

# ALEC Revealed

by Lisa Graves

In April 2011, some of the biggest corporations in the US met behind closed doors in Cincinnati about their wish lists for changing state laws. This exchange was part of a series of corporate meetings nurtured and fueled by the Koch Industries family fortune and other corporate funding.

At an extravagant hotel gilded just before the Great Depression, corporate executives from the tobacco giant R.J. Reynolds, State Farm Insurance, and other corporations were joined by their "task force" co-chairs — all Republican state legislators — to approve "model" legislation. They jointly head task forces of what is called the "American Legislative Exchange Council" (ALEC).

At these ALEC gatherings corporate representatives and state legislators vote on draft bills to rewrite numerous state laws. In fact, corporations vote as equals with elected politicians on these bills. These task forces target legal rules that reach into almost every area of American life: worker and consumer rights; education; the rights of Americans injured or killed by corporations; taxes; health care; immigration; and the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink.

The bills that ALEC corporate leaders, company representatives and politicians voted on this past spring then headed to a luxury hotel in New Orleans' French Quarter for ALEC's national retreat. In New Orleans, Koch Industries — through its chief lobbyist — and lobbyists of other global companies held a "joint board meeting" where a rookery of Republican legislators on ALEC's public board ratified the model bills. Before the bills are publicly introduced in state legislatures by ALEC politicians or alumni in the governor's offices, they are be cleansed of any reference to the secret corporate voting or who really wrote them.

By checking out the website [ALECExposed.org](http://ALECExposed.org), the public can now pierce through some of the subterfuge about ALEC. You can see beyond the names of the bills to what the bills really do. Seeing the text of the bills helps reveal the actual language of legal changes ALEC corporations desire. There is also helpful analysis to decode what the bills really mean. In addition you will see the names of corporations that lead or have helped lead ALEC's agenda.

Many of the bills have obvious financial benefits for corporations but little or no direct benefit to the constituents that a particular legislator was elected to represent. Still, it may be tempting to dismiss ALEC as merely institutionalizing business as usual for lobbyists, except that ALEC's tax-free donations require that ALEC not spend a substantial amount of time on lobbying to change

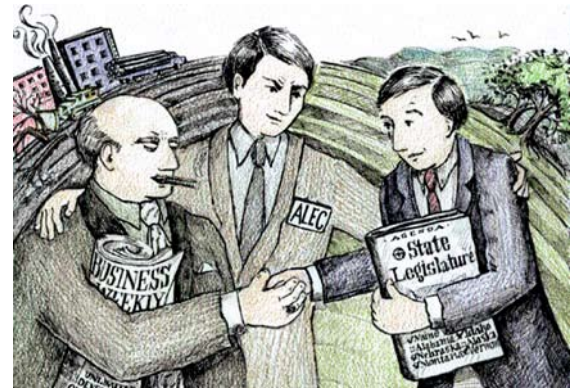
the law. Meanwhile, ALEC has publicly boasted of its "unparalleled" success in terms of the number of model bills introduced and made binding on the rest of us. ALEC says it has created a "unique" partnership between corporations and politicians. And it has.

It is a worrisome marriage of corporations and politicians, which seems to normalize a kind of corruption of the legislative process — of the democratic process — in a nation of free people where the government is supposed to be of, by, and for the people, not the corporations.

The full sweep of the bills and their implications for America's future, the corporate voting, and the extent of the corporate subsidy of ALEC's legislation laundering all raise substantial questions. These questions should concern all Americans. They go to the heart of the health of our democracy, the direction of our country, the soul of our nation. When politicians — no matter their party — systematically put the profits of global corporations above the real needs of the people who elected them, something has gone very awry. It is a form of corruption that must be resisted.

As President Teddy Roosevelt observed in response to the corporate money of robber barons corrupting the democratic process a century ago, "The true friend of property, the true conservative, is he who insists that property shall be the servant and not the master of the commonwealth. ... The citizens of the United States must effectively control the mighty commercial forces which they have called into being." And, so we must.

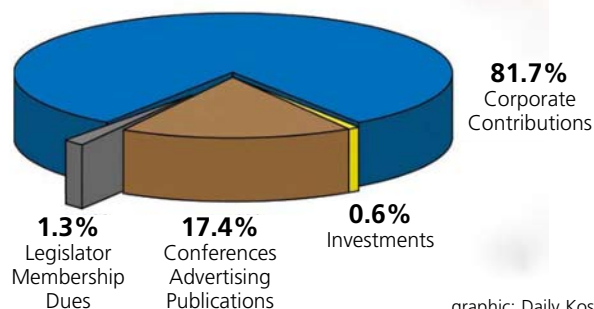
Lisa Graves is the Executive Director of the Center for Media and Democracy and a major driver behind the website [ALECExposed.org](http://ALECExposed.org)



graphic: Daily Kos

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**ALEC Revenue**  
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graphic: Daily Kos