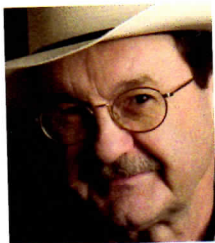


ALEC's War on Local Control



Just days after last November's election, jubilant members and top staffers of the notorious corporate front group ALEC

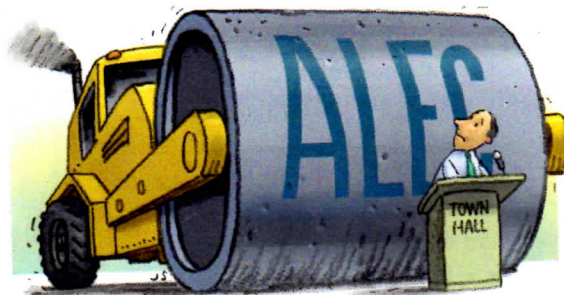
(American Legislative Exchange Council) gathered for a celebratory lunch and planning session at the group's headquarters in Washington, D.C. But rather than looking toward Congress and the newly Republicanized White House, these schemers were drooling over so many rightwing *state* governments.

"There's a sea of red," gushed an ALEC official, asking with delight, "What are we going to do with these new legislatures?"

Corrupt them, of course. ALEC—funded and run by such multinational giants as AT&T, ExxonMobil, the Koch brothers, and Walmart—essentially functions as a hush-hush escort service. Since 1973, it's been hooking up high-dollar corporate customers with on-the-make state lawmakers willing and eager to sponsor special interest bills. In closed-door sessions convened by ALEC, state officials and corporate lobbyists make legislative whoopee, generating "model bills" that participating legislators introduce in their states.

For the last few years, ALEC has provided a major, nationwide burst of energy that's powering state preemption laws. These let corporations and the rightwing fringe outlaw or repeal progressive responses enacted by communities.

ALEC has pushed preemption with a vengeance, rapidly turning it into the corporate-politico cabal's weapon of choice. In 2014, for example, Jobs with Justice, Fight for 15, and other activist groups began winning campaigns in major cities for minimum wage hikes. ALEC responded by holding a how-to forum on stopping such local actions



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and circulating a model bill called the "Living Wage Mandate Preemption Act." Sure enough, half of states have passed a version of it, with Ohio being the latest.

By a large margin, people in the Buckeye State *favor* raising the wage floor, and Cleveland enacted its own increase last year. But a small group of corporate profiteers, including the National Restaurant Association, howled in fury. So, last December, the state's Republican leaders rushed to appease them with a generous Christmas gift: The Ohio legislature overruled the people's will by suddenly hammering a preemption amendment onto a completely unrelated bill. It was a crude political mugging that retroactively negated Cleveland's increase and outlawed increases by any other locality.

Used properly, preemption can be a democracy-enhancing tool for balancing governing powers. But

when perverted and used badly, as is increasingly the norm, it asserts corporate interests over public good. The anti-democracy extremism of these corporate profiteers was bluntly expressed a couple of years ago by ALEC member Howard Stephenson. The Utah state senator announced at one of the organization's private forums, "We need to stomp out local control."

It's hardly news to the great majority of Americans that corporations already have way too much power over us. Letting elites quash our local decisions—by pulling the money strings they've attached to state officials—goes against all that America stands for. Yet the arrogance of these autocratic state officials has no limit—they're grabbing for total domination

over grassroots democracy.

Here's what Texas's Republican governor, Greg Abbott, told a conservative group earlier this year: "I think a broad-based law by the state of Texas that says across the board, the state is going to preempt local regulations, is a superior approach."

People hate such pomposity and political overreach. So let's run right at them. Protecting corporate profits and power by overruling democratically made local policies is a crime that's easily understood and loathed by nearly all Americans. As progressives, let's take hold of this issue and passionately challenge the preemption thugs at all levels of political action. Let's build a broad-based right-and-left, bottom-up coalition to reclaim our democratic rights, and beat the bejeezus out of these sorry bastards. To get involved, visit www.DefendLocal.com. ♦

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