



San Antonio Alamo Area Local Legislative Updates



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ALEC: The Voice of Corporate Special Interests In State Legislatures

The secretive American Legislative Exchange Council has helped corporate America propose and even draft legislation for states across the country. ALEC brings together major U.S. corporations and right-wing legislators to craft and vote on "model" bills behind closed doors. It has come under increasing scrutiny for its role in promoting "stand your ground" gun laws, voter suppression bills, union-busting policies and other controversial legislation. Although billing itself as a "nonpartisan public-private partnership," ALEC is actually a national network of state politicians and powerful corporations principally concerned with increasing corporate profits without public scrutiny.

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) was founded in 1973 by Henry Hyde, Lou Barnett, and Paul Weyrich, who helped build a nationwide right-wing political infrastructure following the reelection of Richard Nixon. ALEC's activities reflect its founding, funding, and control by corporate interests. After paying to get a seat at the table, corporations are able to introduce bills at ALEC conferences that are written by corporate law firms, and that are specifically designed to benefit their industries. Many of these ALEC bills are written by corporate lawyers at defense firms like Shook Hardy & Bacon.

ALEC serves as a means for corporations to advise, lobby and sway legislators. By paying hefty dues and sponsorship fees, corporations are able to participate in ALEC ventures, forums and legislative advocacy work, and also underwrite conferences, task forces and meetings with politicians. Corporations use ALEC to formulate, present and promote model legislation to elected officials who are ALEC members, and hold leadership roles in the organization.

ALEC propagates a wide range of "model legislation" that seeks to make it more difficult for people to hold corporations accountable in court; gut the rights and protections of workers and consumers; encumber health care reform; privatize and weaken the public education system; provide business tax cuts and corporate welfare; privatize and cut public services; erode regulations and environmental laws; create unnecessary voter ID requirements; endorse Citizens United; diminish campaign finance reform; and permit greater corporate influence in elections.

According to ALEC, in 2009, of the 826 "model bills" that were introduced in state legislatures, 115 of those bills were enacted into law. As ALEC's former Executive Director wrote in 1995, "I would say that ALEC is a good investment. Nowhere else can you get a return that high."

ALEC works fervently to promote laws that would shield corporations from legal action and allow them to limit the rights of workers. The group's model legislation would roll back laws regarding corporate accountability, workers compensation and on the job protections, collective bargaining and organizing rights, prevailing wage and the minimum wage. ALEC is a main proponent of bills that undermine organized labor by stripping public employees of collective bargaining rights and "right to work" laws. They also push "regulatory flexibility" laws that lead to massive deregulation.

At the bidding of its major donors like Exxon Mobil and Koch Industries, ALEC is behind state-level legislation that would hinder the ability of government to regulate and curb polluters.³⁰ ALEC has previously said that carbon dioxide "is beneficial to plant and human life alike," and promotes climate change denialism.³¹ The group's model legislation assails EPA emissions guidelines and greenhouse gas regulations, destabilizes regional climate initiatives, permits free-reign for energy corporations, and pushes for massive deregulation.

Americans are increasingly recognizing and speaking out against the disproportionate power of corporations in shaping public policy and steering politicians, and ALEC is a prime example of how Corporate America is able to buy even more power and clout in government. ALEC represents an alarming risk to the credibility of the political process and threatens to greatly diminish the confidence and influence ordinary people have in government.

