



Corporations Paid Millions to Feast on Trump's Ballroom Favors

BY JON GOLINGER

Amid the torrent of disgusting corruption that spewed forth from Donald Trump, his cronies, and his administration in 2024, one pay-to-play scheme stands out because Americans watched it unfold in plain sight. Just before Halloween, a wrecking ball tore into the White House East Wing, clearing the way for a massive new ballroom. The project was bankrolled with \$300 million from large corporations and tech and oil billionaires who sought or received favors from Trump's government, along with an unknown number of undisclosed donors.

Public Citizen's report, "Banquet of Greed," analyzed the government interests of the corporate ballroom donors, including 21 corporations disclosed by the White House and three more identified by news outlets. Our analysis found that:

- **Government contracts:** Two-thirds of the corporate donors – 16 of 24 – have entered into government contracts. Lockheed Martin is the largest of these contractors, receiving \$191 billion in contracts over the past five years. Other major contractors include Booz Allen Hamilton, Palantir,

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Photo of construction of the White House State Ballroom in December 2025 courtesy of Wikipedia.

Trump Administration Pushes Billionaire-Enriching Mining Expansion

BY ALAN ZIBEL

In October 2025, the White House announced a plan to invest nearly \$36 million in taxpayer funds in the stock of Trilogy Metals, a little-known Vancouver-based mining company planning to extract copper, zinc, and other minerals from remote Alaska wilderness. The deal gave the Pentagon a 10% ownership stake, with the option to buy more.

The market reacted instantly. Trilogy's share price tripled, boosting the value of millions of shares held by billionaire John Paulson, a close ally and supporter of Donald Trump and a major investor in mining projects in both Alaska and Idaho.

The transaction was a stark departure from how the U.S. government has overseen extractive industries. According to a new Public Citizen report, "Critical Conflicts," it is part of a far-reaching effort by the Trump

administration to promote and subsidize mining through federal spending and regulatory favors to foreign corporations and Trump-allied billionaires.

The report documents a modern gold and minerals rush in which the Trump administration has rolled back environmental standards, overridden tribal objections, and used taxpayer dollars to confer massive benefits on corporate interests and Trump insiders.

Multiple federal agencies are involved. The Interior Department, for example, has announced plans to permit a 211-mile road through pristine Alaska wilderness to reach the site where Trilogy intends to mine, despite objections from Alaska Native tribes, hunters, anglers, and conservation groups.

In the United States, the mining sector operates under laws largely unchanged for

150 years, offering scant public protections, no royalties for minerals extracted from public lands, and limited opportunities for community input.

"Under Trump's sweeping deregulatory agenda, the mining industry is getting a free pass to pollute public lands without paying a dime in royalties to taxpayers, and even taxpayer-funded investments to prop up mining companies themselves," said Public Citizen co-president Robert Weissman. "To an extraordinary extent, global mining companies are colluding with the second Trump administration to threaten iconic American national parks, forests, and monuments in the service of private profit."

According to the report, millions of acres of public lands, including national parks and other treasured landscapes, are at risk. Interior

see Mining, page 4 ▶

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GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN RICK MORRIS

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers



Since 2023, Rick Morris has served as an insurance campaigner with Public Citizen's Climate Program, advocating for bold action to safeguard consumers and the

environment from financial institutions that have driven the climate to the tipping point. His path to this work began far from the insurance world: after studying religion at Wheaton College and Princeton Seminary, he gravitated toward environmental justice work. Originally from New Jersey and long drawn to the outdoors, Morris moved to Minnesota in 2014, where he raised money for the Land Stewardship Project and later became a clean energy organizer with the Sierra Club. It was at the latter organization that he took up skiing. He loved the sport so much that he quit his job to relocate to Vermont and work on ski patrol before transitioning to his role at Public Citizen. Outside of work, Morris met his fiancée, a fellow mountain enthusiast, on the slopes and the two are now planning a move to Utah to support her career.

advocacy.

Morris: While finishing graduate school, I worked at a group home where we saw that LGBTQ+ kids routinely faced discrimination and abuse within the child welfare system. We organized a campaign urging the state to recognize and protect the children's gender and sexual identities. That experience was my turning point: it made me want to address the root causes that created those harms. Now I work on what I see as the most essential cause of our time: climate change.

Before joining Public Citizen, you spent time working on the front lines of environmental justice. How has that grassroots perspective informed your approach to campaigning against financial institutions now?

Morris: Grassroots organizing taught me there are two sources of power: organized money and organized people. Our opponents have all of the former, so we need to go all in on the latter. The core of my work is sparking, connecting, and resourcing a people-powered movement. Public Citizen is not just a think tank, but a "do tank." Having the right answers to problems is rarely enough. You need to build power, and ours comes from the people.

What's something you wish more people understood about the role of the insurance industry in the climate crisis?

Morris: Despite its opacity, the industry operates on a simple model: maximize premium income, minimize claims costs, and invest customer money for big returns. Here's the kicker: fossil fuel projects cannot secure financing without insurance, and the industry holds an estimated half a trillion dollars in fossil fuel investments. The sector just saw its most profitable year ever. Its influence on the climate crisis is enormous.

What is one thing that someone might be surprised to learn about you?

Morris: I love cooking as much as skiing! My dream is to run a bed-and-breakfast in the mountains – cooking in the morning, skiing in the afternoon, and fitting in a bit of advocacy in between. ■

You've worked on environmental justice campaigns focused on the harms of extracting and burning fossil fuels. Was there a particular community or campaign that shaped how you think about the connection between climate and equity?

Morris: Pipeline fights opened my eyes to the connection between pollution and racism. From Standing Rock to Iowa resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline, and throughout northern Minnesota fighting against Line 3, I saw that these projects consistently ran through Native and low-income communities. Racism and classism allow powerful interests to write off these communities as sacrifice zones. Antiracism, justice, and equity must be at the center of any successful climate effort.

Tell us about your career path to climate

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Public Citizen is a national nonprofit membership organization based in Washington, D.C. Since its founding by Ralph Nader in 1971, Public Citizen has fought for corporate and government accountability to guarantee the individual's right to safe products, a healthy environment and workplace, fair trade, and clean and safe energy sources. Public Citizen is active in Congress, the courts and government agencies.

Public Citizen does not accept government or corporate grants. Our funding comes from our supporters throughout the country, who believe there should be full-time advocates of democratic principles working on their behalf; from foundations; and from the sale of our publications. Public Citizen is an equal opportunity employer. To become a member of Public Citizen and receive the award-winning *Public Citizen News*, please call (202) 588-1000 or send a check payable to Public Citizen for \$20 to Public Citizen Membership Services at the address above.

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As 2025 draws to a close, we want to reflect on what Public Citizen has accomplished during a year defined by aggressive attacks on our democracy. The second Trump administration has had us all grappling with the realities of living in a nation that is slipping towards authoritarianism. Public Citizen has responded by meeting the assault head-on – organizing, mobilizing, litigating, and confronting the administration directly.

We have filed dozens of lawsuits against the administration's illegal actions, helped lead historic mass mobilizations, and convened some of the largest coalitions resisting the Trump regime.



CO-PRESIDENTS' VIEW

ROBERT WEISSMAN AND LISA GILBERT

LITIGATION

This administration has repeatedly disregarded the Constitution and the law. Public Citizen's Litigation Group has responded with an aggressive strategy grounded in deep constitutional and administrative law expertise.

Since Trump returned to office, we have filed 24 lawsuits, with several more imminent. These cases have produced concrete victories, including blocking efforts to shutter the Job Corps program, forcing the administration to resume payments on foreign aid grants, restoring health information and federal spending data to government websites, saving the National Hunger Hotline, removing partisan messaging from furloughed federal employees' email systems, and stopping an attempt to deny commercial driver's licenses to certain immigrants.

Looking ahead, we expect to file even more lawsuits than we did in 2025. We are prepared to litigate against the incipient deregulatory blitz, involving everything from environmental protections to worker safety rules.

Among the areas we are closely monitoring for more potential litigation:

- **Trump's Grift:** Trump's shady business dealings are even more egregious than during

A Year of Fight

his first term. We are exploring litigation opportunities around schemes that financially benefit Trump and his family, including a possible plan to siphon off a share of government drug purchases.

- **Health Care:** We are adding staff to track dysfunction at the Department of Health and Human Services under Robert F. Kennedy Jr., with particular attention to efforts that weaken Medicare and funnel public dollars to for-profit insurers.
- **Corporate Subsidies:** The administration's willingness to steer taxpayer dollars to favored corporations is boundless. We are monitoring a major new initiative to deliver massive subsidies to coal plants, tech companies, and other allies.
- **Immigrant Rights:** Anti-immigrant animus now permeates federal agencies far beyond immigration enforcement. We'll build on our existing docket of cases challenging the administration's illegal actions across the IRS, Department of Education, Department of Labor, and beyond.

- **Open Government:** We anticipate a significant increase in Freedom of Information Act litigation to compel disclosure of records the administration is unlawfully withholding.

These cases matter. They have slowed authoritarian overreach, protected rights, blocked censorship, and preserved agencies. They also send a broader message: resistance works. Litigation is not only about legal outcomes, but about overcoming fear, breaking isolation, restoring agency, and building the power we need to defeat Trump and Trumpism.

MOBILIZATION

Mobilization work has been another defining pillar of Public Citizen's work this year.

We played a central role in making the "No Kings" October mobilizations possible, serving as one of 10 anchor organizations on the steering committee. Our staff led the recruitment of co-sponsors, developed protest themes, drove turnout, managed logistics for the Washington, D.C., event, and engaged national media. Nearly 300 organizations joined the effort! The results were historic. More than 7 million people participated

in 2,700 rallies across all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and internationally. It was the largest single day of protest in American history.

Beyond No Kings events in June and October, Public Citizen led or helped lead more than a dozen other national days of action, including Hand Off and the Good Trouble Lives On actions marking the anniversary of John Lewis' death. These pro-democracy actions reached 1,600 locations nationwide.

We invested in creative organizing approaches to energize diverse communities. We launched a new campus organizing effort to amplify youth opposition to the Trump regime and to pressure universities not to capitulate to Trump's authoritarian demands. We coordinated with faith leaders, attorneys, veterans, farmers, and others to demonstrate broad-based resistance to Trump.

The Trump regime wants to intimidate opponents and chill dissent. Our answer has been solidarity and scale – bringing people together to experience the collective power of mass participation. As we look toward the coming year, we are working with allies to build new mobilizations that reflect the growing reach and resilience of the anti-authoritarian movement.

BUILDING AND RUNNING COALITIONS

Convening coalitions is one of Public Citizen's core strengths. We identify gaps, bring organizations together, and help sustain collaborative efforts grounded in shared purpose. This work has never been more vital. We are a co-founder of the Not Above the Law coalition, which brings together more than 150 organizations to defend the rule of law and fight authoritarianism.

We also co-founded and staff the Declaration for American Democracy (DFAD) coalition, now comprising over 260 organizations. DFAD is leading efforts against Trump's schemes to subvert elections and laying the groundwork for transformative democracy reforms.

This year, we also helped organize collective resistance to the Trump regime's efforts to attack nonprofits that oppose authoritarianism. Under the guise of combating "domestic terrorism" and diversity, equity, and inclusion, the White House has issued presidential proclamations to strip away tax-exempt status, cancel

government grants, and pursue criminal charges against dissenting organizations. In response, Public Citizen worked with partners to issue a solidarity statement signed by more than 3,700 organizations, demonstrating unified resistance at a moment when some institutions have chosen retreat.

Additional coalition efforts included coordinating opposition to the administration's deregulatory agenda and challenging a proposal that would allow churches to participate directly in electoral politics.

As Trump's authoritarianism intensifies, our coalitions will only grow more important. No single organization can meet this moment alone. These permanent and ad hoc coalitions and networks build civil society power and enable coordination and solidarity.

EXPOSING CORRUPTION

Impeccable investigative research remains a Public Citizen hallmark, and the scope of corruption this year has been staggering. Our research team has focused on conflicts of interest and the administration's systematic leniency toward corporate wrongdoing. Our reports have documented, among other findings, the mass suspension or closure of more than 140 corporate investigations; the effective shutdown of enforcement at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau; the abandonment of anti-corruption laws; and what may be the first-ever corporate pardon. We exposed the role of more than 60 oil and gas executives, lobbyists, and lawyers in shaping federal energy policy, as well as the conflicts of interest surrounding Attorney General Pam Bondi and the business entanglements of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. We also detailed the corporate giveaways embedded in the tax and budget reconciliation bill, including handouts to fossil fuel companies and Pentagon contractors, and showed how agencies targeted by Elon Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency had been pursuing accountability for Musk-owned companies.

In November, we released a major report on the corporate and ultra-wealthy "donors" to Trump's ballroom bonanza, revealing that 24 known sponsors had received \$279 billion in federal contracts over five years. The findings landed on the front page of *The Washington Post* and reverberated see Column, page 4 ▶

► Ballroom, from page 1

Microsoft, HP Inc., Caterpillar, Amazon, and Comcast. Collectively, these companies received nearly \$43 billion in contracts in 2024 and \$279 billion over the past five years.

- **Enforcement actions:** Most of the corporate donors – 14 out of 24 – are facing federal enforcement actions or have seen such actions suspended by the Trump administration. These include major antitrust cases involving Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and T-Mobile; labor rights cases involving Amazon, Apple, Caterpillar, Google, Lockheed, and Meta; and Securities and Exchange Commission matters involving Coinbase and Ripple.
- **Political spending:** The companies and wealthy donors spent heavily on lobbying and political contributions, totaling more than \$960 million during the last election cycle and \$1.6 billion over the last

five years.

- **Breadth of lobbying interests:** Lobbying filings from ballroom donors show a striking range of business interests before the federal government, from tobacco, taxation, and trade policy to battlefield domain awareness, telephone poles, consumer privacy, product liability rules, appropriations, and cybersecurity.

“These companies have massive interests before the federal government and they undoubtedly hope to curry favor with, and receive favorable treatment from, the Trump administration,” noted Public Citizen Co-President Robert Weissman. “Millions to fund Trump’s architectural whims are nothing compared to the billions at stake in procurement, regulatory and enforcement decisions.”

Public Citizen’s report also exposed how powerful Washington, D.C., lobbyists worked behind closed doors to steer their corporate clients’ funds to the ballroom project in a textbook influence-peddling scheme.

► Mining, from page 1

Secretary Doug Burgum, a former software executive and fossil fuel investor, has emerged as a central architect of the agenda, arguing that public lands are part of “America’s balance sheet” and should be used for private profit.

The report also warns that the administration is laying the groundwork for a massive transfer of public lands to private interests by seeking to revoke national monument designations established by former presidents.

Other wealthy beneficiaries of Trump’s mining push include Gina Rinehart, Australia’s richest person and a staunch Trump supporter. Rinehart’s company, Hancock Prospecting, is the largest private shareholder in MP Materials, a rare-earth mining company that received a \$400 million investment from the Defense Department. Rinehart has appeared at Trump events, including a Great Gatsby-themed Halloween party at Mar-a-Lago in fall 2025, posed for photos with Tiffany Trump on election night, and bought full-page U.S. newspaper ads praising Trump ahead of his second inauguration.

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nationwide.

Together, this work punctures the administration’s populist façade. Trump is not fighting for ordinary Americans. He is advanc-

After the federal investment, MP Materials CEO James Litinsky sold off about \$40 million in company shares in the fall of 2025, at prices above \$60 – roughly double the share price in June.

Another potential beneficiary of the Trump administration’s mining plans is Chile’s Luksic family, which controls a sprawling business empire spanning mining, banking, hotels, and other industries. One of its flagship holdings, Antofagasta PLC, controls the proposed Twin Metals copper and nickel mine in northern Minnesota just outside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The project has long been controversial over concerns that toxic waste could contaminate one of the country’s most pristine and heavily used wilderness areas.

The Biden administration blocked the project in 2022 and imposed a 20-year ban on mining at the site, reversing approvals granted during Trump’s first term. In June 2025, Burgum and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins announced plans to begin lifting the restrictions and reopen the area to mining.

The Luksic family’s ties to the

ing an agenda of cronyism and corruption on behalf of himself and his super-rich donors. In 2026, we will expand our investigative capacity, deepen our use of FOIA, and continue exposing the graft at the heart of this administration. As we

A separate Public Citizen analysis from November, “Ballroom Lobby-Blitz Creates New Favor Seeking Opportunities for Lobbyists,” found that two-thirds of the corporate donors are clients of lobbying firms led by Brian Ballard, Jeff Miller, or Reince Priebus. According to news reports, all three attended an ostentatious White House fundraising dinner for the ballroom project in mid-October.

In addition to blowing the whistle on the scheme and tracking the ballroom money trail, Public Citizen has worked with outraged lawmakers to start formal congressional investigations and propose legislation to block future ballroom-style shakedowns. Since the corporate-funded wrecking ball struck the East Wing, more than a dozen inquiries have been launched in both chambers of Congress.

Rep. Robert Garcia, the ranking member of the House Oversight Committee, and Sen. Richard Blumenthal, the ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, have been par-

ticularly proactive in pressing for answers from the White House, the National Park Service, and the nonprofit Trust for the National Mall, which has served as the conduit for the ballroom funds and has enabled the donations to be made tax-free.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren has also worked to shine light on the shadowy Trump ballroom scheme through investigative requests and legislation. She introduced the Stop Ballroom Bribery Act, co-authored in the House by Rep. Garcia. The bill would eliminate this category of pay-to-play opportunities by banning donors with business before the federal government from funding such projects, requiring transparency, and enabling enforcement not only by the Department of Justice but also by state attorneys general, who could seek civil penalties and disgorgement of illegal donations.

The East Wing may be gone, but its dramatic destruction, funded by favor-seekers, will endure as a symbol of the corruption that defined this administration. ■

mal regulatory process that would require the company to submit a new mining plan and get approval to mine in a national park.

Dateline employs Michael Best Strategies, a lobbying firm led by Reince Priebus, Trump’s first White House chief of staff and former Republican National Committee chair. Another mining lobbyist is David Bernhardt, who served as Interior Secretary during Trump’s first term. In spring 2025, Bernhardt launched a new lobbying firm, Bernhardt Group, with several former Trump administration officials. The firm quickly signed 11 clients, including Antofagasta, Barrick Mining, Trigg Minerals, and USA Rare Earth.

“Under Trump’s mining policies, hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds are being steered to highly speculative companies with little transparency,” Weissman said. “These decisions are being made behind closed doors, with no clear criteria, creating opportunities for favoritism, weakening oversight, and opening up our public lands to rampant exploitation.” ■

building power at unprecedented scale. This is a record of achievement that all of us who make up Public Citizen should be proud – and an inspiration to do even more in the coming years. ■

2025 Year in Review

DEMOCRACY

The current political moment has made the fragility of American democracy unmistakably clear. In the face of rising authoritarianism, coordinated disinformation, and direct assaults on the rule of law, Public Citizen's Democracy team took bold, strategic action to combat authoritarianism and defend democracy. Over the past year, we campaigned to protect elections from sabotage, advocated for cracking down on money in politics and pushed for other far-reaching legislative reforms, conducted anti-corruption investigations, and mobilized a grassroots movement on a historic scale – laying the groundwork for a durable, people-powered movement capable of resisting democratic backsliding.

Confronting Abuses of Power

Through our Not Above the Law Coalition, co-chaired by Public Citizen, we mobilized thousands to challenge abuses of power, threats to the judiciary, and unlawful detentions. Early in 2025, disturbing videos surfaced showing community members being detained or removed by federal agents without due process. In response, the coalition launched Disappeared in America, a nationwide campaign documenting and publicizing these cases. Nearly 100 cities held public photo actions in which community members displayed images of loved ones, neighbors, and family members who had been detained, deported, or disappeared by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The campaign also supported 150 additional protests at Home Depot, vigils at detention centers, and rallies and marches, amplifying pressure on local officials and private actors enabling these abuses.

Sustaining Resistance Through Mass Mobilization

As the Trump administration intensified attacks on higher education and freedom of speech on campus, Public Citizen expanded efforts to recruit younger people into the resistance movement. We launched a student organizing program across high school and college campuses. Public Citizen student organizers played a key role in the nationwide Students Rise Up actions on Nov. 7, mobilizing thousands of high school and college students in marches, teach-ins, and rallies demanding democratic accountability.

As federal overreach intensified, rapid response became essential. When Texas officials, succumbing to pressure from the White House, advanced an extreme mid-decade redistricting plan, Public Citizen and the Declaration for American Democracy Coalition (DFAD) – a coalition housed at Public Citizen and comprised of more than 250 organizations – helped coordinate the “Fight the Trump Takeover” national day of

action alongside Texas For All and Indivisible. In just nine days, organizers convened 320 events across 44 states, signaling nationwide opposition to efforts to silence voters through gerrymandering.

Public outcry continued to build as Trump ignored limits on executive power. Public Citizen, alongside major partners, played a central role in the historic “No Kings” mobilizations resisting Trump’s actions. We were one of ten anchor organizations on the steering committee for “No Kings.” On June 14 and Oct. 17, more than five million people participated in 2,000 events and seven million in 2,700 events, respectively, declaring that America has “No Kings!” We supported partner outreach, media coordination, and rapid-response planning to ensure millions could take collective action safely and strategically.

Public Citizen partnered with May Day Strong, supporting nationwide May Day and Labor Day rallies in more than 1,000 cities. These worker-centered mobilizations highlighted the links between economic justice, immigrant rights, and democratic participation. We also provided the organizational backbone for the July 17 Good Trouble Lives On actions on the anniversary of John Lewis’ death, events that centered the leadership of Black-led organizations. More than 100,000 people participated in 1,600 events across the nation.

Recognizing that many Americans were taking to the streets for the first time, Public Citizen invested in mass education and training. We launched the “Rise for Freedom” national training series to equip activists with the skills needed to build coalitions, maintain community resilience, and prepare for noncooperation. Participants facilitated small groups in living rooms throughout the country to deepen understanding, strengthen local networks, and prepare for rapid response. To further develop movement leadership, we expanded in-person training through a partnership with the ACLU. The Power and Purpose tour reached more than 640 participants across nine cities, offering popular-education workshops on historical resistance strategies, movement-building, and organizing under authoritarian conditions.

Looking Ahead

American democracy is at a boiling point, but our collective capacity to sustain it has grown stronger. Public Citizen’s multi-pronged strategy – combining movement-building, election protection, and hard-hitting investigations – has positioned millions to resist authoritarianism with courage and coordination. As we build toward 2026 and beyond, we remain steadfast in our mission: to ensure good governance, safeguard fundamental freedoms, and forge a more just, inclusive, and resilient democracy for all. ■



Demonstrators line the streets on the day of the U.S. Army's military parade in Washington, D.C., to protest the Trump administration's actions in the “No Kings” rally. Photo courtesy of Shutterstock.

In 2025, Public Citizen Litigation Group stood at the forefront of the fight against the Trump administration's unlawful upheaval of the federal government. Even as that fight threatened to overwhelm us, we expanded our capacity and continued to litigate cases protecting consumers and the public from corporate and government wrongdoing.

Protecting Vital Government Functions

Since Inauguration Day, Public Citizen has filed 24 lawsuits challenging the dismantling of federal agencies, termination of grant programs, firing of government officials, and removal of public information from agency websites. We did not prevail in every case, but we secured significant victories in many of them.

One early success came after federal agencies removed critical health-related webpages used to track disease outbreaks, guide clinical practice, and communicate with patients. In February, representing a physicians' group, we sued the Office of Personnel Management and the Department of Health & Human Services over the webpage removals. Within days, the district court ordered the agencies to restore some of the websites while the case proceeded. In July, the court granted permanent relief, requiring the restoration of hundreds of webpages and invalidating the government policies that led to their removal.

Public Citizen also had success restoring access to public data after the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) took down the Public Apportionments Database, which Congress requires OMB to post on a website so the public can monitor federal agency spending. Representing Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, we filed a lawsuit challenging OMB's removal of the database. In July, the district court granted our motion for summary judgment and ordered the agency to restore and maintain the database.

When the government moved to shut down longstanding programs, Public Citizen went to court to curb the harm from those unlawful actions. In May, the Department of Labor (DOL) announced plans to suspend the Job Corps program – which Congress established in 1964 to provide young people with education and vocational training – and close all 99 Job Corps centers nationwide. The decision threatened to strip tens of thousands of at-risk young people of their education, job training, housing, health care, and other essential services. Public Citizen represented Job Corps students in a lawsuit challenging the decision. In July, a district court granted a stay, blocking the closures.

In June, we sued the Department of Agriculture (USDA) for failing to maintain a hotline and information clearinghouse that connected tens of thousands of people with food assistance resources. For more than 30

years, Congress has required USDA to contract with a nonprofit to run the clearinghouse. Hunger Free America maintained the clearinghouse for over a decade, but USDA abruptly ended its contract and failed to take any steps to maintain the clearinghouse. We challenged USDA's unlawful actions on Hunger for America's behalf. After we moved for a preliminary injunction, USDA opened bidding for the clearinghouse contract. In September 2025, Hunger Free America was again awarded the contract.

Public Citizen also moved swiftly to protect workers after the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration issued a rule barring certain immigrants with work authorization, including asylum seekers, refugees, and DACA recipients, from holding commercial driver's licenses. Representing individual drivers and unions, we challenged the rule, which threatened the livelihoods of nearly 200,000 truck drivers, school bus drivers, delivery-van drivers, and sanitation workers. A federal circuit court issued a forceful opinion in our favor and granted a stay that would put the rule on hold while the case proceeds.

Challenging Corporate Misconduct

In addition to combatting the Trump administration's abuses of power, we continued to represent public-interest plaintiffs fighting corporate wrongdoing. For instance, in March, we won an appeal that allows a former shipyard worker with mesothelioma to pursue his case in state court. And in July, we won an appeal on behalf of a man who sued the company that hired a trucker whose unsafe driving killed his wife. That same month, we filed suit against Southwest Airlines on behalf of Dr. Briana Hicks, a Black woman who was removed from a flight after reporting racial discrimination by a flight attendant.

Preserving Public-Interest Victories at the Supreme Court

Now in its 36th year, Public Citizen's Supreme Court Assistance Project supports attorneys handling public-interest cases before the Supreme Court, primarily by helping them keep cases that they have won in the appellate courts out of the Supreme Court. In 2025, we assisted lawyers opposing Supreme Court review in cases concerning the Americans with Disabilities Act, class actions, fair wages, forced arbitration, pre-emption, and more. Our work helped preserve public-interest victories in more than 15 cases.

All told, it was a relentless and impactful year for the Litigation Group! ■



Photo of a Job Corps Center in San Marcos, Texas, courtesy of Billy Hathorn / Wikimedia.

MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK

It would be hard to imagine a time when Public Citizen's hard-hitting anti-corruption mission is more urgently needed than in the second Trump administration. Throughout 2025, we pushed back hard against revolving-door corruption, led the opposition to the GOP's budget for billionaires and big corporations, and stood firm against deregulation.

Fighting Corruption and Corporate Power

We led the fight against the nomination of far-right anti-regulatory ideologue Russell Vought to direct the U.S. Office of Management and Budget – one of the cornerstones in the federal rulemaking process. As a result of these and other efforts, no Senate Democrats voted to confirm him.

We also opposed a range of Trump nominees to financial oversight positions, including Treasury Secretary, chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and Billy Long as IRS Commissioner, emphasizing his history of working to make things easier for corporations and tax cheats. Long's tenure at the IRS lasted less than two months.

Early in 2025, DOGE, led by tech billionaire Elon Musk, posed a major threat to government agencies, programs, and services, so Public Citizen published a report in May highlighting Musk's direct conflicts of interest with more than 70% of the agencies targeted by DOGE. We also opposed efforts to shutter the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, emphasizing Musk's conflicts of interest arising out of the new payment network on his social media platform. (And, we filed suit when the administration tried, illegally, to shutter the agency.)

Public Citizen issued a series of reports documenting the corporate funding behind Trump's gaudy and ill-conceived ballroom to replace the now-demolished East Wing of the White House (see story on page 1). Corporate and billionaire donors to the project are beset by conflicts of interest; many are government contractors and direct beneficiaries of the Trump administration's procurement, deregulatory, and lax enforcement policies.

We also filed multiple Hatch Act complaints in response to the Trump administration's repeated brazen misuse of government offices for partisan political actions. And we continued to press for a ban on congressional stock trading. We also opposed Trump's ongoing attempts to privatize the U.S. Postal Service on several fronts, including multiple citizen petitions garnering more than 36,000 signatures.

Public Citizen continued to defend the IRS's free electronic tax filing software (Direct File) in the face of the Trump administration kneecapping and then suspending the program. We published a report linking Republican opposition to Direct File with nearly \$2 million in donations from the tax prep industry. We opposed language in both the reconciliation package and the annual spending bills aimed at ending Direct File.

Opposing the GOP's Billionaires' Budget

Public Citizen vigorously opposed the Republican reconciliation package through a variety of tactics, including convening a biweekly "coalition of coalitions" that included leaders from the tax, Pentagon spending, immigration, environmental, and human needs sectors to coordinate opposition.

We spearheaded a letter opposing the House budget resolution, signed by more than 260 groups. We organized a virtual town hall with over 50 sponsoring organizations, featuring Sen. Ron Wyden and partners, and mobilized thousands of participants to a call-in day of action. And we urged activists to hold lawmakers accountable for their votes to gut health care and nutrition assistance and authorize more tax giveaways to billionaires.

Those tax giveaways didn't happen in a vacuum. Public Citizen published a report showing that 6,000 tax lobbyists descended on Capitol Hill in 2024 – nearly all of them representing corporate interests.

When the Trump administration announced that it would seek a congressional vote to rescind federal spending, Public Citizen mobilized a letter of opposition from more than 100 groups and issued a statement condemning the move.

We also led the opposition to \$150 billion in additional Pentagon spending proposed by President Trump and congressional Republicans in their reconciliation package. We issued a report showing how those same funds could be used to bolster Medicaid and SNAP benefits. And we opposed authorization of a more than \$900 billion Pentagon budget

through the National Defense Authorization Act, which would bring total U.S. military spending to more than one trillion dollars annually.

Public Citizen continued to co-chair the Clean Budget Coalition, which includes hundreds of organizations opposed to harmful poison pill policy riders in spending measures. Our leadership helped defeat dozens of poison pills that were initially proposed for inclusion in the package of appropriations bills that ended the government shutdown in the fall of 2025.

Defending Our System of Regulatory Safeguards

Public Citizen co-chairs the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards (CSS), an alliance of more than 220 groups committed to defending – and ultimately modernizing – the federal regulatory system amid systemic attacks by the Trump White House, congressional Republicans, the courts, and industry lobbyists.

Public Citizen and CSS tracked and opposed dozens of Congressional Review Act (CRA) resolutions of disapproval aimed at tanking Biden administration rules that protect workers, consumers, families, and our environment. We also demanded that the Senate follow the guidance of the Senate parliamentarian and the Government Accountability Office, both of which opposed the GOP's unlawful abuses of the CRA process.

Separately, we also tracked the frequently unlawful dismissals and firings of agency commissioners, which affect whether independent agencies have a quorum and can function.

A Public Citizen memo in April challenged a presidential memorandum calling for sweeping deregulation across the government. CSS and Public Citizen also fought back numerous anti-regulatory bills backed by Republicans in Congress.

CSS and Public Citizen worked closely with the offices of Rep. Pramila Jayapal and Sen. Elizabeth Warren to update and reintroduce the EXPERTS Act (formerly the Stop Corporate Capture Act). The bill is a comprehensive blueprint for modernizing, improving, and strengthening the regulatory system to protect the public more effectively. It already has more than 80 cosponsors in both chambers of Congress.

In 2026, Public Citizen will continue to lead all of these fights and begin laying the groundwork for reconstructing and repairing our broken, corrupted government when the tide turns. ■



Photo of the Capitol courtesy of E. David Luria / Flickr.

CONSUMER HEALTH & SAFETY

In 2025, the Trump administration mounted a direct assault on public health in the U.S. and abroad. Medical research was slashed, preparedness and disease surveillance were weakened, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was effectively shut down, unraveling global health and humanitarian programs that keep clinics open, medicines flowing, and people alive.

It was also a year of resistance. Across prescription drug affordability, pandemic preparedness, and global access to medicines, Public Citizen's Access to Medicines program pushed back. We secured a major policy shift at the National Institutes of Health, affirming that access is a condition of public funding. We also turned to the courts, challenging the foreign aid freeze on behalf of HIV and media partners and suing to force transparency from USAID as global health and humanitarian programs collapsed.

Lenacapavir: Breakthrough Science, Manufactured Scarcity

No issue better captured the consequences of weakened public authority than lenacapavir, a twice-yearly injectable HIV prevention drug owned by the drugmaker Gilead. It is the most promising HIV prevention tool in decades, with the potential to transform the epidemic. But Trump's cuts to global health funding and corporate control put that promise out of reach for many.

Gilead set the U.S. price at more than \$28,000 per person per year and constructed a global licensing system designed to preserve control, secrecy, and exclusion. Countries that hosted clinical trials were excluded from affordable supply, even though production costs were estimated at under \$100 per year. Patent maneuvers threatened to block competition until at least 2034. Throughout 2025, Public Citizen worked with more than 100 health groups across Latin America and beyond to challenge Gilead's model.

In July, a Gilead agreement with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria raised the stakes, promising twice-yearly lenacapavir for PrEP (HIV prevention) to up to 2 million people in poor countries,

while excluding most high-burden countries in Latin America. The deal entrenched a two-tier system: access for some, exclusion for most. In September, Public Citizen and its allies launched a global campaign to dismantle Gilead's patent and regulatory barriers and demand universal access to long-acting PrEP for all who need it.

Defending Global Health Infrastructure From Political Sabotage

As corporate power constrained access, the Trump administration moved to dismantle the multilateral systems that turn shared vulnerability into shared responsibility. On his first day in office, Trump announced his intent to withdraw the United States from the World Health Organization. In the weeks that followed, U.S. agencies pulled back from routine coordination with the organization.

The consequences were immediate. WHO's influenza surveillance network guides the selection of seasonal flu vaccines worldwide, including in the U.S. Public Citizen documented how U.S. disengagement, combined with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's pause in routine data-sharing, could undermine global strain selection and weaken U.S. preparedness for pandemic influenza.

Childhood immunization soon followed. The administration moved to abandon U.S. funding for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, threatening decades of progress. Pressure from Public Citizen and allies averted immediate termination, but months of uncertainty disrupted vaccine planning and procurement. Governments were left questioning whether supply commitments could still be relied upon, exposing how fragile political support for protecting children's lives had become.

Resisting One-Sided U.S. Health Agreements in Africa

As it retreated from multilateral cooperation, the administration pursued a parallel strategy: pressing African governments into one-sided bilateral health agreements. By late 2025, the U.S. had signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with Kenya, Rwanda, Liberia, Uganda, and



One of the signs at the main entrance to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) offices in Washington, D.C., being taped over on Feb. 7, 2025. Photo courtesy of G. Edward Johnson / Wikimedia Commons.

Lesotho, and was pushing for dozens more. These agreements granted Washington extensive access to national health data systems and pathogen samples in the African nations, without binding commitments from the U.S. side on benefit-sharing of the discoveries or products that come from the African data or pathogens, fair pricing, technology transfer, or health system strengthening.

Public Citizen responded in partnership with African allies. In December, working with Resilience Action Network Africa, People's Health Movement Africa, and nearly 50 civil society organizations, we led a public letter to African heads of state and government calling for fair terms rooted in sovereignty and public accountability. The message was clear: these agreements were not neutral technical arrangements, but an extractive model treating health data and pathogens as resources to be taken, with little promised in return.

Defending and Delivering Medicare Drug Price Negotiation

The question of public authority also played out at home. In 2025, Medicare drug price negotiation moved from theory to practice. Drug companies challenged the program in court. So far, Big Pharma is losing. At the same time, pharmaceutical industry efforts to delay Medicare negotiations collapsed in Congress.

The impact is real and tangible. Medicare announced a second round of negotiated prices, with projected savings in the tens of billions of dollars for seniors and taxpayers. Public Citizen played a central role, filing and coordinating amicus briefs, defending the program's legality, and pushing to expand its reach. Even amid a broader assault on public institutions, price negotiation endured.

Medicare price negotiation survived industry lawsuits and political sabotage. NIH reform went further, asserting public authority earlier in the pipeline, at the point of invention, before monopoly power is locked in.

Helping Public Funders to Own Access

The most consequential positive structural shift of the year came at the National Institutes of Health. In January, after years of sustained advocacy by Public Citizen and allies, the agency revived a long-neglected access policy. Companies relying on government-owned inventions must now submit access plans explaining how they will ensure availability, affordability, acceptability, and sustainability. Weak plans can be rejected.

For the first time in a generation, access is treated as a condition of using public inventions, not a voluntary afterthought. The stakes are far from abstract. Had such requirements been in place during COVID-19, the government would have had leverage to prevent Moderna from quadrupling prices for Americans and to support global manufacturing instead of vaccine apartheid.

The Year's Lesson

Across NIH reform, lenacapavir, flu surveillance, and the Africa health agreements, the pattern was unmistakable. Failures of access to new, innovative drug and medical treatments are not failures of science. They are the result of policy choices. The work ahead remains immense. But this year made one truth unavoidable: monopoly power is not inevitable. Public leverage exists. And when it is used early and transparently, it saves lives. ■

HEALTH RESEARCH GROUP

In 2025, Public Citizen's Health Research Group (HRG) focused on the once-in-many-generations challenges to public health posed by the second Trump administration and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), under the destructive leadership of HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Much of our work focused on the turmoil at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), where deep staff cuts and erratic policy shifts undermined the credibility and effectiveness of both agencies. At the FDA, agency leaders undermined long-standing standards for approving new drugs. At both agencies, Kennedy acolytes eroded evidence-based vaccine policy, including how vaccines are approved, made available, and administered. Weakening these institutions, along with the National Institutes of Health and other Health and Human Services agencies, risks lasting damage to the nation's health.

Even as we confronted the administration's attacks on science, we continued our core work: pressing for the safety and effectiveness of drugs, devices, and medical products; campaigning for strengthened health safeguards for workers; and advocating for expanded health insurance coverage, including Medicare for All. We also pushed to rein in Medicare Advantage plans, which have dramatically increased Medicare costs for the benefit of private insurers.

Here are some other highlights of the year:

In February, we issued a report examining the failed clinical trials testing a Duchenne muscular dystrophy gene therapy marketed as Elevidys, that nevertheless received full FDA approval. We had repeatedly urged the agency not to approve the treatment, which costs more than \$3 million per patient, citing concerns about safety, effectiveness, and inadequate trials. Months later, the therapy was linked to two deaths from acute liver failure in patients who were unable to walk. The FDA subsequently added a boxed warning, its strongest safety warning, and restricted use of the treatment to ambulatory patients 4 years of age and older with a confirmed Duchenne genetic mutation and no preexisting liver impairment.

In May, Dr. Jerome P. Kassirer, a former editor-in-chief of the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM), and Dr. Robert Steinbrook, the HRG director and a former NEJM editor, published an op-ed in the *Boston Globe* calling on leading medical journals to defend patients and the medical profession by speaking out against the Trump administration's attacks on medicine and public health.

Later that month, Public Citizen and the American Medical Student Association petitioned the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to implement evidence-based federal work-hour limits for resident physicians, citing the need for safer, more humane working conditions and improved patient care.

Also in May, we petitioned the FDA to require clear contraindications for the use of modafinil, sold as Provigil and in generic form, and armodafinil, marketed as Nuvigil, during pregnancy and in women of reproductive age who are not using effective nonhormonal contraception. We also urged the agency to add boxed warnings highlighting the drugs' potential risks to embryos and fetuses.

In June, we issued a statement supporting more than 6,000 doctors, nurses, researchers, and other health professionals who signed an open letter warning the public that the Trump administration's actions were endangering lives.

We also issued a report on the administration's stop-work order and funding freeze affecting 32 clinical trials funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. Conducted in 25 countries, the trials may have involved as many as 94,150 participants. We detailed how the abrupt shutdown of the clinical trials violated basic research ethics, jeopardizing participants' health and undermining the integrity of the studies.

In November, we petitioned the FDA to require balanced, evidence-based pregnancy warnings for serotonin reuptake inhibitor antidepressants, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors. These widely used drugs cross the placenta and are found in fetal tissues. Our petition stressed that clear, complete labeling of these drugs is essential so pregnant patients and their clinicians can make informed decisions.

Throughout 2025, the Health Research Group did not merely respond to threats to public health. We confronted them directly, using research, advocacy, and public pressure to defend science, protect patients, and hold federal health agencies to account.

CLIMATE & ENERGY

Fighting Trump's Environmental Rollbacks and Rising Energy Costs for Americans

In the first year of Donald Trump's second term, his administration and Republican allies moved swiftly to dismantle important climate and energy protections while entrenching the power of Big Oil. This destruction unfolded as the climate crisis intensified and the energy costs surged for families and businesses. Against this backdrop, Public Citizen's Climate and Energy teams responded with urgency and precision. Through accountability work, coalition leadership, and policy advocacy, we exposed collusion between major corporations and the U.S. government. We defended communities from policies that undermine clean air, clean water, and a livable climate.

Holding Companies Accountable for Climate Harm

Public Citizen has been at the forefront of efforts to hold fossil fuel companies accountable for the mounting harms of climate change, including disasters like the fires in Los Angeles. A law review article by Aaron Regunberg, director of Public Citizen's Climate Accountability Project, and David Arkush, director of the Climate Program, advanced a novel legal theory arguing that fossil fuel companies could face criminal liability in states that prohibit reckless conduct causing or risking a catastrophe.

Across the country, dozens of lawsuits seek to force Big Oil to pay a small fraction of the costs climate change is imposing on people. The industry has aggressively lobbied Congress for immunity from liability. Public Citizen pushed back, defending the right of communities to seek accountability. In testimony before the U.S. Senate, Arkush emphasized that when companies knowingly engage in conduct they understand will cause catastrophic harm, they should be held responsible.

At the Washington, D.C. Auto Show, activists from Public Citizen and other organizations called on Toyota Motor Corp. to stop funding the political campaigns of climate change deniers. The activists disrupted a presentation honoring the automaker and urged the company to "stop driving climate denial" and "stop funding climate deniers." The demonstration highlighted a Public Citizen report showing that Toyota had donated to over four times as many climate change-denying members of Congress as Ford Motor Company and nearly twice as many as General Motors.

Challenging Greenwashing in Mining and Supply Chains

Minerals are essential to clean energy technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines, and electric vehicle batteries, yet mining has long been associated with environmental destruction and human rights abuses. Public Citizen worked to raise standards across mining and other clean energy supply chains. This fall, we launched a public campaign challenging the mining industry's Consolidated Mining Standard, an industry-led initiative that claims to certify "responsible" mining but relies on weak requirements that allow companies to greenwash harmful practices.

Despite years of sustained pushback from Public Citizen and frontline environmental and labor organizations, the draft standards continue to fall short of the rigor, credibility, and trustworthy governance needed to protect workers and communities around the world. As automakers continue to source new minerals, these new standards will shape environmental and labor outcomes.

Fighting the Fossil Fuel Power Grab

When Trump signed an executive order on Jan. 20, 2025, spuriously declaring an "energy emergency," Public Citizen was the first organization to identify and document the sweeping threats the declaration posed to clean energy development, consumer costs, and climate stability. Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen's Energy Program, criticized the move as an effort to halt progress on wind and solar projects while maximizing fossil fuel exports.

Throughout the year, Trump repeatedly invoked emergency powers to delay or stop renewable energy projects, including five offshore wind farms already under construction. Additionally, the Department of Energy brought retired fossil fuel power plants back online, reviv-

ing dirty coal and fossilized gas facilities that increase pollution and saddle customers with higher costs. Each action prompted regulatory and legal challenges from Public Citizen, which warned of the financial and environmental consequences for consumers.

Uniting to End Polluter Handouts

As Congress advanced a Republican-led budget reconciliation process, Public Citizen played a leading role in the United to End Polluter Handouts coalition. The reconciliation process allowed Congress to pass a disastrous domestic policy agenda, and the coalition focused on exposing how the legislation funneled new giveaways to fossil fuel companies. Coalition members analyzed the bill and uncovered new loopholes for polluters, including tax breaks for pipeline companies, gas exporters, and oil refiners, as well as cuts to penalties for methane pollution. Public Citizen worked with congressional allies to introduce amendments to stop the expansion of fossil fuel subsidies, protect clean energy jobs, and prevent electricity price increases for consumers.

Insurance in Crisis as Trump Rolls Back Financial Safeguards

The Trump administration's climate rollback extended beyond energy policy into financial regulation. Since January 2025, the Federal Reserve abruptly reversed course on addressing climate-related financial risk, abandoning years of progress in order to align with the administration's climate denial and pressure our European allies to follow suit.

That shift erased gains secured during the Biden administration, when regulators, including the Federal Reserve and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, had begun taking steps to protect the financial system from climate-driven instability. By summer, much of that progress had been dismantled. The regulatory retreat coincided with sharp increases in homeowners and renters insurance premiums nationwide, as insurers responded to mounting climate-related losses.

In response, Public Citizen and allies launched the Equitable & Just Insurance Initiative to confront the climate-driven insurance affordability crisis. Over the year, the Initiative released model legislation to increase transparency around rate hikes impacting consumers across the country.

In May, Arkush testified before the U.S. Senate on the economic toll of climate-fueled insurance premium increases. Public Citizen also published a series of interactive maps showing that the insurance crisis is not confined to hurricane-prone states; communities once considered low-risk are increasingly facing coverage gaps and unaffordable premiums.

Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Trump administration, extractive industries, and corporate interests will likely continue to attack key pillars of environmental and climate protection. Public Citizen's Climate and Energy teams will remain focused on accountability, coalition building, and policy advocacy to defend communities and advance a clean energy future that works for everyone. ■



Sen. Bernie Sanders speaks at the launch of the United to End Polluter Handouts campaign on Feb. 12, 2025 in the Capitol Visitors Center in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Paul Morigi/AP Content Services for United to End Polluter Handouts.

BIG TECH AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

On day one of Trump's second term, when Big Tech billionaires and CEOs lined up with the president and cabinet members for the inauguration ceremony, it was clear the administration would prioritize the profits of corporations generally – and Big Tech specifically – over protecting Americans. Public Citizen has been fighting on all fronts to protect the public from the corrupt collusion between the administration and Big Tech corporations whose billionaire executives have emerged as some of the authoritarian right's most egregious enablers.

This year, Public Citizen advocates testified before Congress about the risks of unregulated artificial intelligence systems, deregulated cryptocurrencies, and the crypto sector's ties to Trump's businesses, as well as the detrimental impacts on energy prices and local communities wrought by the power-hungry data centers required to power both.

We mobilized activists in October for a virtual national rally against legislation to deregulate crypto, helping to ensure maximum opposition, and led a coalition of more than 500 advocacy organizations, resulting in the historic defeat of a proposed moratorium on state AI regulation by a 99-1 vote in the U.S. Senate. Critical to this work was our heavily cited 50-state analysis detailing state AI laws that would be impacted by federal preemption.

Our advocacy further warned lawmakers about AI-related harms, including consumer scams, harms to the elderly, nonconsensual deepfakes, election interference through deepfakes, and discriminatory AI outputs.

Despite support from members of both major parties for regulating Big Tech and AI, Congress has failed to pass meaningful legislation. But at the state level, model legislation developed by Public Citizen and advanced by our outreach to state lawmakers is making a difference.

In 2025, we added two new model bills to our toolkit for legislators: one to protect children from emotionally manipulative AI companion products and one that addresses the use of AI in health care. These are in addition to our existing slate of model state AI bills to protect the public from nonconsensual intimate deepfakes, election deepfakes, and undisclosed chatbot interactions.

We have scored remarkable successes in state legislators on AI-related legislation. With Public Citizen leading the charge, more than half the states have adopted laws to make political deepfakes illegal. And virtually every state has adopted laws to make unauthorized intimate deepfakes illegal. All of these victories have come with bipartisan support.

But these state-level advances are being threatened. The overreaching executive order President Trump signed in December is a gift to Big Tech seeking to thwart the progress states have made. We're not going down without a fight – and we are leading efforts urging state officials to continue to pursue and defend commonsense AI laws that protect

consumers, civil rights, and children, regardless of federal intimidation.

We also have taken the fight directly to the administration, urging the Federal Trade Commission (along with Congress and OpenAI) to take down OpenAI's deepfake-generating Sora 2 and to conduct an antitrust investigation into the Meta-Scale AI acqui-hire scheme. And we launched a public accountability campaign against Elon Musk, xAI, and Grok, urging the U.S. government to terminate contracts with the platform due to antisemitic and racist outputs.

On the research front, our Corporate Enforcement Tracker and reports based on its data have thoroughly documented the diminishment of federal actions against corporate lawbreaking under Trump, with more than 160 cases seeing government investigations and enforcement lawsuits halted or withdrawn. Our Deleting Tech Enforcement report revealed that a quarter of the corporate enforcement actions the Trump administration halted or dropped were against technology businesses, especially crypto and financial technology businesses that had been facing enforcement by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).

Under Trump, the SEC's enforcement efforts have been severely weakened, and the CFPB has been subjected to a relentless campaign to destroy the consumer protection agency.

The report also highlighted how numerous industry insiders with ties to tech corporations have enmeshed themselves within the administration and how corporate efforts to evade accountability are part of why so many executives, including Apple's Tim Cook, Meta's Mark Zuckerberg, and Nvidia's Jensen Huang, are going out of their way to pander to the president.

Our research on harmful AI companion products shows how important it is to protect state authority to hold reckless Big Tech corporations accountable. The newly released Counterfeit Companions report reveals the harms these products inflict – including psychological harms and their association with 10 suicide deaths so far – and points to Public Citizen's model legislation as an avenue for protecting vulnerable young users.

Finally, our Robo-Trump report put a dollar amount on the tech industry's influence spending: we counted more than \$1 billion in election and lobbying spending – plus spending on Trump's inauguration and the "Golden Ballroom" for the East Wing of the White House (see story on page 1).

These ongoing efforts are essential for continually exposing the web of corruption between Big Tech and the Trump White House, demonstrating that the administration takes every opportunity it gets to prioritize the interests of billionaires and corporations over the American public. ■



Graphic courtesy of Shutterstock.

GLOBALIZATION & TRADE

In a single year, everything changed. As in 2016, Donald Trump exploited legitimate grievances with an unjust global trading system, converting them into a mandate for disruption, cronyism, and perpetual trade chaos. In 2025, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch (GTW) built a growing movement to resist Trump's authoritarian agenda and advance a just global economy.

The Truth About Tariffs

Decades of so-called free trade killed good jobs in America, exploited workers, accelerated the climate crisis, and left consumers vulnerable to shocks of overly concentrated supply chains. Tariffs can help protect jobs and industries from unfair competition – when used strategically. Trump's erratic approach is neither targeted nor principled. His sweeping tariffs are designed not to benefit working people, but to coerce other countries into accepting an imperialist, pro-corporate agenda.

To counter Trump's misinformation and expose corruption, we developed tariff explainers and talking points for allies new to progressive trade advocacy and published accessible versions for the public. We released a report documenting tariff-related corruption during Trump's first term, later cited in a letter from 50 members of Congress. That work was followed by an article detailing how Trump weaponized tariffs to benefit Elon Musk's companies abroad, and another exposing the corporate wish list behind Trump's whirlwind of tariffs and trade deals.

The Global Resistance

Throughout the year, Global Trade Watch served as "Trump chaos translator" for international partners, joining late-night calls to break down developments and share resistance strategies.

We worked with global allies to defend digital and environmental regulations targeted by the administration, landmark policies the U.S. would be smart to emulate rather than undermine. In a joint op-ed with U.K. allies published in Al Jazeera, we urged countries not to negotiate with a bully, but to stand firm against extortion. That message was amplified through international webinars and a global statement of solidarity with communities coerced by U.S. trade pressure.

NAFTA 2.0 is Back

Trump continues to rail against jobs being offshored to Mexico – an implicit acknowledgement that his first-term renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) failed to fix this problem. That deal is now up for its six-year mandatory review, presenting an important opportunity to demand changes that would genuinely benefit people and the planet.

We worked with allies to outline a set of priorities endorsed by nearly 700 organizations and mobilized more than 140 members of Congress to send letters to the administration, pressing for improvements in the pact.

As Trump scapegoats immigrants and ICE terrorizes communities, GTW partnered with the migrant justice organization National Partnership for New Americans to examine the root causes of migration. Our landmark report, "Exporting Instability, Importing Exploitation," shows how corporate-driven trade agreements strip people of their livelihoods, forcing them to migrate for survival. Once in the United States, migrants are criminalized, funneled into exploitative industries, and detained in for-profit prisons.

Fighting Big Tech's Agenda

Since the tech billionaire-studded 2025 inauguration, the administration has carried water for Big Tech by weaponizing tariff negotiations to strong-arm countries away from fair regulations and taxes and toward anti-worker, anti-consumer, and anti-civil rights "digital trade" rules. These rules undermine protections for gig workers and erode anti-discrimination, antitrust, corporate liability, and privacy safeguards.

Public Citizen mapped more than 100 laws and regulations in 45 countries, including rules on data privacy, AI accountability, digital taxes, and anti-monopoly laws, that Big Tech lobbyists have urged U.S. trade negotiators to target in Trump's secretive trade deals. In a report and a widely viewed video, we showed how Trump's deregulatory agenda serves Big Tech at the expense of consumers, workers, and

small businesses.

Our Climate Goals

Trump is aggressively pursuing critical minerals deals not to support clean energy jobs, but purportedly to shore up "national security" and pursue AI dominance. His administration has advanced "minerals for security" deals with Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while pressuring Malaysia, Indonesia, and other countries into one-sided arrangements in response to his punitive tariffs.

The global minerals supply chain is rife with human rights abuses, including the displacement of Indigenous communities, forced labor, and environmental destruction. As Trump seeks control over these natural resources, GTW has fought for accountability, transparency, and strong labor and environmental standards. We helped organize a delegation of Congolese human rights defenders to meet with members of Congress, supported a letter from 50 House members demanding oversight of negotiations with the DRC, and developed recommendations for critical minerals "deals" alongside 30 environmental and human rights organizations.

We also continued our work to dismantle Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), which empowers multinational corporations to sue governments for unlimited taxpayer-funded damages. GTW supported delegations from affected communities in Ecuador and Mexico, amplifying voices often excluded from trade policy discussions.

Looking Ahead

These bleak times call for visionary ideas. Public Citizen's fight against tyranny rests on the belief that a bold progressive platform inspires not just hope, but action. Trump took office by exploiting real frustrations with a deeply unequal global economy, yet his trade agenda serves only himself and his billionaire allies. That cynicism finds no purchase here. In the year ahead, this movement will not only resist but work to make our vision of equity and justice for all a reality. ■



Photo courtesy of Satya Bumi.

Public Citizen's Texas office powered through another whirlwind year packed with three sessions of the Texas Legislature (a regular session plus two special sessions) and an expanding slate of local battles led by a growing team determined to build a healthier Texas.

At the Legislature

The Texas Legislature drew national attention in August when lawmakers caved to President Donald Trump's demands and redrew congressional district lines in a bid to ensure a Republican majority in the U.S. House. But that wasn't the only drama under the dome.

Public Citizen helped advance stronger protections against nonconsensual intimate deepfakes, or AI-generated sexual images and videos created without a person's consent, which disproportionately target women and children. Those long-needed bills were signed into law.

On environmental issues, Public Citizen successfully pushed for a budget item to fund particulate matter monitoring in certain counties.

San Antonio

San Antonio continues its rapid expansion – and with that growth come fresh challenges layered on top of old, stubborn ones. On the city's South Side, industrial facilities sit within the same ZIP codes as residential neighborhoods. Among the most concerning are auto parts and metal recyclers that pollute the air and have been the site of dangerous fires. For more than a year, Public Citizen San Antonio organizer Debra Ponce worked with residents and some industry representatives to overhaul the city's rules governing these recyclers. In June, the city adopted updated ordinances that strengthened fire-prevention requirements, improved zoning rules, and added new protections for nearby communities.

Also in San Antonio, August brought Public Citizen's environmental justice bus tour, where residents, elected officials and reporters boarded a bus to see firsthand the environmental burdens many communities face daily. That kind of visibility is exactly what Public Citizen believes spurs meaningful change.

Austin

In Austin, Public Citizen continues to notch victories on issues that the Republican-controlled Legislature refuses to touch. The city kicked off 2025 with a new initiative – the Solar Standard Offer Program – which lets property owners host rooftop solar systems without spending their own money. Solar developers lease the roof space, build and operate the systems, and sell the power directly to Austin Energy. The resulting boost in local solar capacity will help expand Austin Energy's

popular Community Solar Program, which allows residents to opt into solar power without installing their own panels. This first-of-its-kind approach highlights just one of the options available to meet the energy needs of a fast-growing city.

Houston

The Houston area faces serious air-quality threats, and concrete batch plants remain among the most harmful sources of particulate pollution – especially for children, seniors, and people with respiratory illnesses. This year, Public Citizen secured two major victories against the concrete batch plant industry. In January, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) denied a permit for a proposed plant in Fort Bend County after strong community mobilization led by Public Citizen. Then, in September, the TCEQ voided the permit for a proposed concrete-crushing plant in the same county.

Meanwhile, in Harris County, commissioners passed the county's first regional climate justice plan – a milestone for the state's most populous county.

Statewide

Across Texas, Public Citizen launched new watchdog efforts to hold state regulators accountable while continuing the push for clean, affordable, and reliable energy.

In April, we rolled out our TCEQ Watchdog Campaign, with Kathryn Guerra – a former TCEQ staffer and current chair of the Dallas Environmental Commission – leading the effort. The initiative helps Texans understand how the agency operates and spotlight where it falls short of its mission. Texans broadly view the TCEQ as ineffective, and the state's own 2022 review famously labeled it a "reluctant regulator." Restoring public trust and holding corporate polluters accountable requires transparency and scrutiny.

Statewide, Public Citizen has also been supporting communities actively resisting what has been dubbed the Texas Gas Rush. In 2023, the Legislature created the Texas Energy Fund to increase electricity supply in a state with growing demand and a grid still scarred by the failures of Winter Storm Uri. Instead of centering cleaner and more affordable options, lawmakers doubled down on fracked gas, sending low-interest loans and grants to utilities and private companies building or expanding power plants.

But communities are fighting back – and winning. In Granbury, residents won the right to challenge the air permit for a proposed gas-fired power plant. In Sugar Land, city officials scrapped another project after months of organized opposition supported by Public Citizen. ■



Photo of a SUN DAY event in Texas courtesy of Kaiba White.

Public Citizen salutes...

the extraordinary generosity and commitment of our donors, who make our mission and goals their own. This list includes 2023 leadership donations.

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen

On the Trump family's business ties to Saudi Arabia: *The New York Times*. **On Stephen Miller's stock sale:** *The New York Times*. **On Netflix v. Paramount Warner Brothers acquisition:** *Bloomberg*. **On Democrats ramping up probes into Trump's \$300 million White House ballroom:** *The Washington Post*. **On an executive order that would seek to preempt state laws on AI:** *Reuters*. **On the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE):** *Axios*. **On OpenAI's new business structure and partnership with Microsoft:** *Associated Press*, *San Francisco Examiner*. **On AI-fueled disinformation:** *Politico*. **On Trump's sale of F-35s:** *Common Dreams*. **On Trump's order against state AI regulations:** *Common Dreams*.

Lisa Gilbert, co-president of

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On Trump's Venezuelan boat strikes: *USA Today*. **On Trump being stuck in a gilded White House bubble:** *Talking Points Memo*. **On Trump's plans to further dismantle the Department of Education:** *Scripps News*.

Public Citizen's Litigation Group

On the months-long legal battle to save foreign aid: *The New York Times*. **On campaign spending limits:** *ABC News*, *Roll Call*. **On an ex-Amazon driver suing a civil rights agency for dropping her case:** *Associated Press*, *Reuters*. **On a lawsuit against the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission:** *The Nation*. **On states and cities challenging Trump's policy overhauling public service loan forgiveness:** *Associated Press*. **On challenging grant terminations and RFK's**

horrendous vaccine policies:

***The Nation*. On an Amazon driver's ability to sue over dropped EEOC Probe:** *Bloomberg*. **On the Trump administration violating the First Amendment with out-of-office messages:** *The Hill*. **On the Education Department's partisan employee email messages:** *Politico*.

Dr. Robert Steinbrook, director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group

On the hidden trade-offs of the CNPV Pilot Program: *Pharmaceutical Technology*. **On calls to pull COVID-19 vaccines:** *Axios*.

Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen's Energy Program

On America's fossil fuel ambitions driving up consumers' energy bills: *Mother Jones*, *Inside*

Climate News. On Virginia's gas industry: *E&E News*. **On Energy Secretary Chris Wright fully embracing Donald Trump's war on renewables:** *E&E News*.

On heat aids lagging as temperatures drop and electric bills soar: *USA Today*. **On natural gas prices increasing:** *Forbes*. **On Trump's surging LNG exports:** *Common Dreams*.

J.B. Branch, Big Tech accountability advocate

On AI video app Sora's deepfake dangers: *Associated Press*, *Inside AI Policy*. **On severe internet outages:** *NBC News*. **On Trump's effort to block states from regulating AI:** *CNN*. **On AI chatbots talking to kids:** *The Hill*. **On AI toys:** *Fox 56*. **On increased AI propaganda and harassment by OpenAI's Sora 2:** *Common Dreams*.

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