



**VOL. 45, NO. 4**  
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# PUBLICCITIZEN NEWS

## GOP Budget Bill Trades Life for Death

BY SAVANNAH WOOTEN

The Republican-led Congress has just decided to sacrifice health insurance coverage and food aid for millions of Americans in order to splurge more on war and deportations. That's the direct trade-off contained in Donald Trump's now-enacted tax and budget reconciliation bill.

The state-by-state breakdown of this horror is outlined in a May report published by Public Citizen and the Institute for Policy Studies. "Trading Life for Death: What the Reconciliation Bill Puts at Stake in Your State" examines the hundreds of billions of dollars proposed in the special, filibuster-proof GOP-led budget reconciliation bill championed by

President Trump that go toward unneeded, wasteful programs for the Pentagon and increasingly militarized immigration enforcement operations.

The reconciliation package includes \$150 billion for the Pentagon and war and \$170 billion for mass detention and deportations. More than \$100 billion of the Pentagon spending will be allocated in the next fiscal year, as will \$43.8 billion of deportation funding. With that extra spending for the Pentagon, the nation could see its first \$1 trillion Pentagon budget along with triple annual spending on mass detention of immigrants.

Congress allocating massive

see **Budget Bill**, page 4 ►



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

## Fighting the Cruel, Ugly Oil Billionaire Bamboozle

BY ALAN ZIBEL

President Donald Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress are reversing years of recent climate progress by enacting sweeping domestic policy legislation that would enrich fossil fuel billionaires and Trump cronies at our expense.

Meanwhile, a large coalition of progressive, environmental, and grassroots activists is shining a spotlight on the ruinous fossil fuel giveaways enacted by Republicans in early July – and planning to fight back in the future. The United to End Polluter Handouts coalition, established in early 2025, includes Public Citizen and dozens of allies in the progres-

sive movement, including Friends of the Earth, Sierra Club, Sunrise Movement, Our Revolution, and many others.

In June, the groups created a new campaign called Families Over Big Oil, to bring this fight to Capitol Hill and to lawmakers' home districts. Families Over Big Oil is highlighting the realities that families across the country face as they struggle to afford groceries, child care, rent, and healthcare, while fossil fuel CEOs are raking in massive profits thanks to taxpayer subsidies.

Over the summer, the campaign ran billboard and online ads in states with Republican senators,

including Maine, North Carolina, Kansas, and Utah, educating the public on new giveaways to oil and gas companies included in the Republican budget and tax bill – on top of the \$170 billion in taxpayer-funded subsidies the industry already was slated to receive over the next decade.

The massive cuts to health care and food assistance programs included in the GOP bill will provide a gigantic tax cut for the wealthiest Americans, and sacrifice America's clean energy transition to pay for tax breaks and handouts for polluters.

"Congressional Republicans and President Trump are once

see **Bamboozle**, page 4 ►

## Public Citizen Sues USDA to Restore National Hunger Hotline

BY ALLISON ZIEVE



Since 1994, the National Hunger Hotline has helped to connect food-insecure and low-income Americans with vital food assistance resources, such as SNAP and WIC benefits, food pantries, soup kitchens, and summer meals sites for children. For more than 10 years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has contracted

see **USDA**, page 12 ►



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## GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN ALEX MCCOY

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers



Alexander McCoy is a U.S. Marine veteran and skilled advocate with experience working both within and outside of government to effect change. Since completing his service with the military, he has held staff positions in Congress, the New York State Senate, and several organizations such as NextGen America. In 2016, McCoy aided in the successful passage of The Fairness for Veterans Act, which reformed the military discharge appeals process to provide a presumption in favor of veterans who subsequently received specific trauma diagnoses. Later, he co-founded the advocacy organization Common Defense, the largest grassroots movement of progressive veterans standing up for their communities. At Public Citizen, where McCoy works as senior advisor to the climate program, he is invested in toppling the reign of fossil fuel companies. In his spare time, he enjoys volunteering with fellow veterans and attending renaissance fairs in South Carolina in his full suit of armor. McCoy works remotely for Public Citizen, out of Orlando, Fla.

### Why did you enlist in the Marine Corps?

**McCoy:** I'm the fourth consecutive generation of the male line of my family to have served in the military, and in that respect, it's sort of the family business. The military was an opportunity for me to make something of myself and a way to feel like I was able to do something worthwhile. So, I joined the Marine Corps in January 2008 despite disagreeing with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I was shaped by my six years in uniform in a lot of ways. I was serving during the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, which was repealed while I was in uniform. That was a formative experience because it showed me how disconnected the debate in Congress was from

the actual experience of ordinary people like me and my fellow Marines, and instilled in me the importance of civic engagement. I didn't want to be used as a political prop by people who wanted to keep in place a harmful status quo.

### How does your experience working inside the government compare to working at a nonprofit?

**McCoy:** My experience working within government is that even when you're working in an official capacity, understanding that for policymakers, elections are always in the back of their mind. I think that it is easy in the advocacy world to forget about that dynamic, particularly in organizations that do not have an electoral arm. So you have to demonstrate that what you're asking for has broad support, emphasize how it impacts their own constituents, and think about the ways they might be attacked by their opposition during the next election if they do what you are asking.

### What does your role with Public Citizen look like day-to-day?

**McCoy:** My team's objective is to hold fossil fuel corporations accountable through the legal system when we identify instances where their conduct may constitute criminal violations of the law. My specific role involves engaging with the local community to learn what their experiences have been, and supporting the efforts of that community to make polluters pay for the damage they have caused.

### Who is someone you look up to and why?

**McCoy:** Jane McAlevey, a labor union organizer, has a foundational model of organizing, of differentiating between "are we simply mobilizing the people who already agree with us over and over," and "are we genuinely talking to the people who do not yet agree with us but could?" She mentored a generation of labor union organizers, and challenged us to unify all workers in a workplace. I think Americans across the ideological spectrum share a lot of the same values.

— Compiled by Claire Simon ■

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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.

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Lisa Gilbert and Robert Weissman

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## The Cost of Cruelty: Trump's Big New Bill for Billionaires

Donald Trump and Congressional Republicans have just passed a monstrosity of a bill that may constitute the single biggest upward transfer of wealth in American history and is certainly one of the cruelest bills in our nation's history.

While we weren't able to block passage of the tax and budget "reconciliation" bill, we're committed

disease and ailments, defer care and, when they do get care, pay far more out of pocket. Health researchers estimate the lost health insurance and other measures will cost 50,000 lives every year. Medicaid and health cuts will trigger hundreds of rural hospital closures and the forced shutdown of thousands of community health centers. Meanwhile, food

assistance cuts put at risk upwards of 5 million Americans going hungry.

The bill aims to supercharge the Trump administration's inhumane industrial deportation policy, providing \$150 billion for more horrific detention centers of the kind MAGA is now gleefully celebrating

in Florida, as well as more ICE agents.

While using waste, fraud, and abuse as the fraudulent excuse to slash funding for programs for low-income Americans, the bill showers \$150 billion in additional spending on the Pentagon,

by far the most wasteful government agency. The vast portion of that will go to enrich Pentagon contractors, including tens of billions for a "Golden Dome" missile defense system that can't work and would make the world more dangerous if it could.

Big Pharma came in at the last minute and got its share of the goodies, scoring changes to Medicare drug price negotiations that will cost taxpayers \$5 billion.

As if all that weren't enough, the bill races the United States and the world toward climate catastrophe by ending support for renewable energy that is absolutely vital to avert worst case climate scenarios. Those cuts will lead directly to higher electricity prices for consumers. Incredibly, Republicans have also conferred \$18 billion in new tax subsidies to the fossil fuel industry.

The counterproductive cuts in the bill serve one primary purpose: to offset the \$4 trillion in tax cuts that will disproportionately benefit billionaires and corporations. It's the humble view of Public Citizen that the 800 billionaires in the United States and 12 100-billionaires don't need any

special help.

It's just common sense that we have to work as hard as we can to undo this disaster, which will unfurl over the next several years.

But to motivate people to action, we need to do more than demand repeal of this legislation. Health care was a mess before reconciliation. We need to restore Medicaid coverage – but we also need to work progressively to expand coverage to all, and to crack down on Big Pharma price gouging and more. We need to restore the renewable energy programs that were repealed, but we also need much more aggressive measures to avert climate crisis. We need to end these tax cuts for billionaires – but we also need much higher taxes on billionaires, corporations, and an end to corporate tax subsidies.

We have no illusions that this will be easy. But, equally, we're certain that it's achievable, with enough vision, organizing, and commitment. ■

*Lisa Gilbert*  
*Robert Weissman*



**CO-PRESIDENTS' VIEW**  
**LISA GILBERT AND ROBERT WEISSMAN**

to holding supporters of the bill accountable. We are committed to working for – and winning – its repeal. But we're not going to be satisfied just with repeal. We plan to push hard in the other direction – to demand expansion of government programs in exactly the areas where the reconciliation bill imposes cuts (and vice versa).

As indicated in several stories in this issue, we worked on multiple fronts in the reconciliation fight. In addition to our work on Pentagon spending and oil and gas subsidies described in stories by Savannah Wooten and Alan Zibel, we mobilized grassroots opposition to the bill's health care provisions and tax components. And we coordinated a "meta-coalition" bringing together coalitions working on tax fairness, human needs, environmental protection, immigration rights, and Pentagon spending.

There sure is a lot to hate about this legislation.

It backtracks on the country's painfully slow history of expanding health care coverage and, equally remarkably, takes food away from the hungry. The bill will strip health coverage from 17 million Americans. We know what lost health insurance means: people will go without care they need, skip preventative services, suffer needlessly from



President Donald Trump speaks with Cabinet members and others after signing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act on the South Lawn of the White House, Friday, July 4, 2025, during the 4th of July picnic. Photo courtesy of The White House / Flickr.



loads of taxpayer dollars to militarized spending is not new, but stealing directly from urgent human needs programs to pay for the boost is. Republicans “paid for” their spending priorities by cutting human needs spending directly, including on Medicaid and food support (SNAP benefits).

“The Republican Congress chose to shower money on weapons and surveillance companies and decided to pay for it by slashing health care and food assistance for the nation’s most vulnerable people,” said Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman. “The nation will be weaker and more cruel as a result.”

To see the impact of the reconciliation package’s breakdown up close, take one state as an example. In North Carolina, the amount of North Carolina tax dollars allocated for militarized spending in the reconciliation package could instead keep 799,533 adults on Medicaid; maintain SNAP benefits for 1,780,156 recipients; or cover

**“The Republican Congress chose to shower money on weapons and surveillance companies and decided to pay for it by slashing health care and food assistance for the nation’s most vulnerable people.”**

— Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman

the Child Tax Credit for 1,886,025 children.

Losing so much funding for these programs will devastate millions of the most vulnerable Americans, all to pour billions more into an agency that already has a nearly \$900 billion annual budget and has never once passed an audit. The United States spends well over three times what China spends on its military every year — and more than the next nine countries combined.

Even though the Pentagon budget makes up roughly half of U.S. discretionary spending, the Elon Musk-inspired “Department of Government Efficiency” hasn’t touched the U.S. Department of Defense. Its infamous cost overruns and billions of self-identified budget waste would have been an easy target, but the Pentagon

is heavily protected by corporate interests. Military-industrial contractors defend their own record-breaking profits year after year by lobbying members of Congress to increase the Pentagon budget by billions, with little to no regard for actual “security.”

This is out of step with what everyday Americans want from Congress. In fact, U.S. respondents rank military investments dead last in polls about what would make them feel more secure, instead favoring investments in health care protection against public health threats like the COVID-19 pandemic, and renewable energy.

Surveillance tech and defense contractor CEOs will be among the biggest winners from the reconciliation package. Money clawed away from Medicaid and SNAP for militarization will pay for new warships,

advanced fleets of killer robots for U.S. armed forces, increased detentions and border enforcement, and President Trump’s “Golden Dome” vanity project, an ill-conceived missile defense system that will cost hundreds of billions and could funnel federal funds straight into Silicon Valley firms like Palantir, Anduril, and Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

Public Citizen’s report reminds the public that the reconciliation bill is premised on an utterly false choice. The politicians claiming to prioritize fiscal responsibility could have easily spared some of those who will lose Medicaid or SNAP benefits, by removing their militarized add-ons or cutting existing Pentagon waste. But they made a completely different choice. ■

again choosing to put wealthy fossil fuel corporations and billionaires over working families,” said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. “This deadly budget bill promotes fossil fuel drilling, public lands giveaways and other handouts all while slashing support for domestic clean energy technologies, throwing away good-paying U.S. manufacturing jobs, and driving up consumers’ energy bills.”

Public Citizen has played an instrumental role in exposing how fossil fuel polluters profit as a result of the new loopholes and giveaways in the budget bill, which contains \$18 billion in new tax giveaways to polluters. The bill would:

- **Sabotage the clean energy transition** by stalling the advancement of renewable energy technologies and ending electric vehicle tax credits to pay for handouts to the oil and gas industry, even though Republican-leaning states benefit from these programs.
- **Encourage false solutions** by giving oil and gas companies an expanded tax break to capture carbon from power plants and other industrial sources, even if they use the captured carbon to stimulate more oil production.
- **Provide instant tax cuts for pipeline companies,**

gas exporters, and oil refiners by extending a corporate tax break for major capital expenses, which has been a major priority of Big Oil and Big Tech lobbyists.

- **Cut fees for drilling on public lands and waters**, which could cost taxpayers \$6 billion over the next decade.
- **Get rid of a fee for methane pollution** that would have penalized the worst emitters of this potent greenhouse gas.
- **Allow oil and gas drillers to limit the impact** of a 15% minimum corporate tax, or avoid it entirely.

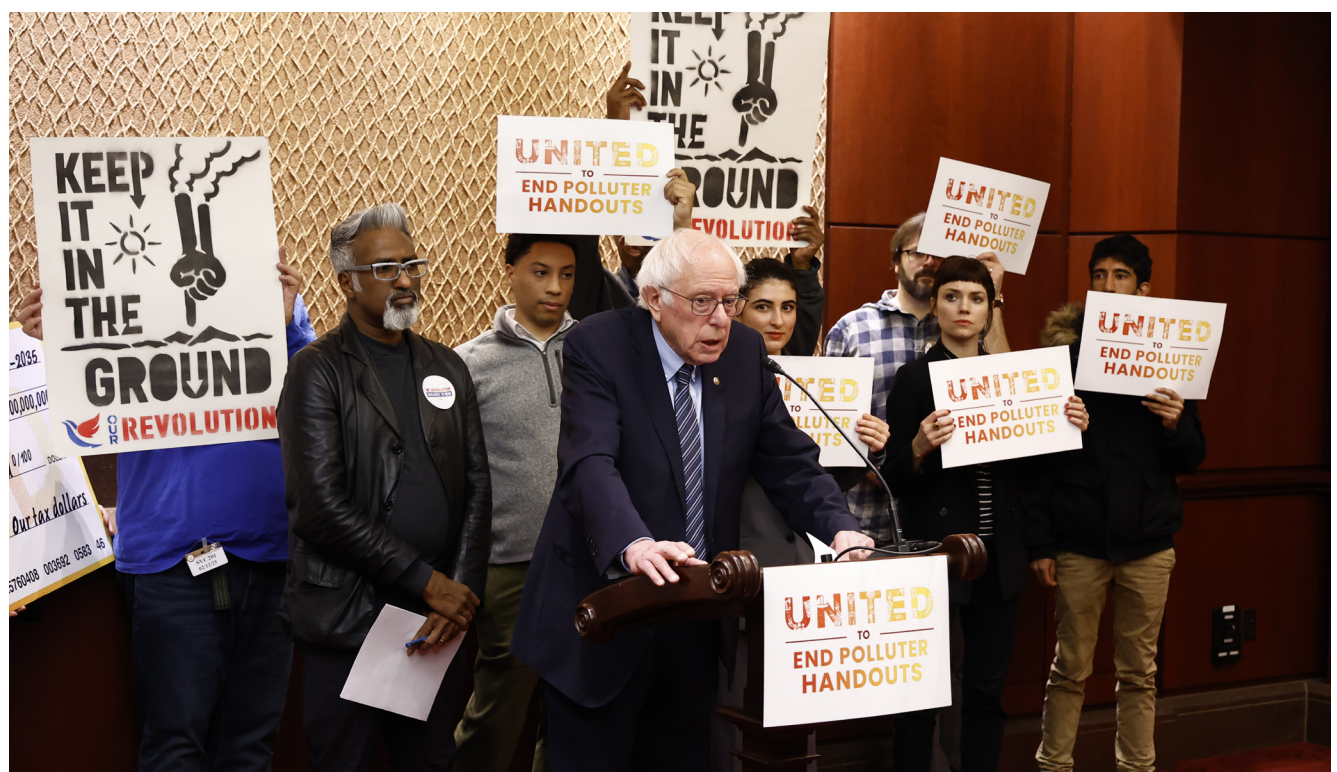
- **Prop up the ultra-dirty coal industry**, despite declining production for the past two decades.

The Republican budget bill repeals most of President Joe Biden’s signature Inflation Reduction Act, slashes incentives for consumers to save money on their electricity bills and buy clean cars, and is likely to increase household energy costs by up to \$415 per year, on average, by 2035.

The winners in this big, ugly legislation are likely to include several CEOs who attended an April 2024 dinner in Florida, during which Donald Trump asked oil

barons for \$1 billion in campaign cash. Some fossil fuel executives attended a Trump fundraising lunch in Houston one month later.

“This is certainly one of the cruelest bills in American history, backtracking on the country’s painfully slow history of expanding health care coverage and, equally remarkably, taking food away from the hungry,” Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman said. “As if all that weren’t enough, the bill races the United States and the world toward climate catastrophe by ending support for renewable energy that is vital to avert worst-case climate scenarios.” ■



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.



# WHO Pandemic Agreement Addresses Global Pandemic Preparedness

BY ANDREW STORINO

On May 20, the World Health Organization (WHO) made history by adopting the Pandemic Agreement with overwhelming support from WHO member states. By approving this new international accord, countries laid the groundwork for action during future global public health emergencies, making disease prevention efforts more collaborative and disease responses more equitable. The agreement promotes spending on pandemic preparedness and research, creates obligations toward clinical trial populations, facilitates reporting on global supply chains of pandemic-related goods, and requires signees to develop national policies supporting equitable access to pandemic products developed with public money. The Pandemic Agreement marks the first commitment to these obligations for pandemics in an internationally binding treaty, and will enter into force once ratified by 60 countries.

The Agreement includes a provision requiring signees to donate at least 10% of pandemic-related health products to the WHO in the event of a health crisis, and make an additional 10% available at affordable prices. If this obligation had existed during COVID vaccine rollout, models suggest low-income countries (LICs) could have fully vaccinated their populations with one dose within 19 months of the vaccines' approval. The reality was much darker: only 60% of people in LICs were vaccinated with a single dose in that period.

Amid growing nationalism and decreased foreign assistance spending, there is broad consensus that the Pandemic Agreement represents a major victory for a vision of global cooperation and

solidarity.

"Trump's funding cuts to WHO and beyond threaten millions of lives," said Peter Maybarduk, director of Public Citizen's Access to Medicines group. "But even in this time of scarcity, countries came together to negotiate a landmark agreement that has the potential to protect everyone from pandemics. Getting there will take new political and funding commitments, and people continuing to work together across borders."

Much of the work to come will center on the Pathogen and Benefit-Sharing System (PABS) annex to Article 12 of the Agreement, set to be negotiated over the next year. The annex will clarify which pathogens the Agreement will apply to, whether different forms of scientific information will be shared in the same way under the agreement, how "affordable prices" are defined, and create a financial and legal structure for pathogen and benefit sharing. Once the annex is finalized, the Agreement will be opened for signature by heads of state and proceed to national ratification processes.

The tension between intellectual property rights enforcement and equitable access to health tools complicated negotiations from the start. Developing countries overwhelmingly supported strong provisions for access to knowledge and technology, while wealthy nations generally objected to any requirements to share knowledge or technologies. Earlier versions of the agreement included formal obligations to share knowledge, skills, and expertise for the production of pandemic-related health products. While the final version promotes knowledge-sharing only "as mutually agreed" by both parties,

it importantly does not preclude countries from using non-voluntary measures to facilitate access to technology and manufacturing information essential during a pandemic response.

Extraordinary opposition from the pharmaceutical industry further widened policy divides between wealthy countries and developing countries. Research by Public Citizen showed that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which counts several of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies among its members, sent 49 lobbyists to influence the Pandemic Agreement last year. BIO, another major pharmaceutical lobbying group, hired 16 lobbyists for the same purpose.

Major conservative groups, including the Heritage Foundation and the Association of Republican Governors, also opposed the Agreement. Peddling disinformation that it violated national sovereignty, states' rights, and even constitutionally protected freedoms of assembly, privacy, and speech, these groups took up the cause long championed by anti-vaccine activists, who used conspiracy theories and public demonstrations to disrupt negotiations from the Agreement's earliest stages.

As WHO members celebrated the Agreement's passage in Geneva this spring, the United States was notably absent from the negotiating table. President Donald Trump reinitiated the U.S. withdrawal from the WHO in January 2025, alongside a slew of cuts to foreign aid, global health funding, and medical research. Nonetheless, the U.S. retains the opportunity to sign on to and ratify the Agreement in the future.

U.S. support earlier in the negotiation process helped propel

Europe toward better positions on key topics, including commitments to global access conditions in publicly funded research and development agreements, and moved the Pandemic Agreement toward adoption. Public Citizen illuminated how domestic law and practice allowed the U.S. to be more accommodating to provisions requested by developing countries. Public Citizen's comments to the HHS demonstrated that the United States' could reaffirm flexibilities under the 2001 Doha Declaration. That language remains in the final draft.

COVID-19 and mpox make clear that international health emergencies and unequal access to vital technologies combine to produce horrific inequity: By November 2022, over 60% of people in high-income countries had received Covid booster shots, while in low-income countries only 23% had received a single dose and less than 2% had received boosters. A new report by Public Citizen shows that during the 2022-23 mpox emergency, the U.S. had 5.7 times more doses than the entire African continent currently has to respond to an ongoing mpox emergency that began in 2024, despite the fact that Africa had 69 cases for every case that the U.S. had at a similar point during the previous outbreak.

These statistics paint a grim picture of equity in a time of global health emergencies. But the Pandemic Agreement lays a foundation for a path forward, and the fight is not over. Negotiations on the Agreement's annex, and the implementation of the Agreement itself, must ensure that the victories gained in Geneva are realized not only on paper, but in practice. ■

## The Republicans' Anti-Regulatory Agenda

BY ELIZABETH SKERRY

The White House and congressional Republicans are pushing an anti-regulatory agenda at warp speed that threatens public health and safety as well as long standing norms of legislative and regulatory procedure. Public Citizen is exposing how this is all being done to benefit Big Business, Big Banks, Big Polluters,

Big Pharma, and Big Tech at the public's expense.

One powerful anti-regulatory tool Republicans used this Congress to advance a corporate agenda is the Congressional Review Act (CRA). The CRA allows Congress to override final agency actions, such as rules that ensure clean air and water. Under the CRA, Congress can undo rules by

passing a resolution of disapproval in both chambers – which only requires a simple majority in the Senate – that is then signed by the president. Typically, bills must overcome the filibuster with a 60-vote supermajority to pass in the Senate. The CRA offers the opportunity to sidestep the filibuster.

For example, in a handout to

Big Polluters, Senate Republicans in May used the CRA to invalidate Clean Air Act waivers issued to California by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The waivers have long allowed California to establish protective pollution standards for auto fuel efficiency and other measures without being preempted by the

see [Anti-Regulatory](#), page 6 ►



# Sleepless and Unsafe: Why Resident Work Hours Need Reform Now

BY NINA ZELDES

Would you want a medical professional who hasn't gotten decent sleep in a week to perform a procedure on you? No, neither would we. So, on May 20, Public Citizen and the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), an international organization representing over 30,000 physicians-in-training, filed petitions with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to issue reasonable work-hours standards for resident physicians – to protect both the physicians and their patients.

Resident physicians – physicians who finished medical school and are pursuing residency and specialty training – have an important role in health care delivery across the U.S. and provide a large proportion of direct care in teaching hospitals, which in turn provide most of the hospital care for Medicare beneficiaries. However, because of long work hour requirements during their residency training, resident physicians are often sleep-deprived and fatigued. Long work hours pose risks not only for their own health and safety but also for the patients in their care.

U.S. resident physicians work far longer than their counterparts in many other countries; some can be required to work up to 88 hours per week. (These long hours are averaged over four weeks, which means that many resident physi-

cians work even longer hours in a single week.) Junior doctors can also be required to work extended shifts that may last up to 28 consecutive hours, during which they may get little or no sleep. Since the work hour limits may not be adequately enforced, many resident physicians may end up working even longer per week or per shift.

Most people would not want to be cared for by resident physicians who have worked such long hours. And with good reason: Studies have repeatedly shown that after extended overnight shifts with little or no sleep, resident physicians were more likely to report serious medical errors, attentional failures, and higher complication rates than resident physicians who received adequate rest.

In Public Citizen's petition, the organization called for a limit of 80 hours per work week, without averaging, and a limit of 16 consecutive hours worked in one shift, without exceptions. The group also requested regulations focusing on time off work or number of night shifts, and requested that the regulations be strictly enforced.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act – which guarantees a right to “safe and healthful working conditions” to all employees – was enacted in 1970. Under the act, resident physicians should have already been protected from unsafe working conditions. Sleep deprivation and fatigue are

not only risk factors for short- and long-term health concerns (such as cardiovascular disease), but also increase the risk of needlestick injuries, motor vehicle crashes and depression, burnout and other mental health conditions. Pregnant resident physicians are at a higher risk of pregnancy complications.

Traditionally, the long hours worked during medical training have been viewed as preparing junior doctors for the hard work and dedication necessary for medical practice. However, after carefully reviewing numerous studies on this topic, Public Citizen found no evidence that excessive work hours are a necessary part of medical training. For this reason, we petitioned OSHA to protect resident physicians and the patients in their care from unsafe workplace conditions, similar to the protections granted to truck drivers, rail engineers, and pilots. Unfortunately, this is not the first time Public Citizen has urged work hour limitations for resident physicians; we unsuccessfully petitioned OSHA twice before, in 2001 and 2010.

“In 2025, there is no reason for resident physicians to have excessive work hours and shifts beyond 16 consecutive hours,” said Robert Steinbrook, M.D., director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group. “Excessive work hours are a relic of another era, not a necessary part of medical training.”

At present, work hour regulations for resident physicians are

set by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), an independent, not-for-profit organization, that both implements and monitors the work-hour standards. Although there have been improvements, the ACGME standards still fall short of what experts deem necessary for the health and safety of resident physicians and the patients in their care. To make matters worse, in 2017, when the ACGME last updated resident physician work hour standards, some of the improvements were rolled back.

“We continue to believe that OSHA is responsible for ensuring that resident physicians are protected by federal labor law,” Steinbrook said. “We also petitioned CMS, which is both the main funder of residency programs and the largest payer for health care in the U.S. CMS has an essential role in protecting the safety of Medicare beneficiaries.”

Previous work hour limits have been demonstrated to be an effective tool to address the safety concerns of resident physicians and patients associated with excessive hours of medical training. Studies have shown that limiting work hours does not negatively affect medical training opportunities or patient care. If OSHA and CMS adopt the evidence-based work hour standards outlined in our petition, the well-being of resident physicians and the safety of their patients will improve. ■

## ► Anti-Regulatory, from page 5

Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) national standards. The Government Accountability Office and the senate parliamentarian found that the waiver should not be subject to the CRA but Senate Republicans simply ignored their findings.

Public Citizen fought hard to prevent this maneuver, sending a letter along with more than 80 other allies to Senate leadership explaining how his dangerous precedent will damage our democracy for the foreseeable future. The door has now been opened for the Senate to ignore the parliamentarian on other matters and pass more harmful measures

by simple majority when a 60-vote threshold should be required – namely, through the upcoming budget reconciliation bill. Public Citizen may have lost the CRA fight, but the work to prevent future harms isn't over.

Congressional Republicans have many more anti-regulatory legislative priorities. In May, the House Oversight Committee referred two dangerous bills to the House for consideration: the Unfunded Mandates Accountability and Transparency Act (UMATA) (H.R. 580) and the Modernizing Retrospective Regulatory Review Act (H.R. 67). These bills seek to delegitimize and weaken the regulatory process that all of us rely on for

protection from potential harms caused by regulated industries – like businesses that place unsafe products in the market or banks that engage in risky financial activities.

UMATA would increase the private sector's involvement in the rulemaking process at the expense of consumers, workers, the environment, and public health and safety, and it would further delay rulemaking. The Modernizing Retrospective Regulatory Review Act would force agencies to waste resources reviewing regulations already on the books, which will do nothing to protect Americans from under-regulated or unregulated hazards. Instead, it will drown government

agencies in busy work and distract them from addressing significant threats to public health and safety, such as polluted drinking water, toxins in our food and products, or workplace safety hazards. Public Citizen is pushing back against all anti-regulatory bills this Congress to ensure they never become law.

“Make no mistake: Trump's deregulatory blitz from DOGE's mass firings to dismantle entire agencies to gutting enforcement against corporate criminals will mean more preventable injuries and illnesses, more needless deaths, more consumer scams and ripoffs, more industrial disasters,” said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen.

see **Anti-Regulatory**, page 10 ►



# Trump's Tariff Shakedown for Deregulation and Self-Enrichment

BY ALANA MATTHEW AND MEENA RAKASI

What is really going on behind closed doors in President Trump's secret trade talks? Trump imposed steep tariffs on dozens of countries with little rhyme or reason, then rescinded the tariffs for 90 days to allow for negotiations – an ultimatum for other countries to offer sweeping concessions or face a trade war. As Public Citizen News goes to print, Trump's deadline has, predictably, come and gone – but he continues to brandish tariff threats.

The trade deals that Trump claims to hate, like NAFTA, were the products of secret, corporate-dominated negotiations. But now, Trump is setting a new low for transparency in trade policy. There is zero clarity on what negotiations are actually occurring, what draft text the United States is proposing, or who is shaping U.S. policy.

Public Citizen Global Trade Watch's latest explainer, "90 deals in 90 days," cuts through the confusion. It reveals that Trump's scheme of blanket tariffs and "emergency" trade deals is, primarily, a bully's demand to win corporate giveaways for Big Tech, Big Pharma, and other corporate interests.

Every year, the U.S. Trade Representative releases a report, the National Trade Estimates Report on Foreign Trade Barriers. At his "Liberation Day" tariff announcement, Trump waved around this "special book," which lists thousands of policies and practices that other countries employ and that U.S. corporations don't like. The U.S. calls these policies "trade barriers," and they are what Trump is trying to eliminate. The targeted policies include:

- Privacy regulations in Brazil, Norway, and 25 other countries.
- Competition laws to counter the monopolistic practices of Big Tech companies, as employed by the European Union, South Korea, and Japan.
- The European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act that sets standards for AI use in risky situations, like resume-scanning tools for job applicants.
- Patent rules in India, Argentina, and elsewhere to prevent abusive "evergreening" – i.e., when a company makes a tiny change to a drug

(like an extended-release version) to justify additional years of high prices protected by patented monopoly control.

- Japan's and South Korea's government pricing and reimbursement policies that help contain medicine costs.
- Colombia's efforts to make a critical HIV/AIDS therapy affordable by authorizing generic competition for drugs still on patent, a right enshrined in international law.
- Canada's plan to reach zero plastic by 2030 by reducing plastic pollution, requiring a minimum recycled content, and restricting single-use plastics.
- Regulations on food safety and pesticides in the UK, EU, and Mexico, among others.
- The EU's deforestation-free supply chain law that aims to curb deforestation linked to European consumption of beef, coffee, palm oil, and other products.

Trump is also using these secretive trade talks and tariff threats to strong-arm countries to back his authoritarian, anti-climate agenda. He's pressuring allies like Canada to ramp up military spending on controversial projects like his "Golden Dome" initiative (see page 11) and push-

ing the EU to buy more U.S. fossil fuels, driving up domestic energy costs and worsening the climate crisis.

Tariff extortion and secret negotiations also give Trump untold opportunities to benefit his personal business empire. For example, Vietnam, facing some of the highest potential tariffs, fast-tracked approval for a \$1.5 billion Trump golf complex and skyscraper.

In another scandal, a Mexican logistics firm trumpeted its purchase of millions of dollars in Trump's memecoin, explicitly stating its intent to influence Trump's tariff policy. The CEO stated that the company's "continued investment into TRUMP puts us at the intersection of finance and advocacy."

Before their nasty breakup, Trump's tariff chaos also gave Elon Musk powerful leverage to push his businesses on foreign governments. In messages obtained by the *Washington Post*, Secretary of State Marco Rubio directed U.S. officials to push for permit approvals for Starlink, Musk's satellite internet service. Governments, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, South Africa, and many others, have fast-tracked regulatory approvals in the hope of avoiding costly tariffs.

It's possible that Trump's pressure will yield symbolic changes

only, like the much hyped United Kingdom "concept of a plan" that Trump announced in May. Trump touted the deal as historic and groundbreaking, but in reality, it was a five-page, nonbinding document designed to make headlines.

But there's no way to have a real window into what's happening until trade deal texts are made public, as Public Citizen is urging.

Public Citizen has endorsed and collected thousands of signatures on petitions demanding that Congress impose transparency and accountability on Trump's trade agenda. More than 100 members of Congress have sounded the alarm – 78 Representatives and 25 Senators – including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, Chair of the Progressive Caucus Rep. Greg Casar, and Ranking Member of House Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee Rep. Linda Sánchez.

Public Citizen has long pushed for an overhaul of U.S. trade policy and has argued that tariffs can be part of a broader economic agenda tool for protecting American jobs and industries from unfair competition.

But that's not what Trump's tariffs are about, Public Citizen has argued – because when transparency and oversight are sidelined and corporate greed takes the wheel, it's not "America First" – it's billionaires first. ■



Graphic courtesy of Ryan Harvey.



# PUBLIC CITIZEN'S 2025 SOIRÉE AND FUNDRAISER

On Tuesday, June 3, Public Citizen hosted a soirée and fundraiser at Washington, D.C.'s National Press Club. The event featured keynote remarks from Senator Jeff Merkley (OR) and honored the former Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) Rohit Chopra with Public Citizen's Golden Boot Award. The Award celebrates those who stand in defiance to corporate greed, government corruption, and threats to our democracy. Rohit Chopra was celebrated for launching the CFPB's program to tackle the student loan crisis. The soirée was attended by more than 400 people.

"We're just getting started as our incredible Litigation Group is constantly working to think of creative cases to take on the utter lawlessness of [the Trump] administration."  
— Public Citizen Co-president Lisa Gilbert



Photos courtesy of Keith Mellnick.



“I don’t know if we’re in the moment to cheer. But we are in the moment to scheme. We are in the moment to strategize. We are in the moment to act, to speak, and to plan for what is new.”

– Rohit Chopra, Former Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

“I was asked a few minutes ago if I’m optimistic, and the answer is yes — because of the type of energy that’s coming together through folks like yourselves ... citizens are standing up and saying let’s make a difference.”

– Senator Jeff Merkley, Oregon



“At Public Citizen, we’re not only [pursuing] anti-Trump [work], but also ... push[ing] for big ideas knowing we may not get it all the way, but we’ll get something.”

– Public Citizen Co-president  
Robert Weissman





# Fires, Fakes, and Fossil Fuels: Texas's Legislative Balancing Act

BY JOSÉ MEDINA

Texas has a part-time Legislature that meets for only 140 days in odd-numbered years. Lawmakers entered this year facing numerous challenges, with energy issues once again near the top of the priority list due to the state's fast-growing population and ever-increasing energy demand.

There were also newer challenges to address, like artificial intelligence and the most destructive wildfires in the state's history. With its primary focus on three issue pillars – energy, environment, and ethics – the Texas office set out to stop bad legislation and fight for the good. Here are some of the peaks and valleys of the 89th regular session of the Texas Legislature.

## Energy Investments and Attacks on Renewables

The operator of Texas' electric grid predicts that the state's demand for electricity will nearly double by the end of the decade. Lawmakers are in a race against time to ensure Texans have energy security. In an oil- and gas-producing state, many politicians default to fossil fuels as the solution. Such was the case with the Texas Energy Fund (TEF), created following the 2023 session to increase electricity generating capacity by funding new gas-burning power plants, but has since flopped as TEF-funded gas projects have struggled to gain traction. Public Citizen and its partners successfully advocated for this round of TEF funding to fulfill a commitment in the original statute: \$1.8 billion for a backup power program that could include clean energy strategies like battery storage.

Attacks on renewable energy were back this year. Bills that

targeted renewable energy by imposing unfair regulations, which were not applied to fossil fuel-generated electricity, nearly passed into law two years ago. Remarkably, however, similar bills filed this year were opposed by a broad coalition of Texans, which included environmental advocates, residents of rural counties, elected officials from both major parties, and others. The failure of these bills is a clear sign that even the fossil fuel-friendly Legislature recognizes that renewables – a booming industry in Texas – have kept the Texas grid afloat while providing clean, reliable, and affordable energy to Texans.

Nuclear power also got a boost with the creation of a new fund to develop small modular reactors, an unproven type of reactor that its proponents claim are cheaper and easier to build than the reactors typically used in nuclear power plants. Public Citizen opposed this effort because it's a costly and risky bet, and the legislation provides no guarantees that electricity generated by new nuclear projects, if they ever come online, will be provided to Texans and not to data centers or other large industrial users. In the end, the newly created Texas Nuclear Power Fund will receive \$350 million – far less than the proposed \$2 billion – with an additional \$120 million allocated for the reactor already in development at Natura/Abilene Christian University.

Public Citizen also successfully lobbied for small gains in energy efficiency efforts that reduce the amount of electricity needed to power the state. This legislature created the Texas Energy Waste Advisory Council to coordinate action on this strategy.

directing agency heads to identify and rescind so-called “unlawful regulations and regulations that undermine the national interest” primarily in accordance with, but not limited to, 10 Supreme Court cases.

Furthermore, the EO calls on agencies to use something called the “good cause” exception to bypass the notice and comment rulemaking process, the democratic process that gives the public the opportunity to have their voice heard as agencies are writing rules. The “good cause” exception is a carveout under the Administrative Procedure Act

## Protecting Texans from AI-Generated Intimate Deepfakes

With the governor's signature on House Bill 581, Texas became the first state in the country to adopt a law that holds platforms accountable for AI-generated intimate deepfakes. These deepfakes, sometimes referred to as “deepfake porn,” are images or videos depicting a person nude or engaged in a sexual act that are fabricated with the help of artificial intelligence. Many such photos or videos are created without the consent of the depicted individual. Nearly all of these victims are women and many of them are children. HB 581 makes online platforms civilly liable for failing to protect minors from intimate deepfakes.

Public Citizen first supported stronger protections against non-consensual intimate deepfakes during the 2023 legislative session, which resulted in a law criminalizing such videos. In addition to HB 581, a separate bill that is now law expands the criminal statute to include images and all other types of intimate deepfake media.

## Responding to a Symptom of our Changing Climate

In February 2024, the largest wildfires in Texas history killed three people and burned more than 1 million acres in the northwest part of the state. Dubbed the Panhandle Wildfires, an investigative committee in the Texas House of Representatives found that the likely start of the fires was a poorly-maintained oilfield electric pole that snapped and fell on dry grass.

Wildfires are becoming increasingly common and destructive across the country due to the effects of climate change. Texas is not immune. The Panhandle Wildfires took place in unusually hot, dry, and windy conditions. Public Citizen supported several bills aimed at preventing wildfires and tasked oil and gas regulators with identifying faulty electric utility equipment that could potentially spark a fire. Other bills signed into law will help fire departments respond to wildfires when they do happen.

## Clean Air for All Texans

Regrettably, the Legislature again failed to take meaningful steps to protect communities from harmful dust and particulate matter generated by concrete batch plants. Concrete batch plant bills that failed include unannounced inspections of these facilities, impose a common-sense restriction on a concrete plant located near a hospital, and give communities greater say in the permitting process, but unfortunately failed to pass.

Public Citizen counted a victory for clean air with the approval of a budget item that will provide an additional \$2 million for monitoring particulate matter in areas of the state that are close to violating federal standards.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has called lawmakers back to Austin for a 30-day special session set to begin in late July. As of this writing, we don't know all of the issues the governor will add to the special session agenda. However, Public Citizen will be ready to respond to the Capitol and advocate for a better, healthier Texas. ■

We're working in coalitions and educating members of Congress to reimagine a regulatory system that is transparent, responsive to the public's needs, and isn't heavily influenced by corporations and their lobbyists. Our health and safety shouldn't be jeopardized by politicians and an administration who have an anti-regulatory, pro-corporate agenda and don't want to play by the rules. ■

### ► Anti-Regulatory, from page 6

“These moves will help boost CEOs' compensation packages and further skyrocket corporations' record profits.”

The Trump administration's anti-regulatory agenda is nearly boundless. In February, President Trump issued Executive Order (EO) 14219, “Ensuring Lawful Governance and Implementing the President's ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Deregulatory Initiative.” EO 14219, in concert with its accompanying presidential memorandum issued in April, pushes an anti-regulatory agenda onto federal agencies by

– the federal law governing the rulemaking process – that allows agencies to forgo notice and comment when that process would be “impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest.” The Trump administration is urging agencies to subjectively label rules as “unlawful” and roll them back without any chance for public input.

Public Citizen is fighting back against the Republicans' alarming and destructive anti-regulatory agenda by fighting for a regulatory system that works in the public interest, not for corporate special interests.



# Trump's "Golden Dome" Scam Could Channel Billions to Musk

BY SAVANNAH WOOTEN

President Trump has successfully convinced Congress to fund a brand new missile defense system that could award hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars to defense contractors over the next decade – including Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Public Citizen has opposed this gift from the first, meeting regularly with members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committee in the build-up to the vote on the tax and budget "reconciliation" bill and coordinating with weapons systems experts to translate the substance of the proposal for the public.

Mimicking the naming schema of Israel's national "Iron Dome," but playing to Donald Trump's penchant for the trappings of royalty, the "Golden Dome" is a \$25 billion proposal for the U.S. to begin creating a weaponized satellite network to defend against missiles entering U.S. airspace. However, nuclear weapons analysts and budget experts alike agree that the proposal itself is prohibitively expensive – a full rollout is expected to cost hundreds of billions or even trillions of dollars, nearly impossible to implement, and highly likely to escalate, rather

than mitigate, the threat of nuclear war.

Missile defense systems like the proposed "Golden Dome" have been repeatedly attempted throughout U.S. history, most famously in 1983, when a Reagan administration "Strategic Defense Initiative" proposal was mocked as a "Star Wars" fantasy. Reagan pitched the program as an essential safeguard against a Cold War nuclear attack, but was vehemently opposed by experts who knew the space-laser system was technologically overpromised.

Despite ultimately costing taxpayers more than \$30 billion, the Strategic Defense Initiative never resulted in a functional missile defense system. In addition to concerns about wasteful federal spending, arms experts also condemned the president's recklessness in creating the program at all, as the USSR interpreted its very existence as a violation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. When the Cold War ended, public support for the program plummeted even further before President Clinton ultimately shuttered it.

Weapons experts have spent the past six months warning that the "Golden Dome" would be

no different. Laura Grego at the Union of Concerned Scientists calls the Golden Dome an outright "fantasy" that uses Iron Dome marketing to "manufacture credibility for something that has never worked," and notes that space-based missile defenses have been "repeatedly abandoned because they are expensive, very technically challenging, and readily defeated."

Xiaodon Liang, a senior policy analyst at the Arms Control Association, has said that Russia and China are already at work developing anti-missile defense technologies that could render the "Golden Mirage" useless within years of its creation.

Projected failures aside, the sticker price of this program alone is enough to reject it. In coordination with President Trump, GOP leadership has included \$25 billion for the Golden Dome in its reconciliation budget bill as part of a \$150 billion spending boost for the Pentagon. If passed, the bill would bring the annual sum of U.S. military spending above \$1 trillion for the first time.

And the spending won't end in Fiscal Year 2026. This \$25 billion expenditure opens a direct line of super-charged spending for years

to come. A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis estimates that procuring space interceptors for the program alone could cost up to \$542 billion if everything goes to plan and schedule. Given that the Pentagon has never once passed an audit, it is a safe bet that it won't.

In late April, *Reuters* reported that three technology firms considered top contenders for the Golden Dome contract – Space X, Anduril, and Palantir – plan to bid together. Until June, Elon Musk, who is both the founder and CEO of Space X, was a prominent member of President Trump's inner circle as a Special Government Employee (SGE). The conflict of interest inherent in awarding his company a multi-billion dollar contract just after his return to the private sector couldn't be clearer – though the picture may have changed now that Musk has fallen out of favor with Trump.

Trump's phony gold "dome" is poised to place a burden on American taxpayers for decades to come. Faced with the outrage of the \$25 billion downpayment on this dangerous system that cannot work, Public Citizen is committed to work to ensure those are the last dollars spent on this boondoggle. ■

## Heat Is Killing Workers. Public Citizen Demands Congress Act.

BY SUSAN HARLEY

For many Americans, the summer months bring to mind picnics, backyard barbecues, and other fun times with family and friends. Yet for the many workers who labor outside under the sun or inside in broiling temperatures, summer heat can be deadly. Sweltering temperatures also pose a lethal danger to behind-the-scenes laborers like warehouse workers and truck drivers who fulfill orders for consumer goods that many of us will be taking on our summer camping trips and beach getaways.

Public Citizen has long fought for enforceable safeguards to protect all workers from exposure to high levels of heat, twice petitioning the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for a national heat standard. Those petitions have pointed out that excess heat exposure can cause illnesses ranging from heat rash, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, cardiac arrest, and even death.

Symptoms of heat illness such as fatigue, sweating, loss of balance and motor coordination, and fainting also greatly increase the likelihood of workplace accidents, such as falling off ladders or roofs, or making mistakes while using power tools, operating vehicles, or working with dangerous chemicals.

It is estimated that 600 to 2,000 workers across the United States die every year due to excessive heat; as many as 170,000 workers across the country experience some form of heat illness or injury that can cause bodily damage and leave a permanent impact on their lives and their families' livelihoods.

The danger from heat exposure is only intensifying as climate change impacts continue to worsen. Heat is already the leading weather-related killer, exceeding the lives lost to hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes. 2024 was a record year for high temperatures across the country. And this year has already seen some startling heat

events, like temperature records being shattered across the East Coast during a June heat wave.

Relatively simple and affordable measures have proven extremely effective at protecting workers, like ensuring continuous access to water, ample breaks in a cool space, and making sure new employees are acclimatized before working in high temperatures. Federal worker protections are slowly making their way through the rulemaking process; in August 2024, in response to Public Citizen's petition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) finally issued a proposed rule to protect outdoor and indoor workers from heat injury and illness. The long-awaited proposal was a thoughtful and comprehensive rule that followed the science and the lived experience of workers. As with all rule proposals, there are areas where worker safeguards could have been strengthened but, on the whole, OSHA set forth a meaningful, enforceable,

protective proposed rule that would educate employers and provide clarity on how to keep their workers safe, and give employees the much-needed protection from the effects of extreme heat that they require.

While OSHA is continuing its progress on the rulemaking, with hearings happening this summer, it seems unlikely this standard will fare well under the Trump administration, given its typical deregulatory bent. Public Citizen will continue to advocate for the rule as it moves forward to prevent the proposal from being defanged and to ensure that it continues to move forward in a timely manner.

Even in the best of times, it was expected that finalizing the federal heat standard would still take several years. And, with only a handful of state heat standards in place, the vast majority of employees lack simple heat protections like guaranteed shade, water, and rest. As an interim step,

see **Heat**, page 12 ►



► **USDA**, from page 1

with the nonprofit organization Hunger Free America to maintain the Hotline.

In late May, though, without explanation or warning, USDA allowed the contract to expire without replacement. Now, Public Citizen is suing USDA on behalf of Hunger Free America to restore funding for the Hotline.

“The National Hunger Hotline can mean the difference between vulnerable Americans getting food on the table and going hungry,” said Cormac Early, an attorney with Public Citizen Litigation Group and lead counsel on this case. “Congress required USDA to fund the hotline, and the decision not to is both cruel and unlawful.”

In the Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act of 1994, Congress ordered USDA to contract with a nongovernmental organization to establish and maintain an information clearinghouse of food assistance resources. Since then, Congress has appropriated money every year to support that goal, dedicating \$250,000 a year for

each fiscal year from 2010 to 2025.

Under the clearinghouse contract, Hunger Free America operated the National Hunger Hotline 12 hours a day, five days a week, with service in both English and Spanish. It also operated a round-the-clock automated texting service and an online database of food assistance resources, searchable by address, with over 45,000 entries. Hunger Free America has helped more than 228,000 callers since it was first awarded the contract in 2014.

Despite Hunger Free America’s demonstrated success in assisting vulnerable Americans, and despite a clear congressional mandate to maintain the clearinghouse services, USDA allowed funding for the hotline to die with only eight hours’ notice to Hunger Free America. Since then, USDA has also taken down its website for the National Hunger Hotline.

Representing Hunger Free America, Public Citizen filed suit against USDA in federal district court in Washington, D.C., to challenge USDA’s decision to let the contract lapse without replace-

ment. The lawsuit alleges that USDA’s actions violate the law on three counts: by disregarding the statutory requirement to establish and maintain the clearinghouse services; by breaching the Impoundment Control Act’s prohibition on federal agencies withholding or deferring appropriated funds unless the president sends a formal request to Congress and Congress consents; and by engaging in arbitrary and capricious agency action in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act.

For now, Hunger Free America has been able to keep the Hotline running using private funds. But those resources are limited and Hunger Free America has warned that it may have to shut down the Hotline very soon if USDA does not award a new clearinghouse contract.

Hunger Free America is not asking the court to reinstate its own contract specifically—only that the court declare USDA’s conduct unlawful and require the agency to comply with its legal obligations by contracting with a qualified nongovernmental provider.

“For more than a decade, we’ve helped hundreds of thousands of hungry Americans access food, from both government programs and faith and community-based charities,” said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America. “Cutting off this vital service would be cruel, arbitrary, and capricious at any time. Doing so precisely when the Administration and Congress are pushing the greatest cuts in food assistance in U.S. history is particularly heartless and counterproductive. This act is clearly illegal, so we are so grateful that Public Citizen is taking up our case rapidly and at no charge to our modestly funded organization.”

The outcome of this case could have implications far beyond this one program. At stake is not just the future of the National Hunger Hotline, but broader questions of whether federal agencies can unilaterally abandon congressionally mandated programs and funding without accountability or explanation. ■

► **Heat**, from page 11

leaders in Congress will again champion the Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness, Injury and Fatality Prevention Act. Named after a worker who tragically lost his life due to laboring in the heat without protections, this bill would direct OSHA to implement an enforceable interim heat standard that would

be in effect until a final federal OSHA standard is issued. Public Citizen is again working with offices on the Hill and our diverse set of stakeholder partners in the Heat Stress Network to ensure as many offices as possible join this important interim measure as we await a strong and effective final heat rule from OSHA.

“The failure to protect workers

— including especially vulnerable immigrant farm workers — is a long standing and absolute disgrace,” said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. “The core elements of a heat standard are water, shade and rest. There’s nothing complicated about it. And there’s no excuse for further delay as temperatures continue to soar due to the worsening climate

crisis.”

As summer temperatures continue to rise, Public Citizen will remain focused on keeping the heat on our nation’s leaders to finally ensure that every single worker has enforceable protections to keep them safe from dangerous heat in the workplace. ■

## Public Citizen Recommends ...

### **"The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West"**

*By Alexander C. Karp with Nicholas W. Zamiska; \$30; Crown Currency*

This is a frightening book. It’s not necessarily one you should read, but it’s definitely one you should know about.

Alexander Karp is the CEO and co-founder, with Peter Thiel, of a company called Palantir. You may not have heard of it, but Palantir is probably the leading surveillance technology company in the world. Its value soared after the 2024 election of Donald Trump. It’s now the 24th most valuable company in the United States. It’s worth more than Disney, American Express, Goldman Sachs, or Merck. Very notably, it’s worth three times more than Lockheed, the largest military contractor.

So, Karp’s views matter. And, Karp is not just any CEO. He’s

erudite, cosmopolitan, and educated in diverse fields, with a Ph.D. in social theory from Goethe University in Germany.

Here’s the short version of Karp’s thesis: Technology companies are failing the world and, specifically, the United States. He argues that most of the technological advances involving the smartphones, apps and the rest amount to little more than toys — toys that deliver advertising and distractions. So far, you may think, that sounds right.

But here’s the rest: Technology companies should be making investments and building products to make a stronger America. They should turn to, not away, from government. And they should view as their mission defending America militarily (including through cyber defenses) from its enemies and advancing norms of “Western civ-

ilization,” as historically understood. Karp is completely aware of — and writes knowingly about the leading critiques of the idea of Western civilization.

For Karp, the gap in people’s individual sense of meaning and in a national sense of purpose should be filled with a notion of improvisational engineering, which he believes is realized inside of his company. He calls for the creation of a Technological Republic, in which technology is creatively but ruthlessly deployed to address social ills, notably crime and foreign military threats. (These happen to be areas of Palantir’s focus, but Karp would say this is not a matter of self-justification, but that Palantir was created to make real these ideals.) Equally, he emphasizes the idea of national identity — hence the highlighting of Western values — and subordination of individualism. This too happens to coincide with the material interests of a surveillance

technology company.

For better or worse, Silicon Valley has long been associated with a kind of technological libertarianism. Karp rejects this completely. His vision is, instead, fundamentally authoritarian.

There are many competing strands of thought and action (and grift) in the Trump administration. That’s true of every administration, but things are different with Trump, because he doesn’t really have a political ideology (beyond personal dominance and self-enrichment). Palantir is a company with major, direct influence in the administration, and is poised to win many more contracts with new spending on mass deportation and military artificial intelligence. We should be very wary of what Alex Karp has to say.

— Robert Weissman ■

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# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

## Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen

**On President Donald Trump’s phone venture:** *The New York Times*, *CBS*, *Dallas Express*, *InDaily*. **On OpenAI retaining control through its nonprofit arm:** *Axios*, *San Francisco Chronicle*. **On Trump accepting a plane from Qatar:** *The Wall Street Journal*. **On Trump’s tariffs:** *The Hill*, *In These Times*. **On Public Citizen’s annual gala:** *Politico Playbook*. **On Trump’s crypto businesses:** *Fortune Crypto*. **On Mattel’s AI usage:** *The Independent*, *Ars Technica*, *Futurism*.

## Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen

**On No Kings Day:** *PBS*, *Fox News*, *News Nation*. **On Elon Musk scaling back from the Department of Government Efficiency:** *The Independent*. **On gift-givers thriving:** *Verge*. **On DOGE growth:** *Politico*. **On Democratic appointed federal employees working after termination:** *Politico*. **On the deployment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents:** *News Nation*. **On Sen. Alex Padilla’s assault:** *Common Dreams*.

## Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen’s Energy Program

**On Michigan’s coal plant:** *Axios*, *Politico*. **On Trump’s emergency power plant order:** *The New York Times*, *Power Magazine*, *Common Dreams*, *Utility Dive*. **On East Coast grid disaster:** *The New York Times*, *Consumer Watchdog*. **On Trump’s energy czar:** *Jacobin*.

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

**On future pandemic prevention:** *The Guardian*. **On Covid-19 boosters for pregnant women:** *The Guardian*, *CBS*. **On medical journals fighting Trump:** *Boston Globe*. **On COVID guidelines:** *Fierce Pharma*. **On RFK Jr.’s vaccine expert purge:** *The Guardian*. **On the Trump administration threatening public health:** *Consumer Affairs*, *Common Dreams*. **On the CDC’s vaccine panel:** *Ars Technica*.

## Craig Holman, government affairs lobbyist with Public Citizen’s Congress Watch division

**On congressional ethics:** *The New York Times*. **On removing limits on political cash:** *The New York Times*. **On Congress playing the stock market:** *The Hill*. **On challenging Minnesota lobbying disclo-**

**sure rules:** *The Minnesota Star Tribune*. **On a congressman accepting a private sector job:** *Popular Information*. **On preventing Trump’s exploitation of digital assets:** *Sienna Sun Times*. **On Trump’s memecoin dinner:** *Cointelegraph*.

## Melinda St. Louis, director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch

**On Trump’s control of global trade:** *In These Times*. **On Trump’s tariffs:** *Black Star*. **On Trump’s trade deal with the UK:** *Common Dreams*.

## Rick Claypool, research director for Public Citizen

**On the DOJ not prosecuting corporate bribery schemes:** *The New York Times*. **On Washington residents funding Trump’s inauguration:** *The Chronicle*. **On the reign of corporations:** *Counterpunch*. **On a Boeing jet crash:** *Common Dreams*.

## Public Citizen Litigation Group

**On filling the gaps left by large law firms:** *The New York Times*. **On the Consumer Product Safety Commission lawsuit:** *CBS*, *The Hill*, *Bloomberg Law*, *Law 360*, *JD Supra*. **On the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s diversity policies:** *Bloomberg Government*. **On Louisiana air monitoring:** *The New York Times*, *Associated Press*. **On shielding immigrant students’ data in financial aid forms:** *NJ Spotlight News*. **On ICE and IRS settlement on immigrant information:** *Miami Herald*, *La Opinión*. **On Louisiana air quality:** *Dallas Weekly*, *JD Supra*. **On Job Corps:** *Fox 5 Atlanta*, *WJTV*, *KATU*. **On education researchers:** *The Hechinger Report*. **On foreign aid freeze:** *Health Policy Watch*. **On cuts to the U.S. Department of Education:** *Hechinger Report*. **On funding cuts to Job Corps:** *The American Prospect*.



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Broad Reach Fund	Edna Wardlaw Charitable Trust	JPB Foundation	New Venture Fund	Reset Tech Action	Trusted Elections Fund	
C.S. Fund	Educational Foundation of America	Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation	Open Society Foundations	Rockefeller Brothers Fund	Urban Movement	
Carbon Advocacy Project	Energy Foundation	Janelia Foundation	Our American Future Action	Rockefeller Family Fund	Innovation Fund	
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# Blackstone’s AI Power Grab Faces Federal Scrutiny

BY PATRICK DAVIS

The future of artificial intelligence might hinge not just on chips and code, but on who controls the power to keep it all running. In Virginia, where hulking data centers loom like sealed fortresses on former farmland, a regulatory battle over a single gas-fired power plant hints at an approaching storm over energy monopolies, and the price our climate will be forced to pay for AI’s rapid development.

Earlier this year, Public Citizen challenged a move by the private equity firm Blackstone to acquire an 800 megawatt gas-fired power plant just outside of Washington, D.C. The plant, located in Virginia’s Loudoun County, sits close to numerous power-hungry data centers, making it a potentially profitable acquisition for the massive private equity firm.

The acquisition is also part of a disturbing trend for energy customers across the country: large private equity firms have been purchasing land, data center companies, and power plants near major data center hubs to set themselves up to profit from a boom in AI usage that could create a run on energy across the United States.

The \$1 billion proposal by Ares Management to sell the 800 MW Potomac Energy Center in Loudoun County, Va., to Blackstone raises concerns about anti-competitive practices by the world’s largest investment management company. (Blackstone’s CEO, Stephen A. Schwarzman, is a close confidant of President Trump and made \$1 billion just last year alone.)

In Virginia – home to more

than 25% of the entire data center capacity of the United States – Blackstone controls as much as 1,000 MW of the data center load.

In its attempt to take control of the gas power plant, Blackstone omitted its role in the data-center boom in a filing with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). “Blackstone’s lawyers have argued that FERC has no current authority to assess an applicant’s control over data centers,” Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen’s Energy Program, told a subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in April. “Then last summer, FERC was caught off guard when 30% of Virginia’s data centers suddenly went offline with a resulting surge in electricity nearly causing a blackout.”

Projections of exactly how much power will be required to meet the future needs of AI are wildly scattered. At the April hearing, Slocum emphasized that forecasts of massive infrastructure investment – spurred by surging data-center growth – risks leaving consumers and taxpayers burdened with energy capacity beyond what will be needed to power AI. He warned of repeating the pattern seen in the early 2000s, when electricity forecasts severely overestimated actual demand due to unanticipated efficiency gains.

“Energy use per computation has decreased by 20% every year since 2010,” said Slocum. “There are ample opportunities to require or encourage data centers developing generative AI to pursue energy demand management

programs, limiting the need for expensive new energy generation infrastructure.”

“I’m very concerned that President Trump’s decision to use emergency powers to usurp state and local laws will force taxpayers and ratepayers to cover the cost of hastily implemented energy infrastructure,” added Slocum. “Federal energy regulators seem to lack adequate authority to ensure that the demand for data center energy will not disrupt the current demand by homes and businesses.”

As part of Public Citizen’s filing with FERC, Slocum asserts that Blackstone’s application to FERC omits critical data, including the private equity firm’s substantial ownership of the data centers.

Over the past year, two alarming grid disruptions – in July 2024 and in February 2025 – triggered a sudden shutdown of 1,500 MW and 1,800 MW of data-center load, respectively.

“These disturbances nearly triggered cascading blackouts in PJM’s ‘data-center alley’ around Loudoun and Fairfax counties,” said Slocum. “If Blackstone were to own the power plants providing energy to these data centers, the risk of anti-competitive and abuse of consumer protections is very real.”

Hypothetically, Blackstone could manipulate energy markets, shifting its significant control of regional data center load away from its longtime consumers and moving it to power data centers. In its filings with FERC, Blackstone doesn’t deny owning significant data center capacity in Virginia. But the private equity firm has neither confirmed exactly which

data centers it owns, nor stated the load size in megawatts of such facilities, let alone divulged whether it is in the process of building additional data center capacity in the region.

In May, the company announced it would buy TXNM Energy, a monopoly utility in New Mexico and Texas with 800,000 customers whose only option is to buy electricity from the utility. The company already has controlling interests in the utilities FirstEnergy and Northern Indiana Public Service Company, and owns a huge fleet of fossil fuel power plants across the country, along with 7,000 miles of Tallgrass Energy’s pipelines.

“Data centers consume so much energy because they’re filled with millions of microprocessors that are doing millions of computations each minute,” said Slocum. “As the use of AI expands, data centers should have to improve the energy efficiency of these facilities and of these microprocessors. There are ways we can ensure an AI future doesn’t accelerate climate change or drive up energy prices for consumers, but we need the companies to take measured steps today to ensure those protections.” ■

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70	6.3%	\$630	5.5%	\$550
75	7.0%	\$700	6.2%	\$620
80	8.1%	\$810	6.9%	\$690
85	9.1%	\$910	8.1%	\$810
90 and over	10.1+%	\$1,010	9.8+%	\$980

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