This week saw the end of one boycott and the start of another.

In North Carolina, months after the boycott by businesses and the NCAA began over the state’s anti-transgender “bathroom bill,” the Legislature passed a bill removing the restrictions, the governor signed it, and the NCAA removed its ban on holding tournaments in the state.

In New York, as Fox host and commentator Bill O’Reilly settled five cases of sexual harassment, and new charges were made, his show’s advertising supporters finally took notice. Five top-flight auto manufacturers, three health care companies and Allstate Insurance have withdrawn their advertising from his show. More may follow.

Since the start of the national debate over gay marriage specifically and LGBT rights in general, national and international businesses have become vocal about their positions on political issues -- especially in states and shows attracting national news. CEOs from Apple, PayPal, Yelp and Eli Lilly weighed in on Indiana’s 2015 law permitting discrimination against gays. The NFL and the NBA are warning Texas over its own proposed bathroom bill. And, back in 2010, popular rock bands canceled concerts in Arizona over that state’s extreme anti-immigrant legislation.

Of course, it is common for businesses, sports groups and celebrities to defend their interests and those of their customers and fans. But, usually that is done with regard to issues related to their areas of activity. Coal and oil companies lobby about energy legislation, for example. Popular singers lobby for copyright enforcement and anti-pirating legislation.

But, this is different. Companies have realized that their national image is at stake; their brand value can be compromised by being associated with particular positions in debates over social issues. They want to choose their positions proactively, not have perceptions or misperceptions attached to them.

So, companies have taken stands to make their positions clear and protect their brands. When Donald Trump became the Republican nominee, Apple, Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Ford and Motorola ended their sponsorship of the party’s national convention. They did not want to be associated with the inflammatory character of then-candidate Trump’s statements about women, immigrants and minorities,” as Apple CEO Tim Cook put it.

While businesses have become more involved in social debates, their involvement tends to focus on one-off events or pieces of legislation. It is usually short-term, either avoiding a particular event or campaigning against a specific bill. Most find it difficult to sustain actions like a boycott over long periods of time. Sports leagues have taken a prominent role in some of these debates. The decision by the NCAA to stop all tournaments in North Carolina because of its bathroom bill played a key role in rolling back that bill’s restrictions. Once state businesses made clear the economic and social impact the NCAA’s decision would have, the Legislature reluctantly made changes -- enough for the NCAA to rescind its ban.

When Arizona passed a law allowing discrimination against LGBT people in 2014, the NFL threatened to move the upcoming Super Bowl to another state. Gov. Jan Brewer vetoed the bill.

The power of sports leagues in combating state-sponsored discrimination comes in part from their fans, and those fans are families. From young children to doting grandparents, families participate in, root for and follow sports. From pee-wee leagues to high school and college games to professional teams, sports in America comprises a family activity. Leagues want to be seen as inclusive of everyone and exclude no one. It is an essential part of their all-American image. Businesses that manufacture products or provide services simply lack that kind of loyal and across-the-board following.

The only other major, national institution that consists of such a broad-based family culture are churches. Indeed, it almost goes without saying that religions -- both Christian and non-Christian -- are family based. They provide services for families and their members from birth (e.g., baptism) through marriage to death.

Finally, many religious movements, such as evangelical Christianity, and on some issues Catholicism, have joined the conservative wing of the Republican party. Ironically, it is conservative and often religious Republican legislators who have passed the discriminatory social legislation that sports leagues like the NCAA and the NFL have lobbied against. Perhaps the greatest irony is that the two family-oriented institutions -- sports and churches -- share many of the same followers.