

**The 2012 Democratic Party of Virginia State Convention
Urges Legislators and Corporations to
Leave and Stop Funding the American Legislative Exchange Council**

Background

Founded to promote right-wing policies at the state level, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has operated as an aggregator of corporate influence for almost forty years, connecting corporate interests with conservative legislators to impose “model legislation” on the states, and to position corporate profit and power ahead of the public interest.

Recently, ALEC’s stealthy mission to purchase our democracy has been publicly exposed as the unseen hand setting the agenda and literally writing the legislation for Tea Party Republican dominated state legislatures. Who is pulling ALEC’s strings...the Koch Brothers, Exxon Mobil, and others, motivated by an ultra right wing philosophy and pure greed.

Many ALEC-drafted bills pursue standard conservative goals: rolling back civil rights, union-busting, “tort reform”, undermining environmental protection and tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy. A central ALEC goal is to curtail government regulations of businesses, especially ones that protect the environment and/or public health.

Across the country, state legislators sympathetic to ALEC introduce about 1,000 of its bills per year. About 170 of them are enacted into law annually, according to a recently leaked 2011 internal document.

ALEC tries to influence both state and federal legislation. In 2009, ALEC lobbied against specific provisions of the pending federal Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act. In November 2011, a legislator copied an ALEC model so slavishly that she accidentally included an ALEC mission statement in the text of her bill to have Florida request Congress to lower marginal tax rates.

ALEC drove the recent surge in state voter ID laws, which erect new barriers to voting and disproportionately hinder minority, elderly and indigent voters. In the past two years, thirty-four states have introduced bills to restrict voting for some 5 million eligible voters, nine have passed voter ID laws and dozens of other states have gotten rid of early voting or tried to hobble voter registration drives.

ALEC adopted and promoted as one of its “models” the infamous “Stand Your Ground” law. Some 24 states have subsequently adopted “Stand Your Ground” laws, at least ten of which are nearly identical to ALEC’s “model.” Buried in ALEC’s “Stand Your Ground” laws is another measure that confers absolute civil immunity on perpetrators who successfully avoid arrest and prosecution under this law, blatantly tearing away the constitutional rights of crime victims.

Preventing access to the civil courts for everyday Americans is a pervasive theme that runs through ALEC’s entire, corporate-backed agenda. ALEC’s very active Civil Justice Task Force is devoted to preventing injured people from holding wrongdoers accountable in court.

For example, some ALEC bills would completely immunize certain industries for manufacturing unsafe products which they’ve brought to market under lax government rules. History shows that many such products were made safer only after families filed lawsuits against those responsible. Immunizing these industries means that people injured by unsafe products will no longer have any recourse.

ALEC doesn’t just influence laws, it literally writes them, supplying fully drafted bills to state legislators who vote for them as equals with Corporations, then introduce the “model” legislation in their home state, and with the help of ALEC’s national political network lobbies, get it passed. In the Virginia General Assembly, more than 50 bills drawn from ALEC sources have been introduced, many almost word for word.

Unlike other nonprofit groups which draft model laws, ALEC does not operate in a transparent manner. Its model laws are adopted in closed meetings and require approval by a majority vote of its corporate members in order to be adopted, On April 20, 2012, Common Cause filed a whistleblower complaint challenging ALEC's tax-exempt status.

Nobel price-winning economist Paul Krugman wrote: "To a large extent the organization seeks not limited government but privatized government, in which corporations get their profits from taxpayer dollars, dollars steered their way by friendly politicians. In short, ALEC isn't so much about promoting free markets as it is about expanding crony capitalism...Its legislative templates aren't just about generating immediate benefits to the organization's corporate sponsors; they're about creating a political climate that will favor even more corporation-friendly legislation in the future."

As Krugman noted, ALEC is keenly focused on privatization — that is, on turning the provision of public services, from schools to prisons, public transportation to social and welfare services, over to for-profit corporations.

Voters have a right to know whether the representatives they elect to work for the public good are actually writing the laws, or whether the job has been outsourced to big corporate interests whose mission to maximize profit and corporate power may be contrary to the public good.

The full sweep of the ALEC bills and their implications for America's future go to the heart of the health of our democracy and the direction of our country.

Action

The 2012 Democratic Party of Virginia State Convention urges:

1. Legislators and corporations to leave and stop funding ALEC; and
2. Legislators to expose and reverse or amend ALEC-drafted bills already passed in Virginia, and to block future ALEC bills, as appropriate.