsiveness section in the Board of Directors policy with respect to say-on-pay.

Frequency of Advisory Vote on Executive Compensation ("Say When on Pay")

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for annual advisory votes on compensation, which provide the most consistent and clear communication channel for shareholder concerns about companies' executive pay programs.

Voting on Golden Parachutes in an Acquisition, Merger, Consolidation, or Proposed Sale

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on say on Golden Parachute proposals, including consideration of existing change-in-control arrangements maintained with named executive officers rather than focusing primarily on new or extended arrangements.

Features that may result in an "against" recommendation include one or more of the following, depending on the number, magnitude, and/or timing of issue(s):

- Single- or modified-single-trigger cash severance;
- Single-trigger acceleration of unvested equity awards;
- Full acceleration of equity awards granted shortly before the change in control;
- Acceleration of performance awards above the target level of performance without compelling rationale;
- Excessive cash severance (>3x base salary and bonus);
- Excise tax gross-ups triggered and payable;
- Excessive golden parachute payments (on an absolute basis or as a percentage of transaction equity value); or
- Recent amendments that incorporate any problematic features (such as those above) or recent actions (such as extraordinary equity grants) that may make packages so attractive as to influence merger agreements that may not be in the best interests of shareholders; or
- The company's assertion that a proposed transaction is conditioned on shareholder approval of the golden parachute advisory vote.

Recent amendment(s) that incorporate problematic features will tend to carry more weight on the overall analysis. However, the presence of multiple legacy problematic features will also be closely scrutinized.

In cases where the golden parachute vote is incorporated into a company's advisory vote on compensation (management say-on-pay), the say-on-pay proposal will be evaluated in accordance with these guidelines, which may give higher weight to that component of the overall evaluation.

Equity-Based and Other Incentive Plans

Please refer to ISS' [U.S. Equity Compensation Plans FAQ](#) document for additional details on the Equity Plan Scorecard policy.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on equity plan proposals subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard framework, where positive factors may counterbalance negative factors under three pillars:

- **Plan Cost:** The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) in relation to peers and considering both:
 - SVT based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants; and

- SVT based only on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants.
- **Plan Features:**
 - Quality of disclosure around vesting upon a change in control (CIC);
 - Discretionary vesting authority;
 - Liberal share recycling on various award types;
 - Lack of minimum vesting period for grants made under the plan;
 - Dividends payable prior to award vesting; and
 - Cash-denominated award limits for non-employee directors.
- **Grant Practices:**
 - The company's three year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers;
 - Vesting requirements in CEO'S recent equity grants;
 - The estimated duration of the plan;
 - The proportion of the CEO's most recent equity grants/awards classified by ISS as performance-based;
 - Whether the company maintains a sufficient claw-back policy; and
 - Whether the company maintains sufficient post exercise/vesting share-holding requirements.

Generally vote against the plan proposal if the combination of above factors indicates that the plan is not, overall, in shareholders' interests, or if any of the following egregious factors ("overriding factors") apply:

- Awards may vest in connection with a liberal change-of-control definition;
- The plan would permit repricing or cash buyout of underwater options without shareholder approval (either by expressly permitting it – for NYSE and Nasdaq listed companies -- or by not prohibiting it when the company has a history of repricing – for non-listed companies);
- The plan is a vehicle for problematic pay practices or a significant pay-for-performance disconnect under certain circumstances;
- The plan is excessively dilutive to shareholders' holdings;
- The plan contains an evergreen (automatic share replenishment) feature;
- The plan lacks sufficient positive features under the Plan Features pillar; or
- Any other factors that are determined to have a significant negative impact on shareholder interests.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON CERTAIN EPSC FACTORS

Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT)

The cost of the equity plans is expressed as Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT), which is measured using a binomial option pricing model that assesses the amount of shareholders' equity flowing out of the company to employees and directors. SVT is expressed as both a dollar amount and as a percentage of market value, and includes the new shares proposed, shares available under existing plans, and shares granted but unexercised (using two measures, in the case of plans subject to the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, as noted above). All award types are valued. For omnibus plans, unless limitations are placed on the most expensive types of awards (for example, full value awards), the assumption is made that all awards to be granted will be the most expensive types.

For proposals subject to Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation, Shareholder Value Transfer is reasonable if it falls below a company-specific benchmark. The benchmark is determined as follows: The top quartile performers in each industry group (using the Global Industry Classification Standard: GICS) are identified. Benchmark SVT levels for each industry are established based on these top performers' historic SVT. Regression analyses are run on each industry group to identify the variables most strongly correlated to SVT. The benchmark industry SVT level is then

adjusted upwards or downwards for the specific company by plugging the company-specific performance measures, size and cash compensation into the industry cap equations to arrive at the company's benchmark.²⁰

Three-Year Value-Adjusted Burn Rate

A "Value-Adjusted Burn Rate" is used for stock plan evaluations. Value-Adjusted Burn Rate benchmarks are calculated as the greater of: (1) an industry-specific threshold based on three-year burn rates within the company's GICS group segmented by S&P 500, Russell 3000 index (less the S&P 500) and non-Russell 3000 index; and (2) a *de minimis* threshold established separately for each of the S&P 500, the Russell 3000 index less the S&P 500, and the non-Russell 3000 index. Year-over-year burn-rate benchmark changes will be limited to a predetermined range above or below the prior year's burn-rate benchmark.

The Value-Adjusted Burn Rate will be calculated as follows:

Value-Adjusted Burn Rate = ((# of options * option's dollar value using a Black-Scholes model) + (# of full-value awards * stock price)) / (Weighted average common shares * stock price).

Egregious Factors

Liberal Change in Control Definition

Generally vote against equity plans if the plan has a liberal definition of change in control and the equity awards could vest upon such liberal definition of change-in-control, even though an actual change in control may not occur. Examples of such a definition include, but are not limited to, announcement or commencement of a tender offer, provisions for acceleration upon a "potential" takeover, shareholder approval of a merger or other transactions, or similar language.

Repricing Provisions

Vote against plans that expressly permit the repricing or exchange of underwater stock options/stock appreciate rights (SARs) without prior shareholder approval. "Repricing" includes the ability to do any of the following:

- Amend the terms of outstanding options or SARs to reduce the exercise price of such outstanding options or SARs;
- Cancel outstanding options or SARs in exchange for options or SARs with an exercise price that is less than the exercise price of the original options or SARs;
- Cancel underwater options in exchange for stock awards; or
- Provide cash buyouts of underwater options.

While the above cover most types of repricing, Sustainability Advisory Services may view other provisions as akin to repricing depending on the facts and circumstances.

Also, vote against or withhold from members of the Compensation Committee who approved repricing (as defined above or otherwise determined by Sustainability Advisory Services) without prior shareholder approval, even if such repricings are allowed in their equity plan.

²⁰ For plans evaluated under the Equity Plan Scorecard policy, the company's SVT benchmark is considered along with other factors.

Vote against plans that do not expressly prohibit repricing or cash buyout of underwater options without shareholder approval if the company has a history of repricing/buyouts without shareholder approval, and the applicable listing standards would not preclude them from doing so.

Problematic Pay Practices or Significant Pay-for-Performance Disconnect

If the equity plan on the ballot is a vehicle for [problematic pay practices](#), vote against the plan.

If a significant portion of the CEO's misaligned pay is attributed to non-performance-based equity awards, and there is an equity plan on the ballot with the CEO as one of the participants, Sustainability Advisory Services may recommend a vote against the equity plan. Considerations in voting against the equity plan may include, but are not limited to:

- Magnitude of pay misalignment;
- Contribution of non-performance-based equity grants to overall pay; and
- The proportion of equity awards granted in the last three fiscal years concentrated at the named executive officer level.

Specific Treatment of Certain Award Types in Equity Plan Evaluations

Dividend Equivalent Rights

Options that have Dividend Equivalent Rights (DERs) associated with them will have a higher calculated award value than those without DERs under the binomial model, based on the value of these dividend streams. The higher value will be applied to new shares, shares available under existing plans, and shares awarded but not exercised per the plan specifications. DERS transfer more shareholder equity to employees and non-employee directors and this cost should be captured.

Operating Partnership (OP) Units in Equity Plan Analysis of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)

For Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), include the common shares issuable upon conversion of outstanding Operating Partnership (OP) units in the share count for the purposes of determining: (1) market capitalization in the Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) analysis and (2) shares outstanding in the burn rate analysis.

Other Compensation Plans

401(k) Employee Benefit Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to implement a 401(k) savings plan for employees.

Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals to implement an ESOP or increase authorized shares for existing ESOPs, unless the number of shares allocated to the ESOP is excessive (more than five percent of outstanding shares).

Employee Stock Purchase Plans—Qualified Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on qualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for employee stock purchase plans where all of the following apply:

- Purchase price is at least 85 percent of fair market value;
- Offering period is 27 months or less; and
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is 10 percent or less of the outstanding shares.

Vote against qualified employee stock purchase plans where any of the following apply:

- Purchase price is less than 85 percent of fair market value; or
- Offering period is greater than 27 months; or
- The number of shares allocated to the plan is more than ten percent of the outstanding shares.

Employee Stock Purchase Plans—Non-Qualified Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on nonqualified employee stock purchase plans. Vote for nonqualified employee stock purchase plans with all the following features:

- Broad-based participation (*i.e.*, all employees of the company with the exclusion of individuals with 5 percent or more of beneficial ownership of the company);
- Limits on employee contribution, which may be a fixed dollar amount or expressed as a percent of base salary;
- Company matching contribution up to 25 percent of employee's contribution, which is effectively a discount of 20 percent from market value;
- No discount on the stock price on the date of purchase when there is a company matching contribution.

Vote against nonqualified employee stock purchase plans when any of the plan features do not meet the above criteria. If the company matching contribution or effective discount exceeds the above, Sustainability Advisory Services may evaluate the SVT cost as part of the assessment.

Amending Cash and Equity Plans (including Approval for Tax Deductibility (162(m)))

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on amendments to cash and equity incentive plans.

Generally vote for proposals to amend executive cash, stock, or cash and stock incentive plans if the proposal:

- Addresses administrative features only; or
- Seeks approval for Section 162(m) purposes only, and the plan administering committee consists entirely of independent outsiders, per Sustainability Advisory Services' [Classification of Directors](#). Note that if the company is presenting the plan to shareholders for the first time after the company's initial public offering (IPO), or if the proposal is bundled with other material plan amendments, then the recommendation will be case-by-case (see below).

Vote against such proposals to amend executive cash, stock, or cash and stock incentive plans if the proposal:

- Seeks approval for Section 162(m) purposes only, and the plan administering committee does not consist entirely of independent outsiders, per Sustainability Advisory Services' [Classification of Directors](#).

Vote case-by-case on all other proposals to amend cash incentive plans. This includes plans presented to shareholders for the first time after the company's IPO and/or proposals that bundle material amendment(s) other than those for Section 162(m) purposes

Vote case-by-case on all other proposals to amend equity incentive plans, considering the following:

- If the proposal requests additional shares and/or the amendments may potentially increase the transfer of shareholder value to employees, the recommendation will be based on the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation as well as an analysis of the overall impact of the amendments.
- If the plan is being presented to shareholders for the first time after the company's IPO, whether or not additional shares are being requested, the recommendation will be based on the Equity Plan Scorecard evaluation as well as an analysis of the overall impact of any amendments.
- If there is no request for additional shares and the amendments are not deemed to potentially increase the transfer of shareholder value to employees, then the recommendation will be based entirely on an analysis of the overall impact of the amendments, and the EPSC evaluation will be shown for informational purposes.

Option Exchange Programs/Repricing Options

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking approval to exchange/reprice options taking into consideration:

- Historic trading patterns--the stock price should not be so volatile that the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term;
- Rationale for the re-pricing--was the stock price decline beyond management's control?
- Is this a value-for-value exchange?
- Are surrendered stock options added back to the plan reserve?
- Timing--repricing should occur at least one year out from any precipitous drop in company's stock price;
- Option vesting--does the new option vest immediately or is there a black-out period?
- Term of the option--the term should remain the same as that of the replaced option;
- Exercise price--should be set at fair market or a premium to market;
- Participants--executive officers and directors must be excluded.

If the surrendered options are added back to the equity plans for re-issuance, then also take into consideration the company's total cost of equity plans and its three-year average burn rate.

In addition to the above considerations, evaluate the intent, rationale, and timing of the repricing proposal. The proposal should clearly articulate why the board is choosing to conduct an exchange program at this point in time. Repricing underwater options after a recent precipitous drop in the company's stock price demonstrates poor timing, and warrants additional scrutiny. Also, consider the terms of the surrendered options, such as the grant date, exercise price and vesting schedule. Grant dates of surrendered options should be far enough back (two to three years) so as not to suggest that repricings are being done to take advantage of short-term downward price movements. Similarly, the exercise price of surrendered options should be above the 52-week high for the stock price.

Vote for shareholder proposals to put option repricings to a shareholder vote.

Stock Plans in Lieu of Cash

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on plans that provide participants with the option of taking all or a portion of their cash compensation in the form of stock.

Vote for non-employee director-only equity plans that provide a dollar-for-dollar cash-for-stock exchange.

Vote case-by-case on plans which do not provide a dollar-for-dollar cash for stock exchange. In cases where the exchange is not dollar-for-dollar, the request for new or additional shares for such equity program will be considered using the binomial option pricing model. In an effort to capture the total cost of total compensation, no adjustments will be made to carve out the in-lieu-of cash compensation.

Transfer Stock Option (TSO) Programs

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: One-time Transfers: Vote against or withhold from compensation committee members if they fail to submit one-time transfers to shareholders for approval.

Vote case-by-case on one-time transfers. Vote for if:

- Executive officers and non-employee directors are excluded from participating;
- Stock options are purchased by third-party financial institutions at a discount to their fair value using option pricing models such as Black-Scholes or a Binomial Option Valuation or other appropriate financial models;
- There is a two-year minimum holding period for sale proceeds (cash or stock) for all participants.

Additionally, management should provide a clear explanation of why options are being transferred to a third-party institution and whether the events leading up to a decline in stock price were beyond management's control. A review of the company's historic stock price volatility should indicate if the options are likely to be back "in-the-money" over the near term.

Ongoing TSO program: Vote against equity plan proposals if the details of ongoing TSO programs are not provided to shareholders. Since TSOs will be one of the award types under a stock plan, the ongoing TSO program, structure and mechanics must be disclosed to shareholders. The specific criteria to be considered in evaluating these proposals include, but not limited, to the following:

- Eligibility;
- Vesting;
- Bid-price;
- Term of options;
- Cost of the program and impact of the TSOs on company's total option expense; and
- Option repricing policy.

Amendments to existing plans that allow for introduction of transferability of stock options should make clear that only options granted post-amendment shall be transferable.

Director Compensation

Shareholder Ratification of Director Pay Programs

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals seeking ratification of non-employee director compensation, based on the following factors:

- If the equity plan under which non-employee director grants are made is on the ballot, whether or not it warrants support; and
- An assessment of the following qualitative factors:
 - The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile;
 - The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation;

- Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements;
- Equity award vesting schedules;
- The mix of cash and equity-based compensation;
- Meaningful limits on director compensation;
- The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites; and
- The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

Equity Plans for Non-Employee Directors

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on compensation plans for non-employee directors, based on:

- The total estimated cost of the company's equity plans relative to industry/market cap peers, measured by the company's estimated Shareholder Value Transfer (SVT) based on new shares requested plus shares remaining for future grants, plus outstanding unvested/unexercised grants;
- The company's three-year burn rate relative to its industry/market cap peers; and
- The presence of any egregious plan features (such as an option repricing provision or liberal CIC vesting risk).

On occasion, director stock plans will exceed the plan cost or burn rate benchmarks when combined with employee or executive stock plans. In such cases, vote case-by-case on the plan taking into consideration the following qualitative factors:

- The relative magnitude of director compensation as compared to companies of a similar profile;
- The presence of problematic pay practices relating to director compensation;
- Director stock ownership guidelines and holding requirements;
- Equity award vesting schedules;
- The mix of cash and equity-based compensation;
- Meaningful limits on director compensation;
- The availability of retirement benefits or perquisites; and
- The quality of disclosure surrounding director compensation.

Non-Employee Director Retirement Plans

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against retirement plans for non-employee directors.

Vote for shareholder proposals to eliminate retirement plans for non-employee directors.

Shareholder Proposals on Compensation

Adopt Anti-Hedging/Pledging/Speculative Investments Policy

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking a policy that prohibits named executive officers from engaging in derivative or speculative transactions involving company stock, including hedging, holding stock in a margin account, or pledging stock as collateral for a loan. However, the company's existing policies regarding responsible use of company stock will be considered.

Bonus Banking/Bonus Banking "Plus"

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals seeking deferral of a portion of annual bonus pay, with ultimate payout linked to sustained results for the performance metrics on which the bonus was

earned (whether for the named executive officers or a wider group of employees), taking into account the following factors:

- The company's past practices regarding equity and cash compensation;
- Whether the company has a holding period or stock ownership requirements in place, such as a meaningful retention ratio (at least 50 percent for full tenure); and
- Whether the company has a rigorous claw-back policy in place.

Compensation Consultants—Disclosure of Board or Company's Utilization

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking disclosure regarding the company, board, or compensation committee's use of compensation consultants, such as company name, business relationship(s), and fees paid.

Disclosure/Setting Levels or Types of Compensation for Executives and Directors

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals seeking additional disclosure of executive and director pay information, provided the information requested is relevant to shareholders' needs, would not put the company at a competitive disadvantage relative to its industry, and is not unduly burdensome to the company.

Vote against shareholder proposals seeking to set absolute levels on compensation or otherwise dictate the amount or form of compensation.

Vote against shareholder proposals seeking to eliminate stock options or any other equity grants to employees or directors.

Vote against shareholder proposals requiring director fees be paid in stock only.

Generally vote against shareholder proposals that mandate a minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

Vote case-by-case on all other shareholder proposals regarding executive and director pay, taking into account company performance, pay level versus peers, pay level versus industry, and long-term corporate outlook.

Golden Coffins/Executive Death Benefits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals calling companies to adopt a policy of obtaining shareholder approval for any future agreements and corporate policies that could oblige the company to make payments or awards following the death of a senior executive in the form of unearned salary or bonuses, accelerated vesting or the continuation in force of unvested equity grants, perquisites and other payments or awards made in lieu of compensation. This would not apply to any benefit programs or equity plan proposals that the broad-based employee population is eligible.

Hold Equity Past Retirement or for a Significant Period of Time

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals asking companies to adopt policies requiring senior executive officers to retain a portion of net shares acquired through compensation plans. The following factors will be taken into account:

- The percentage/ratio of net shares required to be retained;
- The time period required to retain the shares;
- Whether the company has equity retention, holding period, and/or stock ownership requirements in place and the robustness of such requirements;
- Whether the company has any other policies aimed at mitigating risk taking by executives;
- Executives' actual stock ownership and the degree to which it meets or exceeds the proponent's suggested holding period/retention ratio or the company's existing requirements; and

Pay Disparity

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote case-by-case on proposals calling for an analysis of the pay disparity between corporate executives and other non-executive employees.

Pay for Performance/Performance-Based Awards

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requesting that a significant amount of future long-term incentive compensation awarded to senior executives shall be performance-based and requesting that the board adopt and disclose challenging performance metrics to shareholders, based on the following analytical steps:

- First, vote for shareholder proposals advocating the use of performance-based equity awards, such as performance contingent options or restricted stock, indexed options or premium-priced options, unless the proposal is overly restrictive or if the company has demonstrated that it is using a "substantial" portion of performance-based awards for its top executives. Standard stock options and performance-accelerated awards do not meet the criteria to be considered as performance-based awards. Further, premium-priced options should have a meaningful premium to be considered performance-based awards.
- Second, assess the rigor of the company's performance-based equity program. If the bar set for the performance-based program is too low based on the company's historical or peer group comparison, generally vote for the proposal. Furthermore, if target performance results in an above target payout, vote for the shareholder proposal due to program's poor design. If the company does not disclose the performance metric of the performance-based equity program, vote for the shareholder proposal regardless of the outcome of the first step to the test.

In general, vote for the shareholder proposal if the company does not meet both of the above two steps.

Pay for Superior Performance

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request the board establish a pay-for-superior performance standard in the company's executive compensation plan for senior executives. These proposals generally include the following principles:

- Set compensation targets for the plan's annual and long-term incentive pay components at or below the peer group median;
- Deliver a majority of the plan's target long-term compensation through performance-vested, not simply time-vested, equity awards;
- Provide the strategic rationale and relative weightings of the financial and non-financial performance metrics or criteria used in the annual and performance-vested long-term incentive components of the plan;
- Establish performance targets for each plan financial metric relative to the performance of the company's peer companies;

- Limit payment under the annual and performance-vested long-term incentive components of the plan to when the company's performance on its selected financial performance metrics exceeds peer group median performance.

Consider the following factors in evaluating this proposal:

- What aspects of the company's annual and long-term equity incentive programs are performance driven?
- If the annual and long-term equity incentive programs are performance driven, are the performance criteria and hurdle rates disclosed to shareholders or are they benchmarked against a disclosed peer group?
- Can shareholders assess the correlation between pay and performance based on the current disclosure?
- What type of industry and stage of business cycle does the company belong to?

Pre-Arranged Trading Plans (10b5-1 Plans)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals calling for the addition of certain safeguards in prearranged trading plans (10b5-1 plans) for executives. Safeguards may include:

- Adoption, amendment, or termination of a 10b5-1 Plan must be disclosed in a Form 8-K;
- Amendment or early termination of a 10b5-1 Plan allowed only under extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the board;
- Request that a certain number of days that must elapse between adoption or amendment of a 10b5-1 Plan and initial trading under the plan;
- Reports on Form 4 must identify transactions made pursuant to a 10b5-1 Plan;
- An executive may not trade in company stock outside the 10b5-1 Plan;
- Trades under a 10b5-1 Plan must be handled by a broker who does not handle other securities transactions for the executive.

Prohibit Outside CEOs from Serving on Compensation Committees

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals seeking a policy to prohibit any outside CEO from serving on a company's compensation committee, unless the company has demonstrated problematic pay practices that raise concerns about the performance and composition of the committee.

Recoupment of Incentive or Stock Compensation in Specified Circumstances

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to recoup incentive cash or stock compensation made to senior executives if it is later determined that the figures upon which incentive compensation is earned turn out to have been in error, or if the senior executive has breached company policy or has engaged in misconduct that may be significantly detrimental to the company's financial position or reputation, or if the senior executive failed to manage or monitor risks that subsequently led to significant financial or reputational harm to the company. Many companies have adopted policies that permit recoupment in cases where an executive's fraud, misconduct, or negligence significantly contributed to a restatement of financial results that led to the awarding of unearned incentive compensation. However, such policies may be narrow given that not all misconduct or negligence may result in significant financial restatements. Misconduct, negligence or lack of sufficient oversight by senior executives may lead to significant financial loss or reputational damage that may have long-lasting impact.

In considering whether to support such shareholder proposals, the following factors will be taken into consideration:

- If the company has adopted a formal recoupment policy;

- The rigor of the recoupment policy focusing on how and under what circumstances the company may recoup incentive or stock compensation;
- Whether the company has chronic restatement history or material financial problems;
- Whether the company's policy substantially addresses the concerns raised by the proponent;
- Disclosure of recoupment of incentive or stock compensation from senior executives or lack thereof; or
- Any other relevant factors.

Severance Agreements for Executives/Golden Parachutes

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals requiring that executive severance (including change-in-control related) arrangements or payments be submitted for shareholder ratification.

Factors that will be considered include, but are not limited to:

- The company's severance or change-in-control agreements in place, and the presence of problematic features (such as excessive severance entitlements, single triggers, excise tax gross-ups, etc.);
- Any existing limits on cash severance payouts or policies which require shareholder ratification of severance payments exceeding a certain level;
- Any recent severance-related controversies; and
- Whether the proposal is overly prescriptive, such as requiring shareholder approval of severance that does not exceed market norms.

Share Buyback Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against shareholder proposals prohibiting executives from selling shares of company stock during periods in which the company has announced that it may or will be repurchasing shares of its stock. Vote for the proposal when there is a pattern of abuse by executives exercising options or selling shares during periods of share buybacks.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting the company exclude the impact of share buybacks from the calculation of incentive program metrics, considering the following factors:

- The frequency and timing of the company's share buybacks;
- The use of per-share metrics in incentive plans;
- The effect of recent buybacks on incentive metric results and payouts; and
- Whether there is any indication of metric result manipulation.

Supplemental Executive Retirement Plans (SERPs)

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting to put extraordinary benefits contained in SERP agreements to a shareholder vote unless the company's executive pension plans do not contain excessive benefits beyond what is offered under employee-wide plans.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting to limit the executive benefits provided under the company's supplemental executive retirement plan (SERP) by limiting covered compensation to a senior executive's annual salary or those pay elements covered for the general employee population.

Tax Gross-Up Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals calling for companies to adopt a policy of not providing tax gross-up payments to executives, except in situations where gross-ups are provided pursuant to a plan, policy, or arrangement applicable to management employees of the company, such as a relocation or expatriate tax equalization policy.

Termination of Employment Prior to Severance Payment/Eliminating Accelerated Vesting of Unvested Equity

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals seeking a policy requiring termination of employment prior to severance payment and/or eliminating accelerated vesting of unvested equity.

The following factors will be considered:

- The company's current treatment of equity in change-of-control situations (i.e. is it double triggered, does it allow for the assumption of equity by acquiring company, the treatment of performance shares, etc.);
- Current employment agreements, including potential poor pay practices such as gross-ups embedded in those agreements.

Generally vote for proposals seeking a policy that prohibits acceleration of the vesting of equity awards to senior executives in the event of a change in control (except for pro rata vesting considering the time elapsed and attainment of any related performance goals between the award date and the change in control).

6. Social and Environmental Issues

Global Approach

Socially responsible shareholder resolutions receive a great deal more attention from institutional shareholders today than in the past. While focusing on value enhancement through risk mitigation and exposure to new sustainability-related opportunities, these resolutions also seek standardized reporting on ESG issues, request information regarding an issuer's adoption of, or adherence to, relevant norms, standards, codes of conduct or universally recognized international initiatives to promote disclosure and transparency. Sustainability Advisory Services generally supports standards-based ESG shareholder proposals that enhance long-term shareholder and stakeholder value while aligning the interests of the company with those of society at large. In particular, the policy will focus on resolutions seeking greater transparency and/or adherence to internationally recognized standards and principles.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: In determining our vote recommendation on standardized ESG reporting shareholder proposals, we also analyze the following factors:

- Whether the proposal itself is well framed and reasonable;
- Whether adoption of the proposal would have either a positive or negative impact on the company's short-term or long-term share value;
- The percentage of sales, assets and earnings affected;
- Whether the company has already responded in some appropriate manner to the request embodied in a proposal;
- Whether the company's analysis and voting recommendation to shareholders is persuasive;
- Whether there are significant controversies, fines, penalties, or litigation associated with the company's environmental or social practices;
- What other companies have done in response to the issue addressed in the proposal;
- Whether implementation of the proposal would achieve the objectives sought in the proposal; and
- The degree to which the company's stated position on the issues raised in the proposal could affect its reputation or sales or leave it vulnerable to a boycott or selective purchasing.

Animal Welfare

Animal Welfare Policies

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking a report on a company's animal welfare standards, or animal welfare-related risks, unless:

- The company has already published a set of animal welfare standards and monitors compliance;
- The company's standards are comparable to industry peers; and
- There are no recent significant fines, litigation, or controversies related to the company's and/or its suppliers' treatment of animals.

Animal Testing

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals to phase out the use of animals in product testing, unless:

- The company is conducting animal testing programs that are unnecessary or not required by regulation;
- The company is conducting animal testing when suitable alternatives are commonly accepted and used by industry peers; or
- There are recent, significant fines or litigation related to the company's treatment of animals.

Animal Slaughter

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals requesting the implementation of Controlled Atmosphere Killing (CAK) methods at company and/or supplier operations unless such methods are required by legislation or generally accepted as the industry standard.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting a report on the feasibility of implementing CAK methods at company and/or supplier operations considering the availability of existing research conducted by the company or industry groups on this topic and any fines or litigation related to current animal processing procedures at the company.

Consumer Issues

Genetically Modified Ingredients

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals requesting that a company voluntarily label genetically engineered (GE) ingredients in its products. The labeling of products with GE ingredients is best left to the appropriate regulatory authorities.

Vote case-by-case on proposals asking for a report on the feasibility of labeling products containing GE ingredients, taking into account:

- The potential impact of such labeling on the company's business;
- The quality of the company's disclosure on GE product labeling, related voluntary initiatives, and how this disclosure compares with industry peer disclosure; and
- Company's current disclosure on the feasibility of GE product labeling.

Generally vote for proposals seeking a report on the social, health, and environmental effects of genetically modified organism (GMOs).

Generally vote against proposals to eliminate GE ingredients from the company's products, or proposals asking for reports outlining the steps necessary to eliminate GE ingredients from the company's products. Such decisions are more appropriately made by management with consideration of current regulations.

Reports on Potentially Controversial Business/Financial Practices

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's potentially controversial business or financial practices or products, taking into account:

- Whether the company has adequately disclosed mechanisms in place to prevent abuses;
- Whether the company has adequately disclosed the financial risks of the products/practices in question;
- Whether the company has been subject to violations of related laws or serious controversies; and
- Peer companies' policies/practices in this area.

Consumer Lending

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on the company's lending guidelines and procedures taking into account:

- Whether the company has adequately disclosed mechanisms in place to prevent abusive lending practices;
- Whether the company has adequately disclosed the financial risks of the lending products in question;
- Whether the company has been subject to violations of lending laws or serious lending controversies; and
- Peer companies' policies to prevent abusive lending practices.

Pharmaceutical Pricing, Access to Medicines, Product Reimportation and Health Pandemics

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals requesting that companies implement specific price restraints on pharmaceutical products unless the company fails to adhere to legislative guidelines or industry norms in its product pricing practices.

Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting that a company report on its product pricing or access to medicine policies, considering:

- The potential for reputational, market, and regulatory risk exposure;
- Existing disclosure of relevant policies;
- Deviation from established industry norms;
- Relevant company initiatives to provide research and/or products to disadvantaged consumers;
- Whether the proposal focuses on specific products or geographic regions;
- The potential burden and scope of the requested report; and
- Recent significant controversies, litigation, or fines at the company.

Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on the financial and legal impact of its prescription drug reimportation policies unless such information is already publicly disclosed.

Generally vote against proposals requesting that companies adopt specific policies to encourage or constrain prescription drug reimportation. Such matters are more appropriately the province of legislative activity and may place the company at a competitive disadvantage relative to its peers.

Health Pandemics

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports outlining the impact of health pandemics (such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and avian flu) on the company's operations and how the company is responding to the situation, taking into account:

- The scope of the company's operations in the affected/relevant area(s);
- The company's existing healthcare policies, including benefits and healthcare access; and
- Company donations to relevant healthcare providers.

Vote against proposals asking companies to establish, implement, and report on a standard of response to health pandemics (such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and avian flu), unless the company has significant operations in the affected markets and has failed to adopt policies and/or procedures to address these issues comparable to those of industry peers.

Product Safety and Toxic/Hazardous Materials

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its policies, initiatives/procedures, and oversight mechanisms related to toxic/hazardous materials or product safety in its supply chain.

Generally vote for resolutions requesting that companies develop a feasibility assessment to phase-out of certain toxic/hazardous materials, or evaluate and disclose the potential financial and legal risks associated with utilizing certain materials.

Generally vote against resolutions requiring that a company reformulate its products.

Tobacco-Related Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on resolutions regarding the advertisement of tobacco products, considering:

- Recent related fines, controversies, or significant litigation;
- Whether the company complies with relevant laws and regulations on the marketing of tobacco;
- Whether the company's advertising restrictions deviate from those of industry peers;
- Whether the company entered into the Master Settlement Agreement, which restricts marketing of tobacco to youth; and
- Whether restrictions on marketing to youth extend to foreign countries.

Vote case-by-case on proposals regarding second-hand smoke, considering:

- Whether the company complies with all laws and regulations;
- The degree that voluntary restrictions beyond those mandated by law might hurt the company's competitiveness; and
- The risk of any health-related liabilities.

Generally vote against resolutions to cease production of tobacco-related products, to avoid selling products to tobacco companies, to spin-off tobacco-related businesses, or prohibit investment in tobacco equities. Such business decisions are better left to company management or portfolio managers.

Generally vote against proposals regarding tobacco product warnings. Such decisions are better left to public health authorities.

Climate Change

Climate Change/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions

Climate change has emerged as the most significant environmental threat to the planet to date. Scientists agree that gases released by chemical reactions including the burning of fossil fuels contribute to a “greenhouse effect” that traps the planet’s heat. Environmentalists claim that the greenhouse gases produced by the industrial age have caused recent weather crises such as heat waves, rainstorms, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and receding coastlines. With notable exceptions, business leaders have described the rise and fall of global temperatures as naturally occurring phenomena and depicted corporate impact on climate change as minimal. Shareholder proposals asking a company to issue a report to shareholders, “at reasonable cost and omitting proprietary information,” on greenhouse gas emissions ask that the report include descriptions of efforts within companies to reduce emissions, their financial exposure and potential liability from operations that contribute to global warming, their direct or indirect efforts to promote the view that global warming is not a threat and their goals in reducing these emissions from their operations. Proponents argue that there is scientific proof that the burning of fossil fuels causes global warming, that future legislation may make companies financially liable for their contributions to global warming, and that a report on the company’s role in global warming can be assembled at reasonable cost.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking information on the financial, physical, or regulatory risks it faces related to climate change- on its operations and investments, or on how the company identifies, measures, and manage such risks.
- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for the reduction of GHG emissions.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on responses to regulatory and public pressures surrounding climate change, and for disclosure of research that aided in setting company policies around climate change.
- Vote for shareholder proposals requesting a report/disclosure of goals on GHG emissions from company operations and/or products.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report on reducing methane emissions and to assess the reliability of the company’s methane emission disclosures.

Environmental Justice

Companies have faced proposals addressing environmental justice concerns, focused on vulnerable stakeholders – particularly communities of color and low-income communities – who are disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution. These heightened risks can be exacerbated by climate change.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting disclosure of an environmental justice report, as well as a third-party environmental justice assessment.

Financed Emissions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For financial institutions and companies that provide financial services, generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to increase disclosure of its financed emissions. Generally vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals that request a company to adopt a policy to reduce its financed emissions. Financed emissions (scope 3, category 15) are emissions associated with a company’s

investments, not already covered under scopes 1 and 2 – including but not limited to equity investments, debt investments, and project finance. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of the company's financed emissions disclosure;
- Whether the company's decarbonization targets and climate transition plan are in alignment with the Paris Agreement, the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario, and other internationally recognized frameworks;
- Whether the company's methodology is in alignment with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHG Protocol), the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF), and other generally accepted calculation and reporting methodologies; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Just Transition

Companies have faced proposals requesting disclosure on the just transition – addressing stakeholder concerns within a company's value chain with regards to the effects of climate change and the energy transition. Relevant stakeholder groups can include employees, suppliers (and workers in supply chains), communities impacted by operations, and other vulnerable groups potentially affected by a company's climate change strategy. Just transition disclosure should adequately assess, consult on, and address impacts on affected stakeholders regarding climate change risks.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting just transition and labor protection disclosure, in alignment with the International Labour Organization, the World Benchmarking Alliance, and other generally accepted guidelines and indicators.

Natural Capital

Natural capital disclosure has moved into the mainstream of climate change reporting. The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework have mobilized widespread recognition of the fact that Paris Agreement-aligned targets can only be achieved by integrating natural capital-related concerns. As such, there has been increased market uptake around natural capital disclosures and commitments, particularly around TNFD-aligned reporting, as well as alignment with other internationally accepted reporting frameworks.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting disclosure of TNFD-aligned reporting, including but not limited to a biodiversity impact and dependency assessment. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The completeness, feasibility, and rigor of the company's natural capital-related disclosure;
- Whether the company's natural capital disclosure adequately incorporate governance, strategy, risk and impact management, and metrics and targets;
- Whether the company's targets and climate transition plan are in alignment with TNFD, the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement, and other internationally recognized frameworks; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Natural capital-related shareholder proposals also encompass a broad range of industries. Various market-led initiatives have identified key sectors for investor-issuer engagement, including but not limited to: chemicals, consumer goods, food and agriculture, forestry, mining, oil and gas, packaging, and pharmaceuticals. Some proposals also address indigenous peoples' rights, which is also a key consideration for natural capital frameworks.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting companies to increase disclosure and/or to adopt sustainable sourcing policies with regards to natural capital-related risks, dependencies, and impacts.

Say on Climate (SoC) Management Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on management proposals that request shareholders to approve the company's climate transition action plan²¹, taking into account the completeness and rigor of the plan. Information that will be considered where available includes the following:

- The extent to which the company's climate related disclosures are in line with TCFD recommendations and meet other market standards;
- Disclosure of its operational and supply chain GHG emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3);
- The completeness, feasibility and rigor of company's short-, medium-, and long-term targets for reducing operational and supply chain GHG emissions in line with Paris Agreement goals (Scopes 1, 2, and 3 if relevant);
- Whether the company has sought and received third-party approval that its targets are science-based;
- Whether the company has made a commitment to be "net zero" for operational and supply chain emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) by 2050;
- Whether the company discloses a commitment to report on the implementation of its plan in subsequent years;
- Whether the company's climate data has received third-party assurance;
- Disclosure of how the company's lobbying activities and its capital expenditures align with company strategy;
- Whether there are specific industry decarbonization challenges; and
- The company's related commitment, disclosure, and performance compared to its industry peers.

Say on Climate (SoC) Shareholder Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose a report providing its GHG emissions levels and reduction targets and/or its upcoming/approved climate transition action plan and provide shareholders the opportunity to express approval or disapproval of its GHG emissions reduction plan, taking into account information such as the following:

- The completeness, feasibility and rigor of the company's climate-related disclosure;
- The company's actual GHG emissions performance;
- The company's alignment with relevant internationally recognized frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and IEA's Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent, significant violations, fines, litigation, or controversy related to its GHG emissions; and
- Whether the proposal's request is unduly burdensome (scope or timeframe) or overly prescriptive.

Energy Efficiency

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company report on its energy efficiency policies.

²¹ Variations of this request also include climate transition related ambitions, or commitment to reporting on the implementation of a climate plan.

Renewable Energy

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports on the feasibility of developing renewable energy resources.

Generally vote for proposals requesting that the company invest in renewable energy resources.

Diversity

Board Diversity

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports on a company's efforts to diversify the board, unless:

- The gender and racial minority representation of the company's board is reasonably inclusive in relation to companies of similar size and business; and
- The board already reports on its nominating procedures and gender and racial minority initiatives on the board and within the company.

Generally vote for shareholder proposals that ask the company to take reasonable steps to increase the levels of underrepresented gender identities and racial minorities on the board.

Equality of Opportunity

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting a company disclose its diversity policies or initiatives, or proposals requesting disclosure of a company's comprehensive workforce diversity data, including requests for EEO-1 data.

Generally vote for proposals seeking information on the diversity efforts of suppliers and service providers.

Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Domestic Partner Benefits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals seeking to amend a company's EEO statement or diversity policies to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, unless the change would be unduly burdensome.

Generally vote for proposals to extend company benefits to domestic partners.

Gender, Race/Ethnicity Pay Gap

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for reports on a company's pay data by gender or race/ethnicity or a report on a company's policies and goals to reduce any gender or race/ethnicity pay gaps, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and disclosure related to both its diversity and inclusion policies and practices and its compensation philosophy and fair and equitable compensation practices;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap issues;

- The company's disclosure regarding gender, race, or ethnicity pay gap policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers; and
- Local laws regarding categorization of race and/or ethnicity and definitions of ethnic and/or racial minorities.

Racial Equity and/or Civil Rights Audits

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting that a company conduct an independent racial equity and/or civil rights audit, considering company disclosures, policies, actions, and engagements.

Environment and Sustainability

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Companies have received shareholder proposals requesting increased disclosure of responsible AI policies, procedures, and practices with respect to board oversight, environmental sustainability, and human rights risk mitigation.

AI and data center issues are wide-ranging. Some areas where companies may face AI-related risks that could materially impact their operations include:

- How high levels of AI-driven energy use may impact GHG emissions targets, climate goals, and climate transition plans;
- How using AI to increase fossil fuel development and production may impact climate targets, and may pose legal and reputational risks;
- Data centers exacerbating water stress, especially in drought-prone areas;
- Child safety;
- End use due diligence (how use of AI for surveillance and censorship, especially in conflict-affected and high-risk areas, may impact legal and reputational risk);
- Data acquisition and usage (privacy, safety, intellectual property);
- Human capital management (bias, discrimination, workplace monitoring, health and safety, automation, and other workforce impacts);
- Just AI transition;
- Misinformation and disinformation;
- Privacy concerns, and potential promotion of hate speech and discrimination, related to targeted advertising; and
- Potential human rights impacts related to weapons development and deployment.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals requesting companies to prepare reports or adopt policies in line with internationally accepted frameworks. The scope of this recommendation takes into consideration the entire AI lifecycle and value chain, from upstream components and data sourcing, to downstream applications, safety and security issues, and other broader societal and environmental impacts.

Facility and Workplace Safety

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on resolutions requesting that a company report on safety and/or security risks associated with its operations and/or facilities, considering:

- The company's compliance with applicable regulations and guidelines;
- The company's current level of disclosure regarding its security and safety policies, procedures, and compliance monitoring; and
- The existence of recent, significant violations, fines, or controversy regarding the safety and security of the company's operations and/or facilities.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's (natural gas) hydraulic fracturing operations, including measures the company has taken to manage and mitigate the potential community and environmental impacts of those operations.

Operations in Protected Areas

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports on potential environmental damage as a result of company operations in protected regions, unless:

- Operations in the specified regions are not permitted by current laws or regulations;
- The company does not currently have operations or plans to develop operations in these protected regions; or
- The company's disclosure of its operations and environmental policies in these regions is comparable to industry peers.

Recycling

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote FOR proposals to adopt a comprehensive recycling strategy, taking into account:

- The nature of the company's business;
- The current level of disclosure of the company's existing related programs;
- The timetable and methods of program implementation prescribed by the proposal;
- The company's ability to address the issues raised in the proposal; and
- How the company's recycling programs compare to similar programs of its industry peers.

Sustainability Reporting

Shareholders may request general environmental disclosures or reports on a specific location/operation, often requesting that the company detail the environmental risks and potential liabilities of a specific project. Increasingly, companies have begun reporting on environmental and sustainability issues using the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards. The GRI was established in 1997 with the mission of developing globally applicable guidelines for reporting on economic, environmental, and social performance. The GRI was developed by [Ceres](#) (formerly known as the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies, CERES) in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Ceres was formed in the wake of the March 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, when a consortium of investors, environmental groups, and religious organizations drafted what were originally named the Valdez Principles. Later to be renamed the CERES Principles, and now branded as the Ceres Roadmap to 2030, corporate signatories to the Ceres Roadmap to 2030 pledge to publicly report on environmental issues, including protection of the biosphere, sustainable use of natural resources, reduction and disposal of wastes, energy conservation, and employee and community risk reduction in a standardized form.

The Equator Principles are the financial industry's benchmark for determining, assessing and managing social and environmental risk in project financing. The Principles were first launched in June 2003 and were ultimately adopted by over forty financial institutions during a three year implementation period. The principles were subsequently revised in July 2006 to take into account the new performance standards approved by the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation (IFC). The third iteration of the Principles was launched in June 2013 and it amplified the banks' commitments to social responsibility, including human rights, climate change, and transparency. Financial institutions adopt these principles to ensure that the projects they venture in are developed in a socially responsible manner and reflect sound environmental management practices.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking greater disclosure on the company's environmental and social practices, and/or associated risks and liabilities.
- Vote for shareholder proposals asking companies to report in accordance with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking the preparation of sustainability reports.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to study or implement the CERES Roadmap 2030.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to study or implement the Equator Principles.

Water Issues

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting a company to report on, or to adopt a new policy on, water-related risks and concerns, taking into account:

- The company's current disclosure of relevant policies, initiatives, oversight mechanisms, and water usage metrics;
- Whether or not the company's existing water-related policies and practices are consistent with relevant internationally recognized standards and national/local regulations;
- The potential financial impact or risk to the company associated with water-related concerns or issues; and
- Recent, significant company controversies, fines, or litigation regarding water use by the company and its suppliers.

Equator Principles

The Equator Principles are the financial industry's benchmark for determining, assessing and managing social and environmental risk in project financing. First launched in June 2003, the Principles were ultimately adopted by over forty financial institutions over a three-year implementation period. Since its adoption, the Principles have undergone a number of revisions, expanding the use of performance standards and signatory banks' banks' commitments to social responsibility, including human rights, climate change, and transparency. The fourth iteration of the Principles was launched in November 2019, incorporating amendments and new commitment to human rights, climate change, Indigenous Peoples and biodiversity related topics. Financial institutions adopt these principles to ensure that the projects they finance are developed in a socially responsible manner and reflect sound environmental management practices. As of 2024, 131 financial institutions globally are Signatories to the Equator Principles.²²

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for shareholder proposals to study or implement the Equator Principles.

²² <https://equator-principles.com/signatories-epfis-reporting/>

General Corporate Issues

Charitable Contributions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals restricting a company from making charitable contributions. Charitable contributions are generally useful for assisting worthwhile causes and for creating goodwill in the community. In the absence of bad faith, self-dealing, or gross negligence, management should determine which, and if, contributions are in the best interests of the company.

Data Security, Privacy, and Internet Issues

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting the disclosure or implementation of data security, privacy, or information access and management policies and procedures, considering:

- The level of disclosure of company policies and procedures relating to data security, privacy, freedom of speech, information access and management, and Internet censorship;
- Engagement in dialogue with governments or relevant groups with respect to data security, privacy, or the free flow of information on the Internet;
- The scope of business involvement and of investment in countries whose governments censor or monitor the Internet and other telecommunications;
- Applicable market-specific laws or regulations that may be imposed on the company; and
- Controversies, fines, or litigation related to data security, privacy, freedom of speech, or Internet censorship.

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Compensation-Related Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals to link, or report on linking, executive compensation to environmental and social criteria (such as corporate downsizings, customer or employee satisfaction, community involvement, human rights, environmental performance, or predatory lending).

Tax Transparency

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for shareholder proposals that request the company to disclose on tax transparency and country-by-country reporting (CbCR), in alignment with internationally-accepted frameworks, such as the Global Reporting Initiative Tax Standard (GRI 207: Tax 2019) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) BEPS Action 13 (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting).

Human Rights, Labor Issues, and International Operations

Investors, international human rights groups, and labor advocacy groups have long been making attempts to safeguard domestic and international workers' rights. In instances where companies operate in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), for example, these advocates have asked that the companies adopt global corporate human rights standards that guarantee sustainable wages and safe working conditions for workers in their supply chains. Companies that contract out portions of their manufacturing operations to suppliers have been asked to ensure that the products they receive from those contractors have not been made using forced labor, child labor, or other forms of modern slavery. These companies are asked to adopt formal vendor standards that, among other things, include monitoring or auditing mechanisms. Globalization, relocation of production overseas, and widespread use of subcontractors and vendors, often make it difficult to obtain a complete picture of a company's labor practices in global markets. Many Investors believe that companies would benefit from adopting a human rights policy based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labor Organization's Core Labor Standards. Efforts that seek greater disclosure on a company's labor practices and that seek to establish minimum standards for a company's operations will be supported. In addition, requests for independent monitoring of domestic and international operations will be supported.

The Sustainability Policy generally supports proposals that call for the adoption and/or enforcement of principles or codes relating to countries in which there are systematic violations of human rights; such as the use of slave, child, or prison labor; a government that is illegitimate; or there is a call by human rights advocates, pro-democracy organizations, or legitimately-elected representatives for economic sanctions. The use of child labor or forced labor is unethical and can damage corporate reputations. Poor labor practices can lead to litigation against the company, which can be costly and time consuming.

Human Rights Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation:

- Generally vote for proposals requesting a report on company or company supplier labor and/or human rights standards and policies.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to implement human rights standards and workplace codes of conduct.
- Vote for shareholder proposals calling for the implementation and reporting on ILO codes of conduct, SA 8000 Standards, or human rights due diligence standards.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that call for the adoption and/or enforcement of principles or codes relating to countries in which there are systematic violations of human rights.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that call for independent monitoring programs in conjunction with local and respected religious and human rights groups to monitor supplier and licensee compliance with codes.
- Vote for shareholder proposals that seek publication of a "Code of Conduct" to the company's domestic and international suppliers and licensees, requiring they satisfy all applicable standards and laws protecting employees' wages, benefits, working conditions, freedom of association, and other rights.
- Vote for shareholder proposals seeking reports on, or the adoption of, vendor standards including: reporting on incentives to encourage suppliers to raise standards rather than terminate contracts and providing public disclosure of contract supplier reviews on a regular basis.
- Vote for shareholder proposals to adopt labor standards for foreign and domestic suppliers to ensure that the company will not do business with any suppliers that manufacture products for sale using forced labor, child labor, or that fail to comply with applicable laws protecting employee's wages and working conditions.
- Vote for proposals requesting that a company conduct an assessment of the human rights risks in its operations or in its supply chain, or report on its human rights risk assessment process.

Mandatory Arbitration

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on a company's use of mandatory arbitration on employment-related claims, taking into account:

- The company's current policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements on workplace claims; and
- The company's disclosure of its policies and practices related to the use of mandatory arbitration agreements compared to its peers.

MacBride Principles

These resolutions have called for the adoption of the MacBride Principles for operations located in Northern Ireland. They request companies operating abroad to support the equal employment opportunity policies that apply in facilities they operate domestically. The principles were established to address the sectarian hiring problems between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. It is well documented that Northern Ireland's Catholic community faced much higher unemployment figures than the Protestant community. In response to this problem, the UK government instituted the New Fair Employment Act of 1989 (and subsequent amendments) to address the sectarian hiring problems.

Many companies believe that the Act adequately addresses the problems and that further action, including adoption of the MacBride Principles, only duplicates the efforts already underway. In evaluating a proposal to adopt the MacBride Principles, shareholders must decide whether the principles will cause companies to divest, and therefore worsen the unemployment problem, or whether the principles will promote equal hiring practices. Proponents believe that the Fair Employment Act does not sufficiently address the sectarian hiring problems. They argue that the MacBride Principles serve to stabilize the situation and promote further investment.

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Support the MacBride Principles for operations in Northern Ireland that request companies to abide by equal employment opportunity policies.

Community Social and Environmental Impact Assessments

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for requests for reports outlining policies and/or the potential (community) social and/or environmental impact of company operations considering:

- Alignment of current disclosure of applicable company policies, metrics, risk assessment report(s) and risk management procedures with any relevant, broadly accepted reporting frameworks;
- The of regulatory non-compliance, litigation, remediation, or reputational loss that may be associated with failure to manage the company's operations in question, including the management of relevant community and stakeholder impact relations;
- The nature, purpose, and scope of the company's operations in the specific region(s);
- The degree to which company policies and procedures are consistent with industry norms; and
- The scope of the resolution.

Operations in High-Risk Markets

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on a company's potential financial and reputational risks associated with operations in "high-risk" markets, such as a terrorism-sponsoring state or politically/socially unstable region, taking into account:

- The nature, purpose, and scope of the operations and business involved that could be affected by social or political disruption;
- Current disclosure of applicable risk assessment(s) and risk management procedures;
- Compliance with U.S. sanctions and laws;
- Consideration of other international policies, standards, and laws; and
- Whether the company has been recently involved in recent, significant controversies, fines or litigation related to its operations in "high-risk" markets.

Outsourcing/Offshoring

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals calling for companies to report on the risks associated with outsourcing/plant closures, considering:

- Controversies surrounding operations in the relevant market(s);
- The value of the requested report to shareholders;
- The company's current level of disclosure of relevant information on outsourcing and plant closure procedures; and
- The company's existing human rights standards relative to industry peers.

Sexual Harassment

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on requests for a report on company actions taken to strengthen policies and oversight to prevent workplace sexual harassment, or a report on risks posed by a company's failure to prevent workplace sexual harassment, taking into account:

- The company's current policies, practices, oversight mechanisms related to preventing workplace sexual harassment;
- Whether the company has been the subject of recent controversy, litigation, or regulatory actions related to workplace sexual harassment issues; and
- The company's disclosure regarding workplace sexual harassment policies or initiatives compared to its industry peers.

Weapons and Military Sales

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against reports on foreign military sales or offsets. Such disclosures may involve sensitive and confidential information. Moreover, companies must comply with government controls and reporting on foreign military sales.

Generally vote against proposals asking a company to cease production or report on the risks associated with the use of depleted uranium munitions or nuclear weapons components and delivery systems, including disengaging from current and proposed contracts. Such contracts are monitored by government agencies, serve multiple military and non-military uses, and withdrawal from these contracts could have a negative impact on the company's business.

Political Activities

Lobbying

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals requesting information on a company's lobbying (including direct, indirect, and grassroots lobbying) activities, policies, or procedures, considering:

- The company's current disclosure of relevant lobbying policies, and management and board oversight;
- The company's disclosure regarding trade associations or other groups that it supports, or is a member of, that engage in lobbying activities; and
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's lobbying-related activities.

Political Contributions

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's political contributions and trade association spending policies and activities, considering:

- The company's policies, and management and board oversight related to its direct political contributions and payments to trade associations or other groups that may be used for political purposes;
- The company's disclosure regarding its support of, and participation in, trade associations or other groups that may make political contributions; and
- Recent significant controversies, fines, or litigation related to the company's political contributions or political activities.

Vote against proposals barring a company from making political contributions. Businesses are affected by legislation at the federal, state, and local level; barring political contributions can put the company at a competitive disadvantage.

Vote against proposals to publish in newspapers and other media a company's political contributions. Such publications could present significant cost to the company without providing commensurate value to shareholders.

Political Ties

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against proposals asking a company to affirm political nonpartisanship in the workplace, so long as:

- There are no recent, significant controversies, fines, or litigation regarding the company's political contributions or trade association spending; and
- The company has procedures in place to ensure that employee contributions to company-sponsored political action committees (PACs) are strictly voluntary and prohibit coercion.

Vote against proposals asking for a list of company executives, directors, consultants, legal counsels, lobbyists, or investment bankers that have prior government service and whether such service had a bearing on the business of the company. Such a list would be burdensome to prepare without providing any meaningful information to shareholders.

Political Expenditures and Lobbying Congruency

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote for proposals requesting greater disclosure of a company's alignment of political contributions, lobbying, and electioneering spending with a company's publicly stated values and policies, unless the terms of the proposal are unduly restrictive. Additionally, Sustainability Advisory Services will consider whether:

- The company's policies, management, board oversight, governance processes, and level of disclosure related to direct political contributions, lobbying activities, and payments to trade associations, political action committees, or other groups that may be used for political purposes;
- The company's disclosure regarding: the reasons for its support of candidates for public offices; the reasons for support of and participation in trade associations or other groups that may make political contributions; and other political activities;
- Any incongruencies identified between a company's direct and indirect political expenditures and its publicly stated values and priorities;
- Recent significant controversies related to the company's direct and indirect lobbying, political contributions, or political activities.

7. Mutual Fund Proxies

Election of Directors

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the election of directors and trustees, following the same guidelines for uncontested directors for public company shareholder meetings. However, mutual fund boards do not usually have compensation committees, so do not withhold for the lack of this committee.

Closed End Funds - Unilateral Opt-In to Control Share Acquisition Statutes

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: For closed-end management investment companies (CEFs), vote against or withhold from nominating/governance committee members (or other directors on a case-by-case basis) at CEFs that have not provided a compelling rationale for opting-in to a Control Share Acquisition statute, nor submitted a by-law amendment to a shareholder vote.

Converting Closed-end Fund to Open-end Fund

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on conversion proposals, considering the following factors:

- Past performance as a closed-end fund;
- Market in which the fund invests;
- Measures taken by the board to address the discount; and
- Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals.

Proxy Contests

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proxy contests, considering the following factors:

- Past performance relative to its peers;
- Market in which fund invests;
- Measures taken by the board to address the issues;
- Past shareholder activism, board activity, and votes on related proposals;
- Strategy of the incumbents versus the dissidents;
- Independence of directors;
- Experience and skills of director candidates;
- Governance profile of the company;
- Evidence of management entrenchment.

Investment Advisory Agreements

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on investment advisory agreements, considering the following factors:

- Proposed and current fee schedules;
- Fund category/investment objective;
- Performance benchmarks;
- Share price performance as compared with peers;
- Resulting fees relative to peers;

- Assignments (where the advisor undergoes a change of control).

Approving New Classes or Series of Shares

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for the establishment of new classes or series of shares.

Preferred Stock Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on the authorization for or increase in preferred shares, considering the following factors:

- Stated specific financing purpose;
- Possible dilution for common shares;
- Whether the shares can be used for antitakeover purposes.

1940 Act Policies

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on policies under the Investment Advisor Act of 1940, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness;
- Regulatory developments;
- Current and potential returns; and
- Current and potential risk.

Generally vote for these amendments as long as the proposed changes do not fundamentally alter the investment focus of the fund and do comply with the current SEC interpretation.

Changing a Fundamental Restriction to a Nonfundamental Restriction

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to change a fundamental restriction to a non-fundamental restriction, considering the following factors:

- The fund's target investments;
- The reasons given by the fund for the change; and
- The projected impact of the change on the portfolio.

Change Fundamental Investment Objective to Nonfundamental

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals to change a fund's fundamental investment objective to non-fundamental.

Name Change Proposals

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on name change proposals, considering the following factors:

- Political/economic changes in the target market;
- Consolidation in the target market; and

- Current asset composition.

Change in Fund's Subclassification

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on changes in a fund's sub-classification, considering the following factors:

- Potential competitiveness;
- Current and potential returns;
- Risk of concentration;
- Consolidation in target industry.

Business Development Companies - Authorization to Sell Shares of Common Stock at a Price below Net Asset Value

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for proposals authorizing the board to issue shares below Net Asset Value (NAV) if:

- The proposal to allow share issuances below NAV has an expiration date no more than one year from the date shareholders approve the underlying proposal, as required under the Investment Company Act of 1940;
- The sale is deemed to be in the best interests of shareholders by (1) a majority of the company's independent directors and (2) a majority of the company's directors who have no financial interest in the issuance; and
- The company has demonstrated responsible past use of share issuances by either:
 - Outperforming peers in its 8-digit GICS group as measured by one- and three-year median TSRs; or
 - Providing disclosure that its past share issuances were priced at levels that resulted in only small or moderate discounts to NAV and economic dilution to existing non-participating shareholders.

Disposition of Assets/Termination/Liquidation

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to dispose of assets, to terminate or liquidate, considering the following factors:

- Strategies employed to salvage the company;
- The fund's past performance;
- The terms of the liquidation.

Changes to the Charter Document

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on changes to the charter document, considering the following factors:

- The degree of change implied by the proposal;
- The efficiencies that could result;
- The state of incorporation;
- Regulatory standards and implications.

Vote against any of the following changes:

- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to reorganize or terminate the trust or any of its series;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement for amendments to the new declaration of trust;

- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to amend the fund's management contract, allowing the contract to be modified by the investment manager and the trust management, as permitted by the 1940 Act;
- Allow the trustees to impose other fees in addition to sales charges on investment in a fund, such as deferred sales charges and redemption fees that may be imposed upon redemption of a fund's shares;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to engage in and terminate subadvisory arrangements;
- Removal of shareholder approval requirement to change the domicile of the fund.

Changing the Domicile of a Fund

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on re-incorporations, considering the following factors:

- Regulations of both states;
- Required fundamental policies of both states;
- The increased flexibility available.

Authorizing the Board to Hire and Terminate Subadvisers Without Shareholder Approval

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against proposals authorizing the board to hire or terminate subadvisers without shareholder approval if the investment adviser currently employs only one subadviser.

Distribution Agreements

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on distribution agreement proposals, considering the following factors:

- Fees charged to comparably sized funds with similar objectives;
- The proposed distributor's reputation and past performance;
- The competitiveness of the fund in the industry;
- The terms of the agreement.

Master-Feeder Structure

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote for the establishment of a master-feeder structure.

Mergers

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on merger proposals, considering the following factors:

- Resulting fee structure;
- Performance of both funds;
- Continuity of management personnel;
- Changes in corporate governance and their impact on shareholder rights.

Shareholder Proposals for Mutual Funds

Establish Director Ownership Requirement

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Generally vote against shareholder proposals that mandate a specific minimum amount of stock that directors must own in order to qualify as a director or to remain on the board.

Reimburse Shareholder for Expenses Incurred

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on shareholder proposals to reimburse proxy solicitation expenses. When supporting the dissidents, vote for the reimbursement of the proxy solicitation expenses.

Terminate the Investment Advisor

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote case-by-case on proposals to terminate the investment advisor, considering the following factors:

- Performance of the fund's Net Asset Value (NAV);
- The fund's history of shareholder relations; and
- The performance of other funds under the advisor's management.

8. Foreign Private Issuers Listed on U.S. Exchanges

Sustainability Policy Recommendation: Vote against (or withhold from) non-independent director nominees at companies which fail to meet the following criteria: a majority-independent board, and the presence of an audit, a compensation, and a nomination committee, each of which is entirely composed of independent directors.

Where the design and disclosure levels of equity compensation plans are comparable to those seen at U.S. companies, U.S. compensation policy will be used to evaluate the compensation plan proposals. Otherwise, they, and all other voting items, will be evaluated using the relevant regional or market approach under the Sustainability proxy voting guidelines.

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