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Talking Points

Pennsylvania: Sold to the Highest Bidder

The Outsize Influence of Right-wing Conservative Dark Money and ALEC

Many citizens may not be aware that their legislators are sponsoring—and passing—legislation at the behest of corporations, organizations, and well-heeled donors. Recent trends towards privatization comes from the outsized power that these constituencies have in influencing legislation.

This phenomenon plays out in two related ways: "model" legislation written by the American Legislative Exchange Council (commonly referred to as ALEC) and a practice termed preemption. Preemption occurs when laws are passed at the state level—often with ALEC's input—to prevent cities from enacting their own ordinances.

About ALEC

ALEC is controlled by the Koch family, which has a combined net worth of nearly \$100 billion. It has been compared to a dating service for legislators and corporations: it matches up fully-written legislation with legislators willing to sponsor the bills. The vast majority of legislative members are Republicans. ALEC does not reveal its entire membership, either corporate or legislative. Many legislators will not even acknowledge their membership or that they sponsor ALEC's legislation.

The vision of ALEC is to privatize almost all functions of government with the exception of national security. Here is a sampling of what ALEC bills have done:

- Limit consumer rights
- Curtail civil rights
- Weaken the social safety net
- Help protect businesses against lawsuits
- Privatize public entities, such as schools, prisons, roads, water and sewer systems
- Weaken unions and labor laws
- Weaken environmental laws
- Eliminate taxes such as the estate and capital gains taxes
- Require identification to vote and other voter-suppression measures

Pennsylvania is not immune from the influence of ALEC. The complete [paper](https://www.localmajority.org/research-reports/#PaALEC) (<https://www.localmajority.org/research-reports/#PaALEC>) discusses ALEC legislation in Pennsylvania as well as a list of Pennsylvania legislators known to be members of ALEC.

Preemption

Some progressive cities attempt to solve problems not addressed at the state or national level. Some have passed ordinances that would raise the minimum wage, mandate paid sick days, prohibit discrimination by businesses on religious grounds and enact local bans on fracking. In Pennsylvania, the Republican-led state legislature has enacted a preemption law which prevents Philadelphia from raising local minimum wages for all workers. A bill sponsored by Seth Grove (R-HD-196), the Pennsylvania ALEC chair, would prevent localities from passing paid sick leave ordinances and would dismantle the paid sick leave requirements already enacted by Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Conclusion

We should demand that our legislators represent all of us. Do we really want laws—written by outsiders—that are tilted strongly in favor of corporations and against workers? Legislators should represent the interests of their entire community, not just a special few.