

## **“ALEC” Is Not Your New Best Friend**

**By Maxine DeSeta and Chuck Wall**

**ALEC** is the most dangerous corporate lobby group most Americans haven't even heard of, to paraphrase how Common Cause describes it. □ Many of the most important political fights -- healthcare, voting rights, environmental protection -- take place on the state level. And the secretive American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), despite denying that it engages in lobbying, gets an outsize say in all of them, thanks to the efficient way that it rams far- right legislation through state houses.

ALEC's members are a coalition of two groups: representatives of some of America's biggest corporations, and conservative state lawmakers who sympathize with corporate goals. They work in close partnership; the corporate sponsors provide funding for the organization and perks for the lawmakers, and in return the lawmakers allow the corporations' lobbyists to write their dream legislation into ALEC “model bills.” The lawmakers then rush those bills through their state houses, turning them into laws that enrich corporations and hurt the rest of us.

ALEC is responsible for some of the most extreme conservative laws passed in the last decade: “Stand Your Ground” gun measures, racially discriminatory strict voter photo ID laws, rollbacks of environmental protection, blocking the Affordable Care Act, and pushing for a new constitutional convention to put all our rights and liberties up for grabs. ALEC is also responsible for supporting vouchers for private and religious schools.

Working through ALEC, corporations spend huge sums to make sure that their wish lists get into the hands of state

lawmakers. They fund lavish meetings and educational seminars for those lawmakers and pay their travel expenses. Yet when Common Cause accused ALEC of being a lobbying group, ALEC denied the charge, pointing out that it is legally a 501(C)(3) "public charity." That status is what enables, for example, a corporation like Exxon to use ALEC to push legislation overturning environmental regulations and then deduct its expenses as "charitable contributions."

Besides Exxon Mobil, major corporate contributors to ALEC include Kraft, Coca Cola, AT&T, GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson & Johnson, Bayer, Altria (tobacco), Reynolds American (tobacco), Salt River Project (energy), State Farm Insurance, United Parcel Service, and Wal-Mart (the world's largest retailer). Other contributors are corporate "foundations" like the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation and trade associations like that of the pharmaceutical industry.

While most lawmakers who get benefits from ALEC are Republicans, some Democrats such as James Clyburn (D-SC) and Steny Hoyer (D-MD) have accepted contributions from this group.

Wikipedia has a complete list of the corporations and politicians who are ALEC supporters. To combat this organization, a boycott of its corporate contributors might be an effective strategy