

2024 Year in Review

DEMOCRACY

The 2024 election cycle underscored the urgency of protecting democratic norms and ensuring the integrity of elections in the face of persistent threats. Over the past year, Public Citizen's Democracy Program took bold and decisive action to address these challenges, delivering impactful results in voter engagement, election security, and campaign finance reform. From defending election officials and countering misinformation to empowering youth voters and advocating for systemic reforms, our efforts reinforced the foundation of a fair and functional democracy.

With the proliferation of AI-generated deepfakes and disinformation campaigns, the risk of voter manipulation reached unprecedented levels in 2024. Our team led efforts to educate the public and policymakers about the dangers of AI in elections, advocating for robust regulations to curb the spread of misleading content. We supported state legislatures across the country in passing legislation to prohibit the use of deepfakes in campaign communications, providing model bill language, recruiting legislators to introduce legislation, giving testimony in support of the legislation, and working with state-based organizations and our sponsors in the legislature to mobilize support.

We also tracked the status of these bills on a tracker that received substantial media attention. A remarkable 20 states have now passed such legislation and many more are in the works for the coming year. We also worked on this issue at the federal level, unfortunately with less success. We petitioned the Federal Election Commission to adopt a rule prohibiting political deepfakes and mobilized massive support. After delaying for more than a year, the agency ultimately refused to act. We supported regulatory action at the Federal Communications Commission and in Congress, as well, but neither of those bore fruit before the 2024 election.

Another significant focus of our work in 2024 was safeguarding elections. Election officials, often the target of harassment and intimidation, faced unprecedented challenges in 2024. Our program provided critical support to these officials, pushing for stronger protections and condemning efforts to undermine their work. We collaborated with a broad coalition of advocacy groups to ensure that election administrators could perform their duties without fear of retaliation – a necessary step in preserving public trust in the electoral process. We passed legislation at the state level to protect election officials and provided a tracker so the media and others could track our progress. As of this writing, 20 states have adopted laws to protect election workers since 2022.

Another area of concern was the growing reliance on internet voting systems, which remain highly vulnerable to hacking and other security breaches. We worked tirelessly to highlight these vulnerabilities, emphasizing the risks to election integrity posed by poorly secured online voting platforms. We successfully advocated against the expansion of internet voting in several states, reinforcing the need for secure and verifiable voting methods.

Our research and public awareness campaigns played a pivotal role in ensuring that policymakers did not rush to pass legislation that would endanger the security of our elections.

Campaign finance reform remained a cornerstone of our work in 2024. The recent presidential election cycle shattered records for political spending, with billions of dollars flooding campaigns from undisclosed sources. We worked to expose the influence of dark money in politics, highlighting the ways unregulated contributions distort the democratic process. Through investigative reports, media campaigns, and advo-

cacy at the state and federal levels, we called for stricter disclosure requirements and championed policies to limit the outsized influence of wealthy donors and corporations. Among these efforts, we were able to help ensure funding and implementation of New York's first year of its small-donor matching program in the 2024 election.

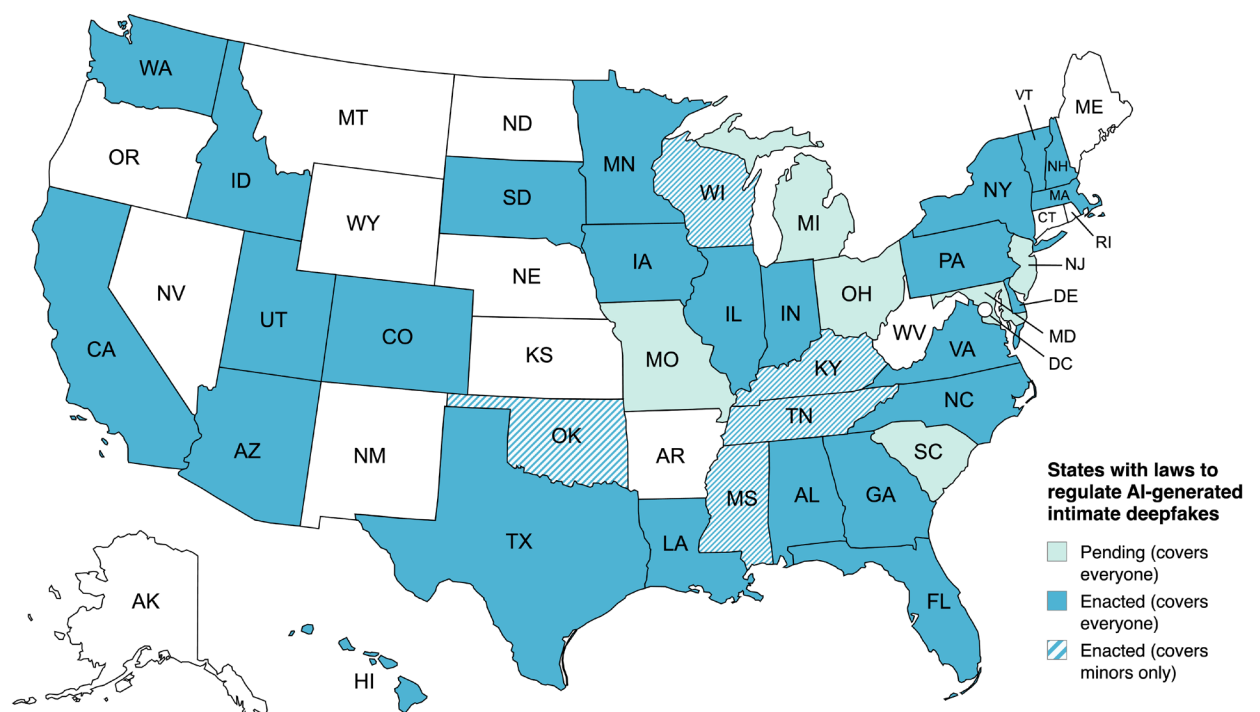
A through line in all our work has been our advocacy for broader structural reforms to strengthen democracy. We continued to press for the passage of comprehensive legislation, such as the Freedom to Vote Act and the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which aim to expand voting access, combat gerrymandering, and restore critical protections against racial discrimination in voting. Although these bills faced significant hurdles in Congress, our persistent advocacy helped keep these issues at the forefront of the national conversation.

Recognizing the critical role of young voters in shaping the democratic process, we mobilized a network of 55 students across nine swing states—Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin – in the lead up to the 2024 election. These student leaders engaged directly with their peers through classroom presentations, voter registration drives, and educational workshops, successfully registering thousands of new voters and educating students about the risks of Project 2025. This grassroots effort was particularly effective in increasing participation among first-time voters, a group historically underrepresented in elections.

Public Citizen was also central to preparing for potential post-election threats to the counting and implementation of the results of the 2024 election. We played a key organizing role in building a network of more than 200 organizations with leaders prepared nationwide to mobilize nationwide should there be substantial efforts to interfere in the results.

After the election, with MoveOn, Working Families Party, Indivisible and hundreds of partners we convened a movement Zoom meeting, “Making Meaning of the Moment” that was attended by more than 100,000 people, and lasted for over four hours. It led to the planning of more than 600 “We Are Worth Fighting For” community gatherings, where activists gathered in living rooms, union halls, faith centers, and other community spaces to prepare for the struggles ahead.

The successes of 2024 were the result of a collaborative, multi-pronged approach. Our team leveraged research, public education, and strategic partnerships to amplify our impact. We worked closely with grassroots organizations, academic institutions, and civic leaders to align our efforts and ensure a coordinated response to the challenges facing democracy. By building coalitions and fostering dialogue across diverse communities, Public Citizen helped lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable electoral process and is well positioned to take on the challenges that lie ahead under a Trump administration. ■



With Donald Trump and his cronies on the verge of retaking the White House, Public Citizen Litigation Group is preparing for legal battles to disrupt the inevitable onslaught of destructive policies that undermine the wellbeing of the American people. But we're taking a moment to reflect on our work in 2024 – a year full of variety, important legal issues, and success. Here is a sample of our work throughout the year.

In February 2024, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of our client in a case concerning the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA). The FCRA allows consumers to sue creditors for failing to correct inaccurate credit information brought to its attention by the consumer. The federal government, however, although it is the nation's largest creditor, has long attempted to avoid accountability under the FCRA by claiming that it is immune from suit under that law. Representing a consumer who had sued a government agency for failing to correct inaccurate information that it provided to credit reporting agencies, Public Citizen's Nandan Joshi argued – successfully – that the FCRA waives the government's immunity and allows consumers to sue federal agencies for FCRA violations.

In May 2024, we filed a discrimination case against American Airlines on behalf of three Black men. American Airlines had forced our clients, along with five other Black men, to deboard a plane because a flight attendant complained about an unidentified passenger's body odor. Our clients were not responsible for any odor, were not seated together, and did not know each other. It appeared that they were chosen for removal solely because of the color of their skin. Shortly after we filed suit, the parties agreed to engage in settlement discussions and, later, reached an agreement to resolve the lawsuit. American fired the flight attendants responsible for our clients' removal and the settlement includes a commitment by American to take action to prevent discrimination in the future, among other things.

In September 2024, Public Citizen attorney Nick Sansone argued before a panel of 11 Ninth Circuit judges on an important consumer issue. The case started when a California consumer filed a lawsuit in California against Shopify, a company that operated a web-based sales platform through which he made an online purchase. The lawsuit alleges that Shopify violated California's data privacy laws by surreptitiously tracking his online conduct and selling information about his online activities to third parties. The trial court dismissed the lawsuit, holding that a California court had no jurisdiction because Shopify did not target its activities at California in particular. After a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit affirmed on appeal, Public Citizen petitioned the Ninth

Circuit to review the panel's decision en banc. As we explained to the court, the panel's decision would have the perverse effect of shielding large companies that engage in online activities nationwide from jurisdiction in California on claims arising from the portion of their conduct that they direct into California. We now await the Ninth Circuit's en banc decision, which will have substantial consequences for consumers' ability to hold companies accountable for their violations of state data-privacy laws.

In November 2024, Public Citizen attorney Lauren Bateman had her first Supreme Court argument – the 67th for the Litigation Group. Bateman argued on behalf of three workers who sued their employer under the Fair Labor Standards Act for unpaid overtime. The workers prevailed in the district court, where the judge found that the employer had not shown clear and convincing evidence that the three were exempt from the protections of the Act. The employer eventually sought review in the Supreme Court, where Public Citizen stepped in as co-counsel for the employees. The issue in the Supreme Court is whether an employer who argues that an employee is not covered by the minimum wage and overtime protections of the Act must prove its defense by meeting a "clear and convincing evidence" standard or a lesser a "preponderance of the evidence" standard. At the argument on Election Day, Bateman explained why the higher standard should apply.

Also in November 2024, we prevailed in the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in another FCRA case. In this one, the plaintiffs sued an entity called the Higher Education Loan Authority of the State of Missouri (MOHELA) for failing to correct errors on his credit report. MOHELA responded by moving to dismiss, arguing that it was an arm of the state of Missouri and, therefore, immune from suit. The district court agreed and dismissed the case. Representing the consumer on appeal, Public Citizen argued that MOHELA had sufficient financial and operational independence from the state to prevent it from being part of the state for immunity purposes. In the first appellate decision in the country to address MOHELA's status, the Tenth Circuit agreed with our argument and held that MOHELA is not immune from liability to consumers.

Now in its 35th year, our Supreme Court Assistance Project assists attorneys with public-interest cases in the Supreme Court, primarily by helping them to keep their cases out of the Court when they won in the court of appeals. In 2024, we helped lawyers opposing petitions for certiorari in cases concerning certification of class actions, fair wages, forced arbitration, and other issues involving access to the civil justice system. Our advice and assistance helped to preserve the public-interest victory attained in the courts of appeals in approximately 25 cases. ■



Photo of members of the Supreme Court courtesy of Wikimedia.

GOVERNMENT & FINANCIAL REFORM

Public Citizen’s uncommonly broad portfolio positions us to lead and innovate to win a broad range of consumer and worker protections. In 2024, we stepped up our longstanding work on forced arbitration, heat stress and executive pay reform, while also driving important initiatives relating to the Supreme Court’s harmful regulatory decisions, the risks of artificial intelligence, Direct File, and executive pay reform.

- Public Citizen helped lead the Coalition for Free and Fair Filing to advocate in support of Direct File, the free IRS e-filing tool. This work included launching a grassroots state push to expand Direct File, which helped spur states to join. Now at least 24 states will be participating in Direct File in 2025 – a major win for tax filers across the country.
- In collaboration with our allies in the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards, Public Citizen helped add 51 new cosponsors to the Stop Corporate Capture Act (H.R. 1507), bringing the total number of cosponsors to 82. The Stop Corporate Capture Act is a comprehensive blueprint for modernizing, improving, and strengthening the regulatory system to protect the public more effectively. It would codify *Chevron* deference into law, the principle that courts should defer to agency expertise.
- Public Citizen educated reporters, our coalition partners, and our allies on Capitol Hill about the impacts of various U.S. Supreme Court decisions on our regulatory system. We published a report highlighting the corporate special interests behind the effort to overturn *Chevron* deference. And we organized a webinar on how to draft legislation in the wake of the Supreme Court’s decisions.
- Public Citizen continued our fight for regulators to complete banker pay reform under Section 956 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. We organized a webinar headlined by Jaime Lizarraga, commissioner at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), to highlight the importance of banker pay reform. On May 6, four agencies published a new rule.
- After years of organizing and leading the advocacy to get the U.S.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue a workplace heat standard, OSHA finally proposed a rule that included almost every element that Public Citizen advocated for. We continue to play a leadership role in organizing comments and support from allies. In addition, we published a report on heat stress protections at the state level.

- Public Citizen continued the fight to end forced arbitration by highlighting sectors of consumers harmed by the practice. We published a report on the harms that forced arbitration inflicts on communities of color and lobbied the SEC for a rule prohibiting the inclusion of forced arbitration clauses in investment advisor and broker-dealer contracts. In addition, we published a report highlighting the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s lopsided legal advocacy in favor of big business and how the Chamber is pushing to restrict access to the courts and shield corporations from liability.
- We continued to advocate for accountability for Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, and collaborated with U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.) on an opinion piece to that effect.
- Public Citizen published a report with a comprehensive look at the lobbying activity of those looking to influence artificial intelligence policy. In addition, we pushed for stronger guardrails for artificial intelligence in healthcare. We met with the leaders of and provided recommendations to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ artificial intelligence taskforce.
- We published a report on how drug manufacturers J&J, Merck, and BMS all lobbied against policies and regulations that would help improve patient access – contrary to their public stances.
- Public Citizen has for years led a push to pass Medicare for All resolutions at the local level. This year, resolutions passed in Sonoma County, Calif., Amherst, Mass., both Baltimore and Anne Arundel County, Md., both Cincinnati and Akron, Ohio, Alachua County, Fla., and Alexandria, Va. We’re over 100 resolutions nationwide, and fast counting! ■



Photo of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce courtesy of Wikimedia.

CONSUMER HEALTH & SAFETY

Advancing Equity in Drug Pricing and Global Access to Medicines

Pharmaceutical profiteering doesn't just drive up costs — it deepens inequities, delays innovation, and costs lives. In 2024, Public Citizen's Access to Medicines team took bold steps to confront this global crisis. Through a number of impactful reports, which generated significant media coverage in news outlets including the *Associated Press*, *Bloomberg*, *British Medical Journal*, and the *New York Times*, we exposed how entrenched corporate practices and policy failures obstruct access to lifesaving medicines and vaccines, both in the U.S. and worldwide. From dissecting the financial barriers blocking equitable mpox vaccine distribution to highlighting egregious patent abuses that stifle competition and inflate prices, our findings revealed a stark truth: the pharmaceutical industry's dominance is not an unchangeable reality but a policy-driven choice. With targeted reforms and sustained advocacy, we can dismantle these systems and prioritize public health over private profit.

Making Progress, Much More to Go Lowering Drug Cost Caps

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has begun reshaping the U.S. drug pricing landscape. In November, Public Citizen released "Impacts of Expanding and Lowering a Cap on Out-of-Pocket Drug Costs," which analyzes the transformative potential of capping prescription drug costs under Medicare and private insurance.

Starting in 2025, the IRA will lower the annual out-of-pocket cap for Medicare Part D from \$3,500 to \$2,000, saving nearly 19 million seniors \$400 each. Our report shows that expanding similar caps to private insurance could save millions more: a \$2,000 cap could save 900,000 privately insured patients \$2.78 billion annually, while a \$200 cap could save 21 million patients \$10.55 billion. Expanding and low-

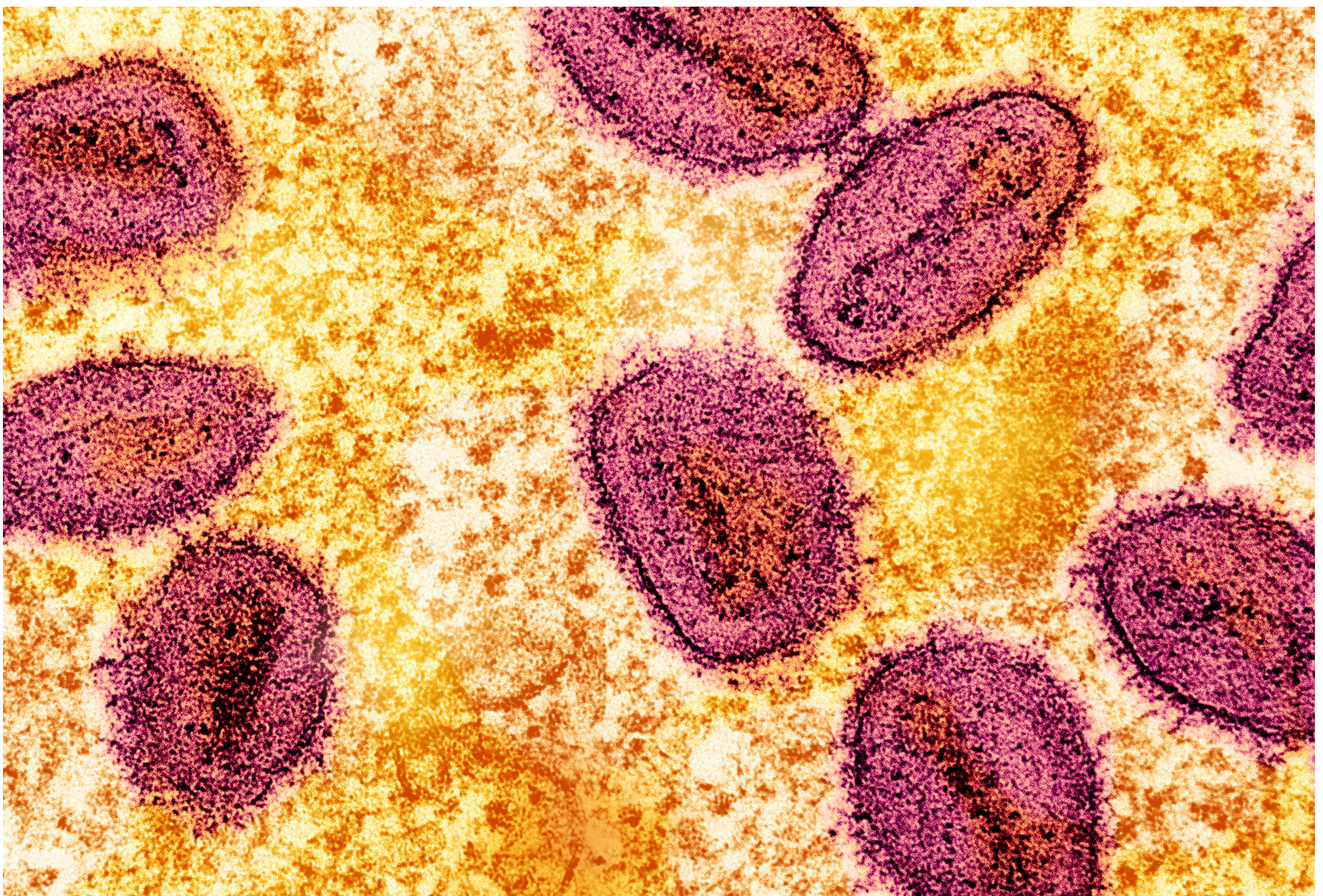
ering cost caps would provide critical relief for American families and ensure broader access to affordable medications.

Yet, patent abuses threaten to erode the IRA's promise. Our report released in December, "Using the Inflation Reduction Act to Rein in Patenting and Evergreening Abuses," examines how pharmaceutical companies exploit patent laws to inflate prices and maintain monopolies. Nine of the 10 drugs selected for Medicare price negotiations demonstrate egregious patent abuses, including "evergreening" tactics, or securing patents for trivial modifications to extend exclusivity.

These tactics have cost Medicare \$4.9 to \$5.4 billion in lost savings over the past decade by delaying the entry of generics and biosimilars. Public Citizen urges the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to account for these abuses when negotiating maximum fair prices and calls for stronger legislative action, including patent reforms, to dismantle monopoly protections that harm patients and taxpayers alike.

Big Pharma's sky high prices go to self-enrichment, not innovation, we showed. Our January report, "Profits Over Patients," dismantles the industry's claim that high drug prices are essential for innovation. Analyzing the first 10 drugs selected for Medicare price negotiations, we found that manufacturers spent \$10 billion more on stock buybacks and dividends than on research and development in 2022.

Similarly, Maryland's costliest drug manufacturers funneled \$9 billion more into self-enriching activities than into creating new medicines. Executive compensation exceeded half a billion dollars, tied largely to inflated stock prices driven by buybacks. These findings reveal a model that rewards shareholders and executives at the expense of public health. Public Citizen's report bolsters the case for reforms like Medicare drug price negotiation and Prescription Drug Affordability Boards, which can redirect resources toward life-saving innovation.



Colorized transmission electron micrograph of mpox virus particles (pink) found within an infected cell (yellow), cultured in the laboratory. Image courtesy of the NIAID Integrated Research Facility / Flickr.

Mpox Vaccine Access

As the mpox outbreak continued to rage across East, West, and Central Africa, we published a report in October on mpox vaccine access. Alarming, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, Sweden, Thailand, the U.K., and the U.S., have all recently reported the first cases of a more contagious and deadly variant, underscoring the growing global threat.

Despite the urgency, equitable access to the MVA-BN vaccine for mpox remains blocked. Developed with over \$2.3 billion in U.S. taxpayer funding, the vaccine is controlled by Bavarian Nordic, whose monopoly forces low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to pay up to 2.5 times more than the U.S. for doses. Secretive pricing and a refusal to share technology have delayed the global response, leaving health systems in affected regions struggling to contain the crisis.

Public Citizen's report calls for action: Bavarian Nordic must adopt cost-plus pricing, license its technology to qualified LMIC manufacturers, and publicly disclose production costs and pricing structures. Millions of lives hinge on moving away from profit-driven decision-making toward policies rooted in global health justice.

The challenges of mpox are not isolated. In October, we also released "Industry Lobbyists and Global Health: Blocking Equity in Pandemic Response," which exposed how pharmaceutical companies derailed efforts to expand access to COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. Between 2021 and mid-2024, more than 500 lobbyists – nearly 90% funded by pharmaceutical interests – worked in the U.S. to fight the TRIPS waiver,

a proposal debated within the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva to temporarily lift intellectual property barriers to lifesaving medical tools.

The lobbying didn't stop with the limited waiver for vaccines adopted in 2022. Pharmaceutical groups also targeted World Health Organization (WHO) negotiations for a Pandemic Agreement, deploying dozens of lobbyists to protect their market dominance. Our findings highlight how corporate influence continues to undermine global health equity and emphasize the urgent need for reforms to ensure that pandemic responses are driven by public need, not private greed.

From global health inequities to domestic reforms, Public Citizen's 2024 reports highlight a common theme: the pharmaceutical industry's domination is not inevitable – it's a choice shaped by policies that prioritize profits over public health. These findings prove that systemic change is not only necessary but achievable. As Peter Maybarduk, director of Public Citizen's Access to Medicines program, commented, "No corporation's monopoly should stand between people and the medicines they require. We know how to fix this; the only thing missing is political will."

The fight for global health equity and equitable access to affordable and quality medicines and other essential health tools is monumental. With bold advocacy and decisive action, we can build a future where equitable access to medicines, vaccines and other health tools is a right, not a privilege. ■

HEALTH RESEARCH GROUP

In 2024, Public Citizen's Health Research Group (HRG) remained focused on its efforts to ensure the safety and effectiveness of drugs, devices, and medical products and closely monitoring the work of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). We testified frequently before FDA advisory committees about drugs being considered for approval. We commented on important issues for the agency, such as the regulatory requirements for generative artificial intelligence-enabled devices and the FDA's use of and processes for advisory committees. We also advocated for stronger health safeguards for workers, including the prompt adoption of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) proposed heat rule, and a national single-payer health care system. We also raised concerns about Medicare Advantage plans, which have increased Medicare costs by hundreds of billion dollars since 2007.

As the year closed, the dominant issue was the reelection of former president Donald Trump and his nominees for critical health-related positions in his administration. We researched and published findings on several nominees' potentially disqualifying issues, including financial conflicts of interest, lack of administrative experience and relevant expertise, and dangerous views on vaccines and other topics. Although Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Dr. Mehmet Oz are undoubtedly horrible choices to lead the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, respectively, the unfortunate reality, as this issue goes to print, is that both may be confirmed.

Here are some of the highlights of the year:

- In May, we issued the fifth in a series of reports on federal and state settlements and legal judgments against pharmaceutical manufacturers. Over a 31-year-period, we identified 482 cases, resulting in \$62.3 billion in penalties for pharmaceutical companies. That number may sound high, but it represents a very small percentage of industry net income during this time period – meaning that even when pharmaceutical companies are found in court to have harmed people, they are still profiting off of doing so. More than 80% of the settlements pertained to the opioid crisis.
- In June, we testified before the FDA, urging the agency to maintain or perhaps even expand voting questions as a central feature of advisory committee meetings and to reduce to zero, with rare exceptions, the number of voting members of committees who are granted waivers to participate despite having an otherwise disqualifying financial interest.
- In July, the FDA granted full approval to donanemab for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease – a decision we strongly opposed. We issued a statement noting that although expected, the FDA's decision "fails patients with Alzheimer's disease and their families. The evidence that donanemab slows the speed of progression of Alzheimer's disease as compared to placebo is very modest." As was the case for other drugs of this class, a boxed warning about brain swelling and bleeding risks was added to the prescribing information, underscoring the substantial safety concerns.
- In October, we issued a new report on state medical boards' disciplinary actions of physicians. The report showed a decline in state rates of serious disciplinary actions in the 2021-2023 period as compared to the 2019-2021 period, which we had covered in a previous report. Unlike previous reports, the 2021-2023 report included both allopathic and osteopathic state medical boards in its rankings. The report found that the state boards most effectively disciplining doctor misconduct were, in order: Ohio, the Michigan osteopathic board, Wisconsin, and North Dakota. The state medical boards most lax on doctor discipline were Indiana, Georgia, the Pennsylvania allopathic board, Delaware, and South Carolina. The report again urged federal legislation to require state medical boards to use the data in the National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB) when licensing all physicians and renewing their licenses, and for opening the NPDB to the public.
- In 2023, the FDA withdrew approval of hydroxyprogesterone caproate (Makena), an ineffective drug for the prevention of preterm birth. In October 2024, we urged an advisory committee to fully support the agency's recommendation to add hydroxyprogesterone caproate to the list of drugs that were withdrawn or removed from the market for reasons of safety and effectiveness and therefore may not be compounded under the exemptions provided in FDA regulations. The committee unanimously supported the agency's recommendation.
- In November, we testified about Generative AI-enabled medical devices, focusing on the need for robust FDA oversight and regulation. Emphasizing the influences of big money and greed in our health care system, we expressed concern that if companies cut corners in rapidly developing and implementing Generative AI devices, patients will be at risk for harm.

CLIMATE & ENERGY

In a year defined by hurricanes, wildfires, and extreme weather, Public Citizen's Climate and Energy teams doubled down on arguably the most critical fight of our generation: the fight against the climate crisis. These efforts weren't just about policy in the abstract – they were about protecting communities, holding corporations accountable, and ensuring a sustainable future. Here's how we made an impact in 2024.

The Climate-driven Insurance Crisis

This past year saw numerous hurricanes, wildfires, severe storms and floods, wreaking havoc on people's lives across the country, leading to a crisis in insurance markets which already showed signs of fragility due to previous losses caused by climate change. In early 2024, the problem became so widespread that the U.S. Senate Budget Committee opened up multiple investigations into the insurance industry. Committee hearings examined the potential for disasters driven by climate change to upend the availability and affordability of insurance.

Insurance companies have passed on those costs to consumers in the form of higher premiums and deductibles or dropped policyholders entirely. In North Carolina, one insurer dropped 10,000 policies in 2023, and the industry proposed a 42% premium increase. In Florida, Farmers Insurance Co. alone dropped 100,000 policies, and home insurance premiums in Florida increased by an average of 35%.

For all of the worry about the costs of insurance, U.S. financial regulators have struggled to keep up with the impacts of climate change. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass), and two California Democrats – Adam Schiff and Mike Levin – recently led a letter to the Federal Insurance Office and National Association of Insurance Commissioners, the convening body for regulators, seeking answers on how regulators will evaluate climate impacts on insurance markets.

The lack of data is a problem for regulators, consumer advocates, and media, but also other actors in the financial system. Because climate risks are concentrated in certain regions, rising costs and falling availability could lead to a foreclosure crisis, which could in turn threaten the tax base needed to fund basic mitigation and increase risks for community and regional banks.

While insurers are dropping homeowners quickly, they're sticking with their oil, gas, and coal clients. An analysis of insurers' investments from California, Washington, and Oregon shows insurers' investments in fossil fuels remain high, while investments in renewables remain low, and these companies could face billions of dollars in losses if they stay on the current course of investments, and could harm our economy in the process.

In 2024, Public Citizen's Climate Program was at the forefront of responding to this crisis – pushing for consumer protections, for regulators to phase out insurance companies' coverage for and investments in fossil fuels, pushing for federal and state governments to collect and publish data on how the climate crisis is impacting insurance availability and affordability, and forming a network of more than 80 local and national groups that are working together to develop widely agreed upon solutions to the crisis that we will then campaign to enact.

Using Criminal Law to Hold the Fossil Fuel Industry Accountable

In an analysis published in 2024 in the *Harvard Environmental Law Review*, David Arkush, director of Public Citizen's Climate Program and Donald Braman, law professor at George Washington University, argued that fossil fuel companies could face homicide charges for deaths caused by climate change-driven disasters. The paper examined Big Oil's decades-long knowledge of the catastrophic risks posed by fossil fuel emissions and their disinformation campaigns to delay climate action. The coverage of Public Citizen's efforts to hold the fossil fuel industry accountable, earned recognition from the independent media publication *Grist*, which named "Climate Homicide" – the theory proposing that oil companies could be guilty of actual homicide for climate-related deaths – to its list of the most important ideas of 2024.

Fighting Frackers and Gas Exporters

At the start of 2024, Public Citizen and its allies won a surprising victory when the U.S. Department of Energy announced it would pause approv-

als of most LNG exports to reassess their impacts on consumers, communities and the climate. The Biden administration decision unleashed a furious backlash from polluting industries who want to fast-track a massive buildout of LNG export infrastructure without regard for the impacts.

Over the summer, West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a longtime fossil fuel ally, unveiled a sweeping energy permitting deregulation bill to speed the approval of LNG terminals and transmission lines for renewable energy. The bill garnered support from oil-friendly Republicans and some centrist, corporate-allied Democrats alike. Public Citizen worked for months to defeat the Manchin bill, written with another friend of dirty energy, Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming.

The Energy Team's work focused on the economic harms, especially to low-income consumers, arguing that LNG exports have made U.S. methane gas consumers vulnerable to global market volatility and price shocks, while oil and gas companies have reaped record-breaking windfall profits at the expense of U.S. households and businesses. Meanwhile, we found that the price households pay for methane gas has increased by 52% since 2016, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, and we calculated that gas prices in Pennsylvania alone could increase by \$16 billion by 2050 if eight gas export permits are approved.

At the end of the year, the Biden administration released a report largely agreeing with criticisms of gas exports that have long been raised by Public Citizen, but the incoming Trump administration appeared likely to ignore or dispute these findings and approve LNG permits.

EVs and the Future of Transportation

Public Citizen continued to spearhead a series of high-profile campaigns to advance clean vehicle policies, expose automaker misconduct and pressure the Biden administration to adopt stronger environmental standards.

Over the course of 2024, Public Citizen staged actions at annual auto shows in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and New York, spotlighting Toyota's failures to build clean vehicles and highlighting the company's greenwashing and use of forced labor in supply chains. We also filed a detailed complaint with the Federal Trade Commission and several state attorneys general about Toyota's misleading marketing and media campaigns. The complaint alleges that Toyota is intentionally working to confuse the public by blurring the lines between fully electric vehicles (EVs) and its hybrid vehicles, which run primarily on fossil fuels. Toyota is a leader on yesterday's hybrids and an extreme laggard on increasingly popular EVs, the complaint alleges, so the company is trying to fool consumers into thinking its hybrids are a type of EV.

In addition to Public Citizen's work to convince auto manufacturers to build and sell more EVs, this year saw continued work to convince auto manufacturers to adopt cleaner supply chains, and to specifically seek out clean steel, made without burning fossil fuels.

Public Citizen has pushed steelmakers to ditch the dirty blast furnaces of the past and commit to fossil-free steel today for the health and future of our climate, communities, and steel producers' viability and own financial health. Steelmakers should invest in "green steel," which is produced from iron ore without coal or other fossil fuels. ■



Activists gather outside of AIG's New York headquarters with frontline leaders in 2024 to demand the insurance giant meet with communities. Photo courtesy of Erik McGregor.

CORRUPTION, CRYPTO, AND THE PERILS OF AI

From billionaires leveraging political donations to shield their empires from scrutiny to the unchecked spread of artificial intelligence misinformation, the year underscored a dangerous trend: powerful corporations and their allies are rewriting the rules to serve their own interests, often at the expense of the public good. Public Citizen spotlighted these dynamics in a series of reports revealing a troubling pattern of privatized power undermining public accountability.

Elon Musk's Self-Serving Election Influence: Tilting the 2024 Election to Escape Corporate Accountability

This report showed that at least three of Elon Musk's businesses – Tesla, X (formerly known as Twitter), and SpaceX – were under scrutiny for alleged misconduct by at least nine federal agencies while Musk was spending more than \$200 million to help Trump's campaign for the presidency.

Public Citizen's research showed that the last time Trump took office, corporate enforcement plummeted across agencies where Trump's appointees took over. Federal investigations into corporate misconduct were dropped and in multiple instances, corporate penalties were reduced.

Now Musk's campaign for government "efficiency" may become a self-serving campaign of cutting agencies tasked with thwarting the misconduct of Musk's corporations.

Big Crypto, Big Spending: Crypto Corporations Spend an Unprecedented \$119 Million Influencing Elections and Cryptobros United: Crypto Super PACs Amass Over \$100 Million for 2024 Elections

These reports revealed that the cryptocurrency sector has exploited the Citizens United ruling to an unprecedented degree, dwarfing direct corporate spending by Big Oil and other corporate sectors. The reports showed that crypto corporations were responsible for nearly half of all the corporate money in the 2024 elections and that crypto corporations' total spending in the past three election cycles amounted to 15% of all known corporate contributions since 2010.

Top corporate donors to the crypto super PAC Fairshake had settled or were facing charges by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. Beating back regulations was among the super PAC backers' stated goals.

Fairshake's contributions came almost exclusively from crypto corporations and billionaire crypto executives and venture capitalists.

This tsunami of corporate crypto cash represents a brazen attempt by for-profit businesses to force their private, pecuniary priorities ahead

of the public interest.

Enforcement Uptick: In 2023, DOJ Corporate Crime Prosecutions Increased Slightly

This report – part of an annual series tracking corporate crime enforcement – showed that U.S. Department of Justice efforts to ramp up corporate crime enforcement remain insufficient. In 2023, the DOJ prosecuted only 113 corporate offenders.

While the number is a slight uptick from the previous year's 99 prosecutions, they remain far below their peak in 2000, when the DOJ prosecuted nearly three times the number of corporations that it does today. The number of corporate prosecutions has remained far below the agency's 25-year average (172) since the end of the Obama administration.

The DOJ's tendency in recent years to avoid criminally charging the largest corporations by resolving cases through leniency agreements instead of criminal prosecutions has continued. While the number of leniency agreements as a proportion of cases is down significantly from the Trump administration, they remain overused.

The report found that leniency deals primarily help the biggest corporations – and that smaller businesses are likelier than big businesses to be prosecuted.

Mushrooming Risk: Unreliable A.I. Tools Generate Mushroom Misinformation

This report, which was reprinted by the mycological publication Fungi Magazine, examines the proliferation of AI-powered tools marketed to mushroom foragers and the potentially deadly consequences of misinformation provided by the emerging technology.

The report highlights AI-powered identification apps, whose use has led to the hospitalization of foragers who consumed toxic mushrooms, and generative AI foraging assistance chatbots and image generators, which can produce dangerous misinformation.

While some AI tools can be a helpful resource for mushroom foragers in conjunction with books and expert advice, they are no substitute for human knowledge and experience. Too often, businesses promoting these technologies overhype their abilities.

To protect users and prevent the spread of harmful misinformation, the businesses behind these technologies must accept the responsibility to disclose the use of AI and remind users constantly that AI makes mistakes. When AI systems sold as sources of truthful information instead produce false and deceptive content resulting in users making harmful decisions, businesses must be liable for the harms they cause. ■



Graphic courtesy of Shutterstock.

GLOBALIZATION & TRADE

Centering Frontline Communities in the Fight for Trade Justice

In 2024, Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch (GTW) deepened our focus on uplifting the voices of those most harmed by corporate-dominated trade rules. Through accessible reports and storytelling, public education and advocacy directed at the halls of power, our team made great strides in our fight for trade justice.

Eliminating Corporate Tribunals

Over the summer, GTW released an in-depth report titled “The Corporate Colonization of Latin America: How ISDS Harms Indigenous Communities” that traced the origins of investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms in trade and investment agreements as a post-colonial tool that corporations wield to continue patterns of exploitation. The report highlights the particular harms to Indigenous communities from ISDS, which empowers foreign corporations to seek compensation for “damages” from domestic laws, including those concerning land rights, environmental protection, and health and safety.

To center the voices of those most harmed, we invited Venessa Cárdenas and Luisa Connor, Afro-Indigenous, Black-English community leaders from Crawfish Rock, Honduras to Washington, D.C., to help launch the report and speak directly to policymakers. These powerful leaders shared their experience with corporate trade deals, U.S. investors, and the Próspera ISDS case (which was discussed in the *New York Times* as well as an episode of the Times The Daily show).

We continued to build up validators and research in the fight against corporate colonialism. We organized more than 300 professors of law and economics to sign on to a letter urging the Biden administration to eliminate ISDS in all existing U.S. trade and investment agreements, and amassed over 300 state legislators from 48 states as signatories on a bipartisan letter to President Biden calling for the elimination of ISDS due to its ability to undermine state and local laws. We highlighted the opposition to ISDS across the political spectrum, and built relationships with Republican and Democratic state legislators.

We worked closely with international allies, who shared that support from the U.S. Congress and international organizations has galvanized governments worldwide to pursue avenues to exit the ISDS regime. Honduras recently denounced the arm of the World Bank where most ISDS cases are adjudicated, Ecuadorian voters rejected ISDS via referendum, and the European Union is exiting the Energy Charter Treaty (which contains ISDS). We are eager to build on this momentum domestically and internationally.

Holding Big Tech Accountable

We also worked to bridge the gap between digital rights organizations and trade policy advocates by facilitating the Digital Trade Alliance’s (DTA) global research and advocacy presence. DTA’s mission is to empower consumer and digital rights groups, particularly those from the Global South, to push back against Big Tech companies’ capture of the digital ecosystem under the guise of trade policy.

The DTA published a number of accessible reports, including on digital trade and labor rights, pointing to how corporate friendly “digital trade” provisions are likely to further erode labor rights that are already being

diluted by the ubiquity of technology use in the workplace. And we made connections with Kenyan digital content workers whose labor rights have been repeatedly violated by large technology companies and helped to facilitate their participation in stakeholder sessions with the U.S. government in the context of ongoing U.S.-Kenya trade discussions.

Ensuring a Truly Just Transition

We also worked to ensure that the voices of vulnerable communities are centered as we promote a shift to a clean energy economy. With the growing global demand for electric vehicles, increased mining in Global South countries for so-called “critical minerals” poses risks to frontline communities unless robust environmental, labor, and human rights standards are rigorously implemented and enforced. GTW helped convene several dozen cross-sector organizations to craft detailed recommendations for U.S. trade policymakers to address this issue.

In collaboration with Friends of the Congo, we released a report that illuminates the devastating labor, health, environmental and human rights impacts of cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The first in a new series, the report outlines how to avoid recreating a neocolonial extractivist model in the name of the green transition and how trade policy must be crafted to uplift, rather than exploit, those at the bottom of the EV supply chain.

Many of GTW’s policy victories will be under threat by the new administration, but we’re no strangers to fighting the tough fight. Global Trade Watch, along with our extensive network of experts, activists, and leaders across the world, are preparing to use the resources and trust we’ve built to defend our gains and find new opportunities for progress. ■



Photo of people mining cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo courtesy of Afrewatch / Flickr.

Multiple legislative sessions. An impeachment trial. Local victories for the climate and public health. 2023 was as busy as ever for Public Citizen’s Texas office. Below are some milestones.

Working for a Texas with a Sunnier Disposition

Texas is a leader in wind-generated energy and one of the top states for solar-generated energy on a large scale. But on a smaller scale – home solar – the state lags. Why? Part of the explanation is the mishmash of electric utilities and their rules and regulations. Depending on where one lives in Texas, one could pay one’s electricity bill to a customer-owner cooperative, a city-owned utility, or a large for-profit company. At some utilities, policies for home solar installations can be unfair or downright hostile. The result: Investing in home solar makes little financial sense for some Texans.

In early 2024, the Texas office of Public Citizen released its research findings to make sense of it all. In the report, "Eclipsing Progress: The State of Solar Rates and Fees at Monopoly Electric Utilities in Texas," Kamil Cook and Kaiba White examined 141 noncompetitive Texas electric utility policies for customer-sited solar. They compared the bill savings to the cost of purchasing and installing a home solar system. In some circumstances, the report found that no utility has the conditions that allow a residential customer to recover the costs of an on-site solar system in 10 years if the customer finances their system with a 10-year loan. At some utilities, the situation is even worse, pushing the return on investment to 15 years or more.

Cook and White offered solutions, including a standardized state-wide policy determining a fair compensation rate for energy returned to the grid. In Austin, there was progress in embracing solar energy.

Public Citizen successfully lobbied for new, game-changing programs at Austin Energy. One program will allow businesses and homeowners to lease their roofs for solar installations, providing income for the homeowners and business owners and cheap, clean energy for Austinites.

A Mini Solution to Extreme Temps

In San Antonio, Public Citizen Organizer Debra Ponce worked to connect working families with climate change adaptation funding.

In partnership with city officials, Ponce identified families to receive mini-splits. These home cooling and heating systems are inexpensive compared to more traditional heating and cooling and energy efficient. With grant funding from the Biden administration’s Inflation Reduction Act, as of this writing 19 families had received a mini-split installation

at no cost.

In a state facing an energy crisis and severe weather events like Winter Storm Uri in February 2021, affordable solutions like mini-splits help Texans stay safe from the heat and cold while reducing energy bills.

Holding the State Accountable for Its Climate Change Inaction

In late January, the Texas Panhandle was devastated by wildfires, the largest in the state’s history. From the start, the signs of climate change were obvious: unusually high winter temperatures, extreme drought and strong winds. Yet, a legislative committee tasked with investigating the fires and recommending strategies to prevent future fires buried its head in the sand. During two days of hearings, climate change was not touched upon, and no climate scientists were invited to testify. A report produced by the committee and released months later had the same glaring omission.

Public Citizen was the lone Texas organization that brought attention to an incomplete investigation. In the legislative session that begins in January 2025, Public Citizen will hammer home the point that climate change can no longer be ignored by asking lawmakers to consider climate change in fire mitigation and emergency preparedness plans.

“It’s self-defeating for the state with the most billion-dollar weather and climate disasters to bury its head in scorched sand,” said Kaiba White, climate policy specialist for Public Citizen.

Preparing for 2025

The Texas Legislature will return to Austin in January 2025. The Texas office of Public Citizen is preparing to be at the state capitol to advocate for energy policies focused on clean, affordable and reliable energy. Public Citizen will also ask lawmakers to pass legislation to respond to wildfires, place guardrails on the energy-hogging of the state’s Bitcoin miners, get AI out of our elections, and more.

As part of its legislative efforts, the Texas office of Public Citizen is playing a leadership role in critical coalitions like the Healthy Port Communities Coalition and the Alliance for a Clean Texas.

“The state faces numerous challenges that impact all Texans regardless of whom they voted for. Lawmakers have much to do in a relatively short period that should end with meaningful legislation that improves lives and keeps people safe on its way to the governor’s desk,” said Adrian Shelley, director of Public Citizen’s Texas office. ■



Photo of the Smokehouse Creek Fire of 2024 courtesy of Wikimedia.