

Do you know who is writing your legislation?

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June 25 — To the Editor:

Do you know who is writing your legislation, the bills that are about to become law in New Hampshire? Do you know why the same bills that are being passed in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Florida, North Carolina and many other states sound so familiar to us in New Hampshire? Why our House of Representatives and Senate are passing the same legislation?

It is because of ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, the voice of corporate special interests in state legislatures. Its chief contributors are Exxon Mobil, the Koch brothers, the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and many others.

Here is how ALEC works: It hosts conferences for right-wing state legislators who possess no staff of their own, including New Hampshire legislators. The group lavishly wines and dines lawmakers while giving them a chance to "collaborate on legislation" previously researched and introduced by the policy groups of its corporate members. For example, Speaker of the House William O'Brien wouldn't sign off on the budget until he returned from a meeting in Washington, D.C., with the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute and the tobacco industry. Then, in the budget meeting, he demanded that the N.H. tobacco tax be cut by 10 cents a pack. This is going to cost New Hampshire at least \$30 million in lost revenues during the next biennium. According to ALEC in 2009, there were 826 "model bills" introduced in state legislatures, 115 of those bills were enacted into law.

ALEC's next conference is in New Orleans in August. It would be interesting to see how many of our N.H. tea party, Free Staters, Libertarians, and right-wing extremists attend this conference. All expenses for the legislators are paid by ALEC's corporate members.

Here are some of the things for which ALEC is responsible: It released a "State Legislators Guide to Repealing Obamacare," presenting several examples of model legislation including bills to partially privatize Medicaid. ALEC'S Health and Human Services task force is led by representatives of PhRMA, the drug industry, and the board includes Bayer. The group's model bill, the "Freedom of Choice in Health Care Act," has been introduced in 44 states. Their sources of ideas come from pro-corporate groups such as the previously mentioned Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the James Madison Foundation, the same groups Speaker O'Brien saw on his recent trip. All are intent on crafting legislation that destroys our democracy.

The N.H. House recently passed a Voter ID bill and a bill to the repeal the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. Both bills are directly attributable to ALEC. Using false allegations of "voter fraud," right-wing politicians are pursuing policies that disenfranchise Democratic leaning voters, including students, the elderly and the poor, who are unlikely to have drivers' licenses and other forms of photo ID. By undermining the right to vote, ALEC's model "Voter ID Act" gives the advantage to Republicans. In New Hampshire, it is now easier to buy a gun than it is to vote. The ALEC Public Safety and Elections task force is co-chaired by Sean Parnell of the Center for Competitive Politics, one of the most pro-corporate election groups promoting total destruction of campaign finance reform.

In summary, ALEC does not serve the public interest in New Hampshire. It serves corporate America. It pays for access to legislators in every state, who then introduce to their Houses and Senates bills that gut environmental laws, create a regressive tax system, eliminate workers' rights, undermine universal and affordable health care, privatize public education, and try to eliminate voting rights.

Because you were mad at the federal government, you took your anger out on your state lawmakers. Now you know who you really voted for in the 2010 election. In case it crossed your mind how it was possible for freshman legislators to write such sophisticated and damaging bills, you now know that it is ALEC and its corporate lobbyists who are really writing your legislation. In the "Live Free or Die" state, is this what you want? Yes, elections do have consequences! Voter, beware!

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