



Public Citizen Sues Trump Administration over Removal of Health Data from HHS Website



Late in the afternoon on Jan. 31, physicians around the country made a startling discovery: webpages containing important health information and datasets were missing from the websites of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and its components, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A few days later, Public Citizen's lawyers filed suit, representing Doctors for America, a national

organization of physicians and medical professionals, challenging the removal of this critical information.

The content removed by the agencies included guidance on reproductive health and infectious diseases, and data on drug safety – resources that many medical professionals relied on to provide informed care to patients. The complaint alleged that these removals violated the Administrative Procedure Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 by denying timely public access to crucial public health information and failing to provide notice of changes to the websites.

Because of the urgent need for the information, we quickly filed a motion asking the judge to order HHS, CDC, and FDA to restore the removed content while the case proceeds. The court agreed and issued a strong order requiring the agencies to restore the webpages and datasets.

"These federal agencies exist to serve the American

see **HHS**, page 4 ►



Public Citizen file photo.

Unmasking Musk's Secret Money Spending on Sketchy "RBG PAC"

BY JON GOLINGER

Fifteen years ago, the United States Supreme Court issued its deeply flawed opinion in *Citizens United v. FEC*, striking down prohibitions on corporate spending on election campaigns and paving the way for "independent expenditure committees" – commonly known as SuperPACs – to pour unlimited funds into election ads. The late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg joined three of her Court colleagues in a vigorous dissent, authored by Justice John Paul Stevens, opposing the *Citizens United* decision as wrongly

decided on both the law and the facts. The dissenters asserted that the decision would blow open the doors to corporations and wealthy individuals dominating elections with massive ad spending.

Justice Ginsburg and her dissenting colleagues were right – and in the 2024 presidential election the disastrous results of *Citizens United* were more evident than ever. In fact, one corporate CEO's millions were used to exploit Ginsburg's own name, image, and reputation to fund

see **Musk**, page 4 ►



Graphic of Elon Musk courtesy of DonkeyHotey / Flickr.

Trump's Bogus "Energy Dominance" Push Will Harm Consumers

BY ALAN ZIBEL

President Donald Trump launched his second term with a so-called "energy dominance" agenda, determined to use extraordinary emergency measures to produce more climate-destroying fossil fuels, ship them to overseas customers, and harm American consumers in the process.

In the wake of Trump's election, Public Citizen has been

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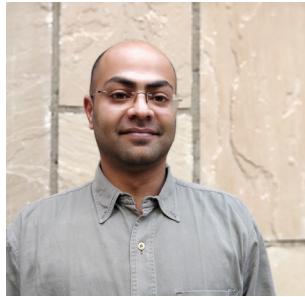
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GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN RISHAB BAILEY

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers



Rishab Bailey is the research director for the Digital Trade Alliance (DTA), where he leads efforts to shape the global conversation around digital trade, privacy, AI, and Big Tech accountability. With a background in telecommunications regulation, digital rights, platform regulation, and data governance, Bailey has extensive experience as both an advocate and a technology policy researcher in India. He has worked at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy and the global software company ThoughtWorks, and has contributed to several civil society organizations in India. Bailey holds a bachelor's degree from the National Law School of India University, Bangalore, and an advanced law degree (cum laude) in digital technologies from the University of Leiden, Netherlands.

Tell us about your path to the Digital Trade Alliance.

Bailey: I've been working in the technology policy space for close to 15 years now on a variety of domestic and international issues related to internet and data governance, platform regulation, as well as telecoms. I started working in this space largely because it was something new and exciting. After all, new technology can be really cool! On the other hand, technology also has significant effects on the lives of people. This makes it important to look beyond the techno-utopia we are often promised and try to understand how technology affects all of us. The Digital Trade Alliance promised an exciting opportunity to work on a new set of issues, the confluence of trade and tech policy.

What advice would you give to someone who's passionate about getting into research but has no idea where to start?

Bailey: In order to be a good researcher, you must be curious about the way the world works. Good

research habits carry across domains, so don't worry if you are working on something that you don't identify with personally. Work somewhere (or with someone) where you "learn the process" – how do you frame research questions, how do you break a big problem into smaller components and how do you present your research in an easy to understand yet nuanced manner. It also helps if you are open minded, read fast, and have oodles of patience.

What are some hobbies or activities that help you recharge and stay inspired?

Bailey: I've always enjoyed playing sports, so moving to the U.S. has been amazing. I've rekindled my love for cycling and am also learning pickleball. The public facilities here (free, year round access to swimming pools!) are wonderful and something that shouldn't be taken for granted. I also really like music (rock, jazz, blues mostly) and the performing arts generally, so I'm really enjoying my time in D.C.

What are some of the most impactful projects you've worked on so far?

Bailey: For years, Big Tech has been attempting to preempt public interest regulation of the digital ecosystem by incorporating deregulatory provisions into trade agreements. Public Citizen played a major role in helping shift the pro Big Tech position adopted by the U.S. government prior to the Biden administration. We supported the Biden administration's pivot to a worker centered trade agenda in the face of significant hostility from Big Tech. In fact, the Chamber of Commerce filed Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests with the USTR accusing us of being too close to the administration (despite mountains of evidence suggesting that it is actually Big Tech and their cronies who enjoy privileged access to trade negotiations)! You know you are doing the right thing when industry lobbyists are upset with you.

— Compiled by Zenisha Arora ■

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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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Public Citizen's Legal Battle to Stop Trump's Overreach

We are confronting an authoritarian onslaught with no precedent in American history.

At Public Citizen, we think it is vital to be honest about the seriousness of this crisis moment. It's equally crucial that we underscore that whether worst-case scenarios play out depends on what we – not Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and their minions – do.



CO-PRESIDENTS' VIEW
ROBERT WEISSMAN AND LISA GILBERT

If we investigate and shine a light on Trump and Musk's self-serving actions, if we build coalitions united to confront Trump's authoritarianism, if we rally congressional leaders to stand up for the rule of law and against an agenda for the billionaires and giant corporations and, above all, if we mobilize people to take to the streets, we can stop our nation's authoritarian slide.

An absolutely vital tool in this effort is litigation: Drawing on the unparalleled talents of Public Citizen's Litigation Group, we are suing and suing the Trump administration to block their illegal and unconstitutional actions.

Public Citizen Litigation Group has unmatched expertise and skill in areas relating to constitutional and administrative law. Based on our work during the first Trump administration, as well as our 50 years of experience, we were ready to respond to Trump II with a well-developed legal strategy. But Trump and Musk's authoritarian rampage

is more extreme than we anticipated. We have pivoted with a stepped up and aggressive litigation strategy designed to meet the moment.

Our eight cases filed in less than one month have:

- Blocked Trump and Musk from dismantling the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau;
- Restarted foreign aid grants, which Trump illegally ordered suspended;
- Forced the administration to repost health information it had stripped from the web (out of concern about the invented term of "gender ideology"); and
- Stopped Elon Musk's DOGE efforts to arbitrarily block federal payments and to invade Americans' data privacy at the U.S. Department of Treasury.

We have no illusions about how nefarious are the forces we're up against or their willingness to circumvent or take bad-faith actions to evade court rulings.

But we also know that our tough litigation can hold them accountable.

One of our cases involves the administration's illegal and devas-

tating stoppage of all foreign aid. So much is at stake in this case. A global health expert inside the U.S. government estimated that if the aid stoppage is made permanent, it will result in 100,000 or more malaria deaths every year, a 28 percent increase in global TB cases and as many as 2 million deaths due to lack of immunization every year.

We sued over the foreign aid stoppage and won a temporary restraining order (TRO) requiring the administration to resume making payments on existing foreign assistance contracts. The administration simply refused, making up countless excuses. We obtained subsequent court orders and still the administration dangled. Then, the judge in our case ordered payments to resume within 36 hours, with no more excuses to be brooked.

The Trump gang took this order seriously. After an appellate court said it had no jurisdiction to review the district court, Trump lawyers appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. There, we won a 5-4 decision ordering the administration to comply with the district court. Although the majority did not explain their rationale, the angry dissent made plain what was at stake: Justice Alito and the three justices who joined with

him were ready to rubber stamp the administration's refusal to follow the district court's order.

There's no doubt that we're going to lose some of the lawsuits we bring to challenge the administration's illegal actions and some of those losses will feel devastating.

But there's also no doubt we're going to win, often. And just weeks into the administration, we're already seeing how impactful – and lifesaving – those victories can be.

Along with the substantive wins, the cases are inspiring hope – hope that authoritarianism can be stopped, that fighting makes a difference, that something can be done.

In this way, the litigation is about more than the court cases and completely integrated into our overall advocacy effort. The litigation is not only about the rule of law, but also about overcoming fear, isolation and hopelessness, so that people connect and mobilize and build the power we need to defeat Trump. ■

Robert Weissman
Lisa Gilbert



people by protecting public health,” said Zach Shelley, the Public Citizen Litigation Group attorney serving as lead counsel on the case. “By removing this information, they undermined their missions. By setting aside the agencies’ unlawful and harmful actions, the judge’s order provides an important victory for doctors,

“These federal agencies exist to serve the American people by protecting public health.”

- Zach Shelley, Public Citizen attorney

patients, and the public health of the whole country.”

In an amended complaint, the City and County of San Francisco joined as an additional plaintiff

in the lawsuit. The City’s participation highlights the vital public health underlying the case.

The case is just one of several filed by Public Citizen Litigation

Group in the first month of the Trump administration to challenge their relentless assault on American workers and consumers throughout the country. ■

► Musk, from page 1

campaign ads aimed at persuading a key election demographic – women between the ages of 18 and 54 in four swing states – to buy the claim that Trump’s and Justice Ginsburg’s opposing positions on the issue of abortion were somehow “alike.”

The \$20 million spent by that corporate CEO – Elon Musk – was used to co opt Justice Ginsburg’s name for a pro-Trump political committee that exploited loopholes in federal campaign disclosure laws to hide Musk’s last

minute funding of the mysterious “RBG PAC” independent expenditure committee until after Election Day, when it was too late for voters to factor that into their decisions. A new Public Citizen report examines how this happened, why it matters, and how to fix it.

The report’s extensive review of RBG PAC campaign records, digital-ad targeting data, and a web of recently-deleted websites, social media, and video ads revealed a carefully coordinated scheme to maximize RBG PAC’s election impact while depriving vot-

ers of information vital to enable them to evaluate the credibility of RBG PAC’s advertising messages. Disclosure likely would have defeated the deceptive purpose of the whole enterprise.”

New data detailed in the “Unmasking Musk” report includes:

- Less than 24 hours after Musk – the Super PAC’s only funding source – gave \$20,500,000 t, RBC PAC spent nearly all of the money on ads, mailers, and text messages. But none of the pre-election campaign

finance filings or ads reviewed disclosed Musk’s involvement to enable voters to evaluate the credibility of the ads.

- RBG PAC spent Musk’s money on: \$17.8 million worth of digital ads and 15 and 30 second videos; \$1 million worth of mailers; \$1.6 million worth of text messages
- RBG PAC ran 110 different versions of abortion-themed ads on Facebook and Instagram between Oct. 25 and Nov. 5 (Election Day) that cost more see Musk, page 5 ►



GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE

► **Musk**, from page 4

than \$1 million and were seen on a screen more than 6.6 million times.

- RBG PAC ran Facebook and Instagram ads primarily targeting women between the ages of 18 and 54 in four key swing states: Pennsylvania, Michigan, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.

The messages, imagery, and targeting of the RBG PAC ads all appeared designed to achieve one objective: to soften the perception of Trump's anti-abortion positions in order to win Trump votes from pro-choice women in states that could swing the election. As described in the "Unmasking Musk" report, the information that RBG PAC presented to its target voters before the election asserted in various ways that Trump's position on abortion was aligned with former Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's position on abortion. This assertion has no reasonable merit and Justice Ginsburg's family quickly disputed it in the press. Knowing that Musk was

funding the ads may have alerted voters about what was going on – but there was no way for them to know. None of the RBG PAC ad information analyzed in the report disclosed before the election that Elon Musk was in any way associated with RBG PAC, much less that it had been entirely funded by Musk.

While the *Citizens United* majority's decision striking down reasonable limits on SuperPAC campaign spending was deeply flawed and wrongly decided, the majority opinion did get something right: it affirmed the constitutionality of campaign finance disclosure laws and encouraged the adoption of robust transparency requirements to empower voters, stating: "The First Amendment protects political speech; and disclosure permits citizens and shareholders to react to the speech of corporate entities in a proper way. This transparency enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages."

Unfortunately, while the Court reaffirmed campaign finance dis-

closure as valuable, constitutional, and a theoretical prophylactic to reduce the corrupting influence of big money, in Washington, D.C., the rules and laws needed to actually make disclosure a meaningful counterweight to the flood of money in elections have failed to move forward because of powerful corporate lobbyists.

Promisingly, hope has flowered on the ground level in the states, when it comes to campaign finance disclosure. Over the past five years, voters in three states – statewide voters in Alaska and Arizona and municipal voters in San Francisco, California – have demonstrated their strong support for greater campaign finance disclosure by passing ballot initiatives that have survived legal challenges all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

If adopted by Congress, all three of these voter-approved state campaign finance disclosure laws would be major improvements on current federal campaign finance disclosure law. If the Sunlight on Dark Money campaign ad disclosure law adopted by San Francisco

voters had been in place federally for the 2024 presidential election, it would have required the RBG PAC ads to list the names of their top three donors and the amount those donors contributed to fund them – on RBG PAC YouTube ads and digital ads, on its website, and on campaign mailers. Alongside their campaign messages, RBG PAC ads would have had to disclose: "Paid for by RBG PAC – top donor is Elon Musk Revocable Trust (\$20,500,000)." Targeted voters would have had more complete context for the RBG PAC ads they were receiving and been able to consider the merits and credibility of RBG PAC ads' questionable claims accordingly.

The elaborately deceptive RBG PAC scheme funded by Elon Musk should motivate Congress to follow the peoples' lead and shine sunlight on dark money. The results of meaningful campaign finance disclosure, while straightforward in practice, can have a powerful and positive impact on boosting public trust in our damaged democracy. ■

Public Citizen's Fight Against Trump's Assault on Global Health

BY LIZA BARRIE

The Trump administration's foreign aid freeze and withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO) is a deliberate attack on global health and international cooperation. Public Citizen is fighting back not only in the courts, but in Congress, in coalition with global allies, in the media, and in the streets.

Trump's executive orders have shut down life-saving programs overnight, abandoned millions of people to disease and hunger, and dealt a devastating blow to decades of U.S. leadership in global health. The numbers are staggering: over 25 million people have received HIV treatment through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. government's flagship global HIV/AIDS program; more than 60 million children are vaccinated annually through USAID-supported programs; WHO coordinates responses to outbreaks that threaten millions. This infrastructure took decades to build. Now, it is being destroyed in a matter of weeks.

Trump's Strategy: Destroy the System, Starve the Institutions

The Trump administration's actions are not about "reevaluating foreign aid" or "realigning priorities." They are a systematic dismantling of the institutions that sustain global health and a surrender of U.S. leadership.

With a single executive order, Trump froze all global health funding, terminated or furloughed thousands of USAID employees, and blocked Congressionally approved funds for critical health programs – defying both the law and basic human decency. Simultaneously, his administration abandoned WHO, America's last line of defense against pandemics, leaving a leadership vacuum in global health governance.

The damage is cascading across the globe. Clinics are closing. Medical supply chains are breaking down. Children are missing vaccinations, pregnant women are losing access to maternal care, and patients on antiretroviral treatment are being

cut off from life-saving drugs.

The Legal Battle: Holding the Administration Accountable

Public Citizen is leading a multi-front legal battle to stop this attack on global health.

In early February, Public Citizen filed a lawsuit challenging the dismantling of USAID. By terminating the vast majority of its grants and contracts, firing most of its staff, shuttering its building, the Trump administration left thousands of Americans without jobs while creating a humanitarian nightmare abroad. The judge presiding over the case denied our motion for immediate relief while the case proceeds, but motions seeking a final decision are imminent.

A second lawsuit, filed on behalf of the HIV prevention coalition AVAC and the Journalism Development Network, challenges the administration's freeze on foreign assistance funding and the stop-work orders sent to nearly all grantees. Our legal papers explain that the refusal to spend funds appropriated by

Congress for foreign assistance violates the separation of powers principle in our Constitution, as well as numerous statutes. And the result is wreaking irreversible damage on programs that keep millions alive.

In this case, the court ordered the administration to lift its freeze and stop-work orders while the case is litigated. The administration has refused to comply with the court's order, thereby prolonging the suffering of millions who rely on these programs and demonstrating a staggering disregard for both the rule of law and human life.

More Ways Public Citizen Is Fighting Back

Public Citizen is fighting back on multiple fronts. We are identifying plaintiffs to strengthen legal challenges, mobilizing coalitions, and organizing global allies. We recently hosted a high-level discussion at Public Citizen's headquarters building with key partners, featuring Loyce Pace, former head of Global Affairs at the Department of Health and see **Global Health**, page 11 ►

Toyota's Unholy Alliance with Climate Deniers Threatens Climate Progress

BY PATRICK DAVIS

Over the past three electoral cycles, Toyota has emerged as the top auto industry financier of climate deniers, financing 207 of their congressional campaigns. That's according to a report released in January by Public Citizen's Climate Program.

According to the report, by the end of the 2024 election cycle, Toyota Motor Corp. 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.

The company also ramped up its funding to Republicans and cut funding to Democrats. While in the previous two cycles Toyota donated relatively evenly to both parties, in the 2024 election cycle the company contributed over 60% to Republicans.

"The world's largest automaker has quietly spent the past several years building a powerful U.S. influence operation in an effort to delay the transition to electric vehicles," said Adam Zuckerman, senior clean vehicles campaigner with Public Citizen's Climate Program and author of the report. "Funding a small army of climate denying lawmakers, while lobbying aggressively against stronger emissions and fuel economy standards, is a volatile combination intended to roll back policies that protect our communities and planet."

In the three congressional election cycles between 2020 and 2024, Toyota's political action committee donated \$808,500 to the campaigns of congressional candidates that deny or question the existence of climate change. In the most recent electoral cycle, it contributed \$271,000 – nine times more than Ford, which donated \$29,500, and over twice as much as General Motors, which donated \$128,500.

"Toyota wants to continue to make dirty, polluting vehicles and align itself with climate deniers in a futile effort to hold onto internal combustion and fossil fuels," noted Zuckerman. "But EVs are the future of the automotive industry, and if it fails to evolve, Toyota risks becoming the next Kodak or Blockbuster, corporate giants that fought innovation and paid the price for it. It is a risky strategy that has left Toyota vulnerable to an influx of competitors who have leapfrogged the auto giant to build the next generation of vehicles."

Days after Donald Trump won his reelection bid, then-Toyota Motor North America COO Jack Hollis slammed clean air rules adopted by California and other states, effectively painting a target on the policies intended to clean up air and water. After the press conference, Hollis penned a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed entitled "Trump Can Get EVs Back on Track," calling on the new

administration to dismantle the Biden-era policies that encourage automakers to reduce emissions, complaining that "unrealistic regulations favor one carbon-reducing option over, and at the expense of, all others."

Public Citizen's work to push Toyota to offer more EVs as part of the company's line-up of cars has inspired protests at auto shows across the country. At the public policy day of the Washington, D.C. Auto Show, activists from Public Citizen called on Toyota Motor Corp. to stop funding the campaigns of climate change deniers.

The activists disrupted a presentation to Toyota during the U.S. News & World Report Best Cars for the Money Awards, where they unfurled banners reading "Toyota: stop driving climate denial!" and "Toyota: stop funding climate deniers!" and chanted "Hey Toyota, stop toying with the climate!"

"Walking around the D.C. Auto Show, it is evident that electric vehicles are not only the future, they are the present," said Zuckerman. "Yet, Toyota insists on financing the campaigns of extremist lawmakers, while lobbying aggressively against stronger emissions and fuel economy standards."

After the 2024 election, with Toyota's climate-denying allies entering power, the company is poised to marshal an assault on climate policy.

"Despite over a decade of record-setting global temperatures, Toyota continues the company's futile effort to hold onto internal combustion and fossil fuels," said Zuckerman. "While the company continues to play into the extreme politics of climate change denial, Toyota is failing to innovate and plan for a cleaner transportation future."

Toyota is trailing its competitors on EVs and is at risk of falling behind even further as Chinese competitors make low-priced EVs to sell around the globe, according to the report. Even Toyota's Japanese competitor, Honda, has recognized the threat.

In announcing a proposal to merge with Nissan, Honda CEO Toshihiro Mibe cited technological trends of electrification and autonomous driving, saying, "The rise of Chinese automakers and new players has changed the car industry quite a lot ... We have to build up capabilities to fight with them by 2030, otherwise we'll be beaten." The proposed merger was called off, but the threat of Chinese EVs continues to be a threat to automakers around the world.

"Automakers have a responsibility to prioritize the health of our families and communities," said Zuckerman. "A major part of that responsibility requires the auto industry to start making affordable electric vehicles available to consumers." ■



At the 2025 D.C. Auto Show, activists from Public Citizen called on Toyota Motor Corp. to stop funding the campaigns of climate change deniers. Photo courtesy of JD Knight.

working to call attention to Trump’s planet-destroying fossil fuel agenda and fight back on several fronts.

In a January 2025 analysis, Public Citizen and Friends of the Earth scrutinized the destructive impacts of exports of liquefied methane, also known as liquefied natural gas (LNG). The analysis found that 14 proposed terminals awaiting export approvals from the U.S. Department of Energy have signed deals to sell 76 million metric tons per year of LNG from facilities in the U.S. and Mexico.

Those export deals are crucial for developers to obtain financing for the giant facilities, which are being constructed on the Gulf Coast of Texas and Louisiana, as well as on the East Coast and Pacific Coast of Mexico.

Contrary to Trump’s “Make America Great Again” and “Drill, Baby, Drill” platitudes, American consumers won’t benefit from these policies. More than half of LNG volume from the export deals analyzed in the report is under agreement to be shipped to Big Oil companies and commodity trading firms that act as speculators.

The report warned that LNG traders and other “portfolio” players can sell the gas worldwide to fetch the highest price, including to countries like China. That means higher prices for American consumers, who currently pay far less than other countries for the fuel.

“Using LNG exports to provide energy abundance for China at the expense of higher utility bills for working Americans is not in the public interest,” said Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen’s energy program.

Only about 19% of the LNG volume from the 14 terminals is destined for Europe, where LNG imports surged after the war in Ukraine but have since declined, the report found. The largest single buyer is Saudi state-owned energy giant Aramco, accounting for 8% of the total volume, followed by Shell at 7% and Chevron at 5%.

Rising exports could prompt a sharp increase in domestic natural gas prices, the report noted, as American consumers compete with buyers around the world for the fuel. Higher and more volatile prices would hit low-income consumers with higher bills they may be unable to afford. The price U.S. households paid for gas has increased 52% since 2016, according to the Energy Information

Administration.

The report also examined the role of foreign investors in the LNG export industry, a key source of funding for U.S. LNG projects. The report identified large investors in LNG terminals based in Australia, Qatar, Japan, Canada, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. For example, Australia-based Woodside Energy Group recently acquired Tellurian Inc. and its proposed Driftwood LNG project in Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana. The project, renamed Woodside Louisiana LNG, is expected to cost \$27 billion.

Unlike other kinds of fuel, Congress has long mandated federal consumer protections for natural gas, regulating it as an essential utility service. Lawmakers have declared that most exports of the gas cannot occur unless first deemed to be in the public interest.

Nevertheless, the Trump administration is likely to ignore this vital responsibility and proceed with export approvals. Energy Secretary Chris Wright, a former fossil fuel executive, has signaled this intention, saying that Trump “has outlined a bold agenda for unleashing American energy dominance, and restoring regular order [for] U.S. LNG export permits is critical for meeting this commitment to the American people.”

Public Citizen has also been working to expose the Trump administration’s potential use of emergency powers to greenlight fossil fuel infrastructure. Trump’s bogus “national energy emergency” declaration, issued shortly after his inauguration,

could be used to eliminate federal public interest reviews for gas exports, speed the greenlighting of other fossil fuel infrastructure and impede renewable energy.

For example, shortly after being sworn in, Trump’s Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said he would “immediately identify all emergency and legal authorities available” to facilitate oil and gas permitting, leasing, production, refining and exports and also use emergency powers to “expedite the completion of all authorized and appropriate infrastructure, energy, environmental, and natural resources projects.” At the same time, Burgum has moved to block wind energy projects.

“The ultra-wealthy fossil fuel executives who donated huge sums to Trump’s campaign see this fraudulent emergency declaration as an opportunity to destroy the remarkable progress of wind and solar development while maximizing fossil fuel exports and domestic consumption,” Slocum said.

Since the U.S. LNG export boom began in 2016, eight more U.S. export terminals have started exporting LNG around the world. More are under construction in the U.S. and Mexico, or are in various stages of the planning and approval process.

Until Trump’s election, LNG export permits were largely on hold for nearly a year as the Biden administration completed its study of the rapidly growing industry. That comprehensive review, released in December 2024, said rising LNG exports could increase consumer prices while harm-

ing coastal communities and the climate.

Former Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm expressed concerns about the “astounding” growth of U.S. gas exports, pointing out that LNG exports may outpace global demand for the fuel. “By itself, this rapid growth to date – and the continued growth we expect under existing authorizations – recommends a cautious approach going forward,” Granholm said at the time.

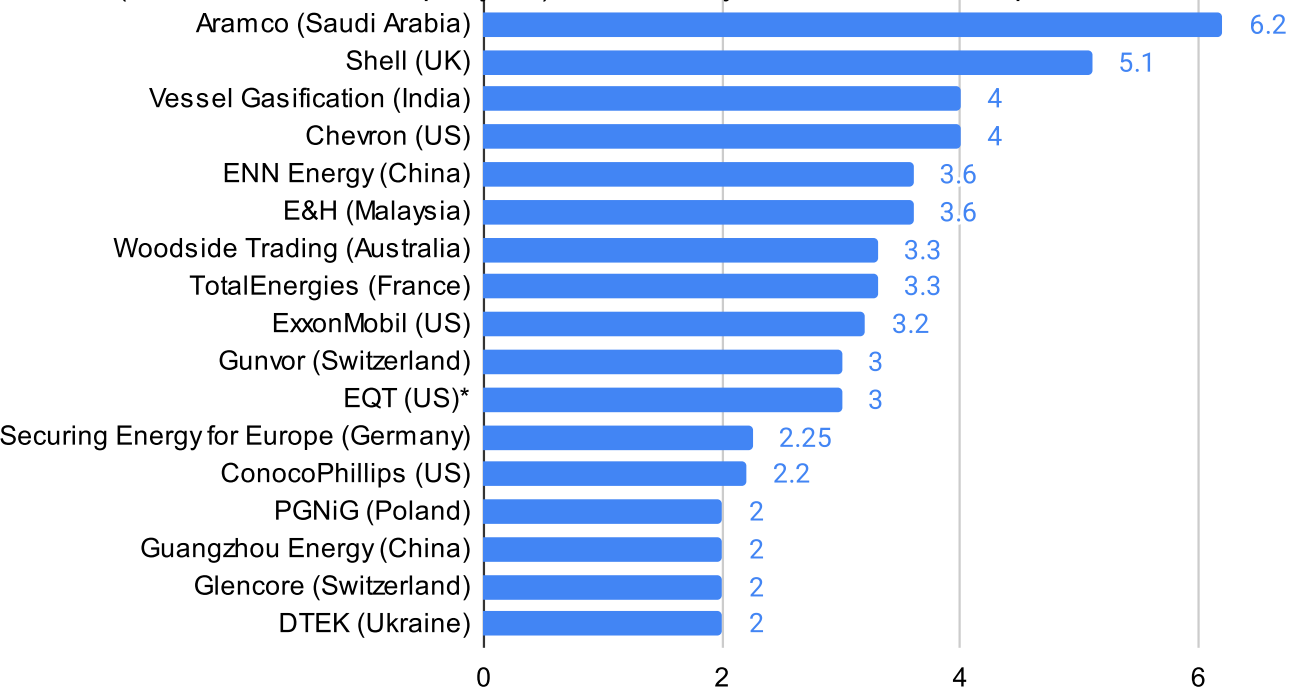
The DOE’s study found that exports expose American households and businesses to higher energy prices, concluding that U.S. households would pay an additional \$122 per year on average on their gas and electric bills if LNG exports continue to grow as expected, with the most severe impacts on the Gulf Coast and Southwest.

American businesses also face harm from LNG exports. The DOE study found LNG exports could push costs for the industrial sector up by \$125 billion through 2050 – a burden that would be spread through the economy via higher prices.

Industry groups have claimed that LNG exports benefit the climate by providing gas as an alternative to polluting coal-fired electricity production in Asia. However, the DOE analysis cast doubt on that claim, finding that exported methane would wind up displacing more renewable energy from the global power supply than coal. ■

Top Buyers of LNG Supplies From 14 Proposed Projects Awaiting Trump Approval

Volume (million metric tonnes per year) Includes buyers of at least 2 mmtpa.



Source: Friends of the Earth/Public Citizen tally of supply agreements. *EQT signed a “tolling” agreement in which it pays a terminal operator to process gas that it supplies and then sells on its own.

House Republicans Do the Bidding of Big Tax Prep

BY MIKE TANGLIS

In May 2023, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) announced it would begin to allow some American taxpayers to file their taxes for free directly through a newly developed electronic filing (e-filing) software run by the IRS. The pilot program, known as “Direct File,” was a direct outgrowth of a government report on the feasibility of IRS e-filing software funded by a provision in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), passed by Democrats in 2022.

Direct File proved to be an overwhelming success for taxpayers. In its first year, it helped more than 140,000 tax filers combined in the 12 pilot states file taxes for free. The program saved people time and money. Many users reported it took them less than 30 minutes to file their taxes, and the U.S. Treasury Department estimates the Direct File pilot saved taxpayers \$5.6 million in tax preparation fees. After the success of the pilot program, the IRS announced the program would be permanent and would now be open to all states that choose to participate. At the time of this writing, 25 states have chosen to participate.

One would think that a successful program with the potential to save Americans billions of dollars would be something very few elected leaders would intervene to obstruct. But some Republican members of the House have done just that.

On Dec. 10, 2024, 29 U.S. Republican Representatives (hereinafter, Republican signers) sent a letter to incoming President-elect Trump, among others, asking his administration to eliminate Direct File on day one of his new administration.

Public Citizen’s recent report sheds light on why some elected officials might be keen on ending a popular and successful government program: intense lobbying from the industry – led by Intuit – along with millions in campaign contributions from the industry and its proxies.

We looked at three entities – Intuit, H&R Block, and the American Coalition for Taxpayer Rights, a tax preparation industry trade group that counts both Intuit and H&R Block as members. All three (which we’ll call “Direct File opposition”) are opposed to the IRS’s Direct File program and have

lobbied the federal government over the last two years.

We looked at all lobbying done on behalf of the Direct File opposition over the last two years – 2024 and 2023 – to find the firms and lobbyists they hired. We then analyzed campaign finance data to determine how much money the Republican signers of the December 10th anti-Direct File letter have received from the Direct File opposition PACs, the PACs of lobbying firms they hired, and from lobbyists employed by the firms.

- Among other things, we found:
- \$1.8 million in career contributions to the Republican signers from the Direct File opposition companies, the lobbying firms they hired and lobbyists working at those firms. This total includes more than \$700,000 during the 2024 election cycle.
 - During the 2024 cycle, 19 of the Republican signers received a PAC contribution from either H&R Block or Intuit. One of the letter’s drafters, Rep. Adrian Smith (R-Neb.), received a PAC contribution from both companies.
 - Republican signers received \$315,000 during the 2024 cycle from the specific lobbyists registered to lobby Congress on behalf of Intuit, H&R Block, and the American Coalition for Taxpayer Rights. These Republicans claim we don’t need Direct File because

our current system works just fine. But Intuit and H&R Block provide revealing examples of what happens when we rely on corporate America to administer a “free” tax program. In 2024, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) accused H&R Block of deleting customer data to steer eligible filers away from free filing and into paid plans. In 2022, Intuit settled with 30 states for \$141 million over allegations it had “unfairly charged” low-income taxpayers by making them pay for free tax-filing software. And, sensitive tax information was leaked to tech companies by several Big Tax prep corporations.

For 20 years, Intuit “has waged a sophisticated, sometimes covert war” against any government-run free filing system, according to ProPublica. That war continues today. Twelve of the 29 Republican signers include those that represent five Direct File program states. According to data from the Economic Security Project, a combined 15.2 million taxpayers in these states were eligible for the program in the first year. Had they all used the program, these taxpayers would have saved more than \$2.4 billion in filing fees.

Our analysis found these same 12 signers received more than \$640,000 from the Direct File opposition and their proxies throughout their career. This includes more than \$240,000 during the 2024 cycle.

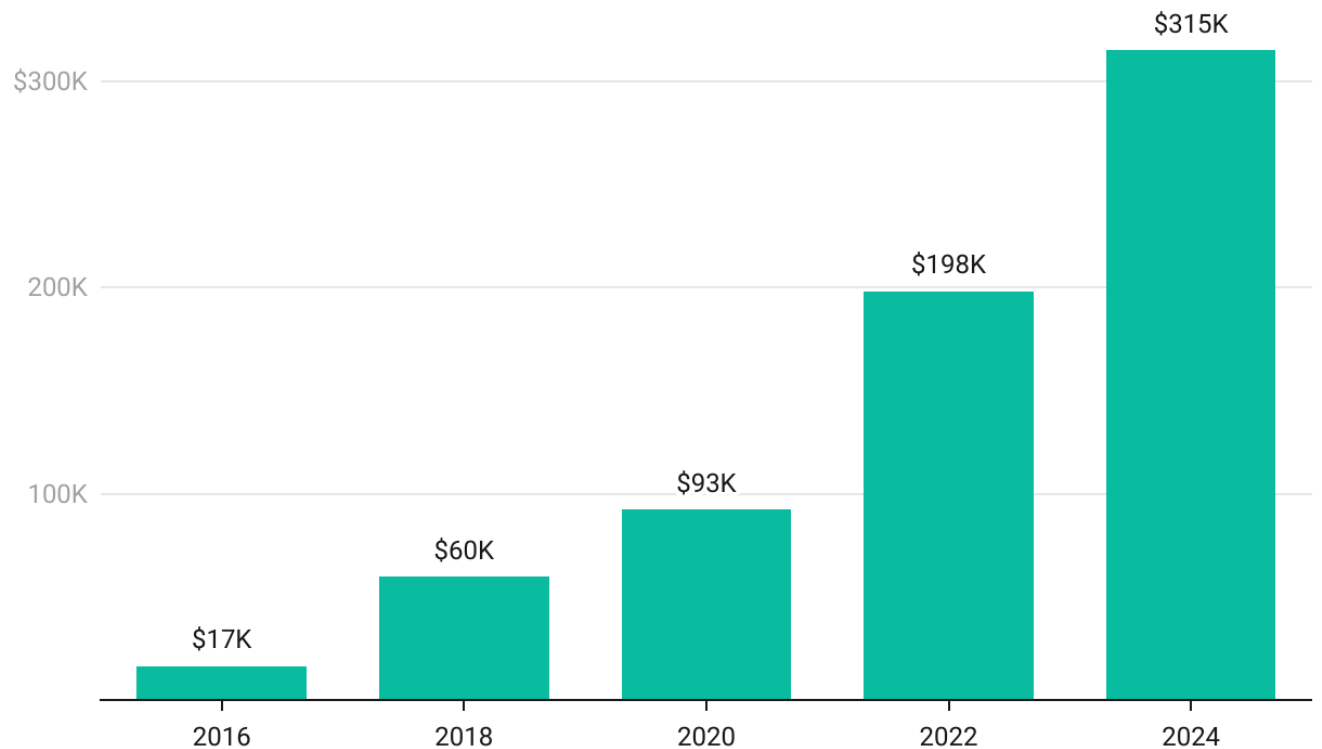
These Republicans are putting

the interests of their donors ahead of their constituents. Scott Bessent, Trump’s new Treasury Secretary, has committed to keeping Direct File “operative” for the 2025 filing season. The fate of the Direct File program after 2025, though, is unclear. The companies certainly won’t give up. Intuit donated \$1 million to Trump’s inaugural committee. And if every Republican member signing the Dec. 10 letter were to vote to end Direct File, Intuit and others would already have two-thirds of the Republican majority on the House Ways and Means Committee on their side.

One thing is clear, though: The IRS’ Direct File program works. It saves taxpayers money and cuts out a middleman that does nothing but extract unnecessary fees from American taxpayers. Taxpayers in 25 states are currently using Direct File – available at directfile.irs.gov – this tax season, saving many hundreds of dollars. These savings can provide some financial relief at a time when budgets are stretched thin. It’s paramount that as many eligible filers as possible use the Direct File tool this year in order to have a better shot at ensuring the program’s longevity.

Getting rid of Direct File would be a huge mistake. It should be expanded, made permanent, and be held up as a model for government programs enacted to help average Americans – not corporate America. ■

DIRECT FILE OPPOSITION LOBBYISTS’ CONTRIBUTIONS TO REPUBLICAN SIGNERS BY CYCLE



Source: Public Citizen’s analysis of FEC data and House lobbying disclosure data. There were a small number of contributions in cycles prior to 2016. • Created with Datawrapper

Public Citizen's Fight for Grid Stability, Wildfire Prevention, and Fair Elections in Texas

BY JOSÉ MEDINA

Remember when Winter storm Uri killed hundreds of people in Texas? In Texas, we sure do, so as the Texas Legislature convenes, the state's Public Citizen office returns to the fight with a familiar sense of urgency. The scars of Uri linger, the population is booming, and warnings of energy shortages grow louder. Lawmakers have a chance – if not an obligation – to shore up the grid. But that's not the only battle ahead. Public Citizen is also pressing for stronger wildfire prevention measures and safeguards against the creeping influence of AI in elections.

Fixing the Grid

In June 2024, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which manages the Texas electric grid that serves almost all of the state, warned lawmakers that an updated forecast predicts statewide electricity demand could surge from 85 gigawatts to 150 gigawatts by the end of the decade. This warning should trigger swift action by lawmakers.

"Winter Storm Uri was the costliest disaster in Texas history, with an estimated \$195 billion in damage," said Adrian Shelley, Texas director of Public Citizen. "The legislature should do everything possible to prevent it from happening again. Instead, lawmakers have done little more than double down on fossil fuels. There has been no action to reduce demand or use the energy we have more efficiently. This 'all gas, no brakes' approach to grid stability is not going to work anymore."

In the aftermath of Uri, state leaders convinced voters that only funding costly new methane gas-powered power plants could fix our grid. Their efforts culminated in the creation of the Texas Energy Fund in 2023, which offers grants and low-interest loans to build the new methane-powered generating capacity. To date, no TEF-approved project has broken ground, and it will likely be years before any TEF-funded facility generates its first megawatt of electricity.

Public Citizen is lobbying Texas lawmakers for better, cheaper, faster-to-implement solutions. One such solution is establishing a new statewide energy efficiency standard to reduce energy demand.

"What was true in February 2021 remains true today: the cheapest – and most reliable – megawatt of electricity is the one you don't use," Shelley added.

Public Citizen also supports legislation to study the cost of burying power lines and consider connecting the ERCOT grid to other state grids. We're raising awareness about the public health and climate consequences of increasing fossil fuel generation, pushing lawmakers to use the TEF to fund renewable energy projects. In the years since Uri, renewable energy projects have accounted for almost all of the state's power-generating capacity.

Preventing Wildfires

In February 2024, Texas experienced the largest wildfire in state history. The Panhandle Wildfires killed three people, burned more than 1 million acres, and destroyed more than 15,000 head of cattle. A Texas State House committee created to investigate the fires determined the fires started by a brittle oil field electric utility pole that broke and fell on dry grass. The state agencies that should have regulatory oversight of oil fields and utility poles – the Railroad Commission of Texas and the Public Utility Commission of Texas – claim they didn't have the legal authority to do so. Public Citizen is working with lawmakers to make it clear the agencies have the responsibility to hold oil field

owners and operators accountable for starting fires.

The honor system isn't working. Public Citizen supports giving state regulators the tools and funding they need to fix this problem and prevent it from happening again. It also backs legislative proposals to provide firefighters with new and sufficient equipment to fight fires when they do occur.

Ethics Commission Reforms and Getting AI Out of Elections

The 2023 Texas House impeachment and Texas Senate acquittal of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton spotlighted the ineffectiveness of campaign finance laws and the agency that is supposed to enforce them, the Texas Ethics Commission.

That's why Public Citizen advocates for reforms to address the conflicts of interest that came to light during Paxton's impeachment and trial. The process was influenced by significant political contributions due to a loophole that banned political donations while the state Legislature was in regular session but not during an impeachment proceeding outside of a legislative session. Such was the case for Paxton's impeachment. This situation allowed Paxton's supporters to spend money to influence the outcome and pressure the jurors – the 31 state

senators, which include Paxton's wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton – and save him from the substantial evidence of public corruption presented at trial.

The Texas Ethics Commission (TEC) oversees campaign finance rules and reporting and is notoriously toothless and ineffective by design. Public Citizen believes that true and fair democracy means having a watchdog to keep campaigns and political groups honest and impose consequences when candidates violate election finance laws. As part of the TEC's agency-wide review, due this year, Public Citizen supports expanding the contributions moratorium to include special sessions and periods when an impeachment is pending and giving the TEC the teeth it needs to enforce its rules.

As part of its work combating the use of artificial intelligence to influence elections, the Texas office of Public Citizen supports expanding an existing state law banning AI in videos to influence elections, by expanding the ban to include audio and still images.

The Texas Legislature meets for only 140 days starting in January on odd-numbered years. Public Citizen is working hard to end the session with legislative victories that improve the environment, public health, and good government in the Lone Star State. ■



Kaiba White, a climate policy and outreach specialist with Public Citizen's Texas Office, speaks at a rally for clean energy that Public Citizen organized at Austin City Hall. Photo courtesy of AI Braden.

Corporate Colonization Through Trade: A New Scramble for Africa

Many free trade and investment agreements allow multinational corporations to undermine democracy via a secret pseudo-court system known as Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). ISDS has become a significant concern for African nations, as it often privileges multinational corporations at the expense of local governance and public welfare. This system allows foreign investors to sue governments over policies that might affect their profits, like denial of a mining permit or implementation of a new toxic chemical ban, leading not just to substantial financial costs, but also undermining the sovereignty of host countries.

And the crisis is only propelled by the historical lack of critical analysis regarding the impacts of ISDS on the region. Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch has been working to fill this gap of research, and in December released a report, "The Scramble for Africa Continues: Impacts of ISDS on African Countries," detailing the rise in cases since the 1990s and the trend of corporations suing the former colonies of their home countries.

Since 1993, African governments have been the target of 171 ISDS claims, overwhelmingly from investors headquartered in the Global North. In total, African states have been ordered to pay over \$5.7 billion to corporations, with an additional \$19.5 billion still at stake in ongoing cases. However, due to the lack of publicly available information for many disputes, the actual amounts paid and sought are likely significantly higher.

More than 70% of the corporations that have launched ISDS lawsuits against African nations are based in Australia, Europe, and the United States. European investors account for 32% of all ISDS cases against African countries.

Notably, many of these nations were former colonizers of African territories, including Belgium, Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Since the inception of ISDS, 40% of all cases filed by investors from these countries have targeted

the very territories their country once colonized. Each flag on the map below represents an instance of a corporation challenging a nation its home country had once colonized.

The report spotlights select ISDS cases, including the egregious example of *von Pezold v. Zimbabwe*, in which a Swiss-German family filed a claim against Zimbabwe's 1980 land reform policy. The law sought to redistribute farmland from European owners to displaced locals post-independence – a measure specifically aimed at reversing the damage of colonialism. The tribunal ruled in favor of the family, ordering Zimbabwe to pay over \$64 million, plus an additional \$1 million in "moral damages."

"The ISDS mechanism, as it stands, disproportionately favors multinational corporations, leaving African countries vulnerable to costly litigations that impede their policy-making autonomy," emphasized GTW Research Director and author of the report Iza Camarillo.

International trade was a key instrument for geopolitical power and colonization for centuries. In a "post-colonial" world, ISDS allows corporations to assume the status of sovereign governments and formalize their neocolonialist power.

The United States maintains ISDS pacts with several African countries, including Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Morocco, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tunisia. To date, U.S. investors have launched 13 ISDS cases against African governments, resulting in over \$200 million in known awards and settlements.

The financial burden of a government litigating an ISDS case, compounded with the high risk of losing and being forced to pay millions, can deter governments from implementing public interest policies at all. This "chilling effect" is particularly alarming in sectors like mining, where efforts to enhance labor standards, ensure fair wages, and enforce workplace safety can be stifled by the threat of ISDS claims.

Indigenous communities often bear the brunt of ISDS cases, as

they are frequently excluded from direct participation in proceedings that affect their lands and livelihoods. Legal briefs submitted on behalf of these communities are routinely dismissed, marginalizing their voices and concerns. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle where corporate interests supersede the rights and well-being of local peoples, undermining social and environmental justice.

The people who have lived with the consequences of ISDS worldwide have formed social movements calling for its elimination to safeguard sovereignty and facilitate equitable development. This past November, more than 40 civil society organizations and advocacy groups adopted the Entebbe Declaration in Uganda, presenting an African-led vision to reform global investment frameworks. The Declaration calls for sustainable, human rights-centered investment policies, the replacement of ISDS with equitable regional dispute mechanisms, and prioritization of renewable energy, local value addition, and environmental protection to align with climate and development goals.

Historically, the U.S. has been one of the strongest proponents of ISDS, making it our duty to lead the charge in dismantling it in our investment agreements. And the opposition to ISDS is growing every day across the political spectrum.

In the post-colonial era, ISDS has continued the legacy of injustice, particularly impacting the Global South and Indigenous peoples by favoring foreign corporations at the expense of Indigenous lands and resources, mirroring colonial power dynamics. To strengthen sustainable and just supply chains with African countries, particularly with regard to the 'critical minerals' needed for the clean energy transition, elimination of ISDS should be a top priority.

"The era of colonialism may be over, but the power dynamics of resource extraction remain alive and well," says Camarillo. "ISDS is an extension of the same economic model that has prioritized foreign interests at the expense of African sovereignty and development for decades. It's time to dismantle this relic from colonialism once and for all and prioritize democracy and sovereignty." ■



Each flag on the map represents an instance of a corporation challenging a former colony of its home country.

► **Global Health**, from page 5

Human Services, to strategize responses to this unprecedented crisis.

We are helping affected communities navigate the fallout through the CHANGE Network, a fast-growing coalition of more than 1,000 HIV and community health advocates worldwide. We are producing critical analysis, such as our report "The Fate of Flu," which exposes the dangers of the administration's withdrawal from the World Health Organization for pandemic preparedness. We are providing translation support, uniting advocates, and amplifying impacted voices.

And we are taking this fight to the streets – protesting outside the State Department, demanding the restoration of HIV funding, and refusing to let these attacks go unanswered.

Global Health Is Not Charity. It's Survival.

The Trump administration has framed global health aid as a luxury the U.S. can no longer afford. But global health is not charity – it is an essential investment in stability, survival, and justice.

The programs under attack don't just save lives – they create resilience. PEPFAR has not only provided antiretroviral treatment to millions but also strengthened entire health systems, training over 340,000 healthcare workers in regions hardest hit by HIV. WHO's disease surveillance network has detected and contained deadly outbreaks before they spiral into global crises. USAID-supported immunization programs do more than prevent outbreaks – they anchor fragile healthcare infrastructures, ensuring that millions of children receive routine care in places where hospitals are scarce.

Gutting these programs isn't just shortsighted – it is an act of political violence against the world's most vulnerable. When health systems collapse, pandemics spread. When prevention is abandoned, suffering multiplies. The U.S. cannot afford to turn its back on global health – morally, strategically, or economically.

Dismantling Global Health: A Shift in Global Influence

With the U.S. abandoning its global health commitments, a leadership vacuum is emerging – one that geopolitical rivals are well-positioned to exploit. Health aid has long been a cornerstone of U.S.

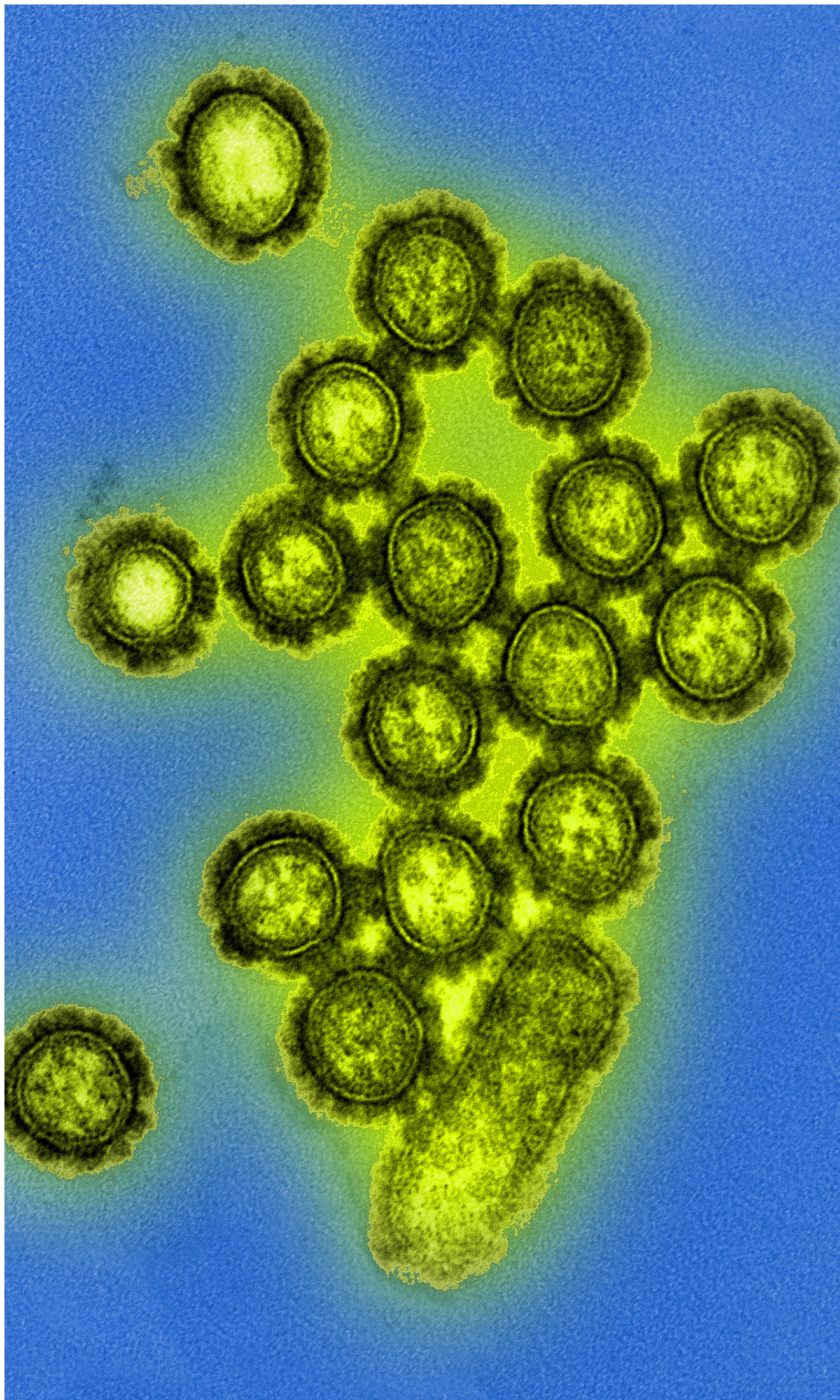
diplomatic engagement, securing partnerships, fostering goodwill, and strengthening global stability. Now, by walking away, the U.S. is forfeiting its ability to shape international health priorities, leaving other nations to set the agenda.

Peter Maybarduk, director of Public Citizen's Access to

Medicines Program, put it bluntly: "The idea that some lives matter less – that it's acceptable to cut off millions from treatment, to leave children unvaccinated, to dismantle systems that protect the vulnerable – is an outrage and a moral failure. Public Citizen will not allow this to go unchallenged."

Maybarduk warned: "This is

not just a policy dispute – it is a death sentence for millions. The administration knows exactly what it is doing. By abandoning global health commitments, it is condemning people to avoidable deaths, greater suffering, and the collapse of critical health systems. The harm will not be undone." ■



Colorized transmission electron micrograph showing H1N1 influenza virus particles courtesy of NIAID.

The FDA's Long-Overdue Ban on Red Dye No. 3 in Food and Oral Drugs

BY ROBERT STEINBROOK, M.D.

After decades of inaction, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has finally banned Red Dye No. 3 from food, beverages, dietary supplements, and oral drugs. The synthetic dye, responsible for the bright cherry-red hue of certain candies, cakes, cookies, frozen desserts, and frostings, has long been widely used in the food and pharmaceutical industries. In 2021 alone, more than 200,000 pounds of the dye were used. This long-overdue decision, announced in January, comes after relentless advocacy by consumer health groups and public interest organizations.

The evidence against Red Dye No. 3 has been clear for decades. In 1990, the FDA banned its use in cosmetics and topical drugs, such as lipsticks and skin ointments, after studies from the 1980s demonstrated that the dye caused thyroid cancer in male laboratory rats. The agency at the time acknowledged the risks and even stated its intent to move against its use in food and oral medications. Yet, inexplicably, it failed to do so—allowing the dye

to remain in widespread circulation for more than 30 years.

The ban is the culmination of decades of pressure from organizations like the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) and Public Citizen, which have worked tirelessly to remove this harmful additive from the market. In October 2022, CSPI led a petition urging the FDA to act, joined by Public Citizen and 22 other organizations and scientists. But Public Citizen's efforts go back much further. The organization first took legal action against Red Dye No. 3 in 1977, not long after it was founded by consumer advocate Ralph Nader, when it filed the first of four lawsuits to compel the FDA to remove the dye from the market. In 1984, Public Citizen's Health Research Group, led by the late Dr. Sidney M. Wolfe, petitioned the agency to immediately ban 10 widely used dyes, including Red Dye No. 3. Despite mounting scientific evidence of its risks, the FDA failed to take comprehensive action.

Dr. Wolfe was vocal about the absurdity of this delay. In 1990, speaking to journalist Malcolm

Gladwell, then reporting for *The Washington Post*, Wolfe was blunt: "This whole thing has taken a lot of time and wasted a lot of FDA resources ... It's really very simple. [Red Dye No. 3] causes cancer. We should get rid of it." But instead of swift action, the FDA allowed millions of consumers – including children, who are disproportionately exposed to artificial food dyes – to continue ingesting Red Dye No. 3 for decades.

The FDA's recent decision is based on the Delaney clause of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, a provision that explicitly prohibits the addition of food or color additives that have been found to cause cancer in animals or humans. Named after Congressman James Delaney, this clause was enacted in 1958 as part of an amendment to the laws governing the FDA. Although the FDA has concluded that studies in other animals and humans have not demonstrated the same effect, and that there is no evidence that the dye causes cancer in people, the Delaney clause mandates the removal of Red Dye No. 3 based on its carcinogenicity in labora-

tory animals.

Although the FDA's decision is welcome, it raises troubling questions about the agency's prolonged inaction. By the time the ban takes effect – January 2027 for food and January 2028 for oral drugs – several more years will have passed, adding to the already unacceptable delay of over three decades. Given the agency's legal obligation under the Delaney clause, why did the FDA not remove Red Dye No. 3 from the market in the 1980s when its dangers first became clear? How many people, particularly children, have been unnecessarily exposed to Red Dye No. 3 due to regulatory inertia?

Public Citizen has long sounded the alarm on the FDA's failure to uphold its duty to protect consumers from harmful food additives. The organization has repeatedly called for the removal of toxic substances from the market and has highlighted how industry influence and bureaucratic sluggishness undermine public health. This latest decision underscores the need for continued vigilance in holding regulatory agencies accountable. ■



Photo of candy apples on display courtesy of Greudin via Wikimedia Commons.

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen

On potential conflicts of interests created by Trump’s return to the White House: *The New York Times*. **On Trump and Project 2025:** *CNN*, *KFF Health News*. **On RFK Jr. trying to claim the populist mantle on health care:** *The Washington Post*. **On the unprecedented power grab within the government:** *CNN*. **On Elon Musk’s access to IRS data raising privacy concerns:** *CBS News*. **On Musk’s varied business interests:** *Mother Jones*, *CNN International*, *POLITICO*. **On a resignation deadline for federal workers:** *CBS*. **On independent agencies targeted by Trump’s latest executive order:** *Guardian*, *Government Executive*. **On Trump’s attack on agencies’ independence:** *Truthout*, *E&E News*, *UPI*, *Union Journal*, *Common Dreams*. **On Public Citizen’s lawsuit to stop Elon Musk’s attempted takeover of the Treasury Department’s payment system:** *The Nation*, *Democracy Now!*, *Truthout*. **On Musk’s antipathy to anything that sounds woke:** *The American Prospect*. **On safety concerns amid recent aviation incidents:** *ABC News4*, *Common Dreams*. **On Public Citizen’s lawsuits against the Trump administration:** *MSNBC*. **On the crypto crack-down:** *The Street*. **On Trump Media expanding into fintech:** *Salon*. **On military budget increases:** *Responsible Statecraft*. **On Biden rules vulnerable to Trump purge:** *E&E News*.

Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen

On a lawsuit against the Treasury Department: *CNN*. **On Public Citizen’s lawsuit against DOGE over its uncertain legal status:** *The Washington Post*. **On Public Citizen’s role in challenging the Trump agenda:** *C-SPAN*, *AlterNet*. **On Trump opening the floodgates for conflicts of interest:** *Associated Press*. **On Trump taking action to pardon violent criminals:** *BBC*. **On Pam Bondi’s past lobbying work:** *USA Today*, *NBC News*, *Roll Call*. **On how DOJ officials may have tried to sway the 2020 election for Trump:** *Reuters*. **On the Internal Revenue Service and delivery of tax refunds:** *Newsweek*. **On Trump’s roll-back of consumer protections:** *USA Today*. **On the CFPB and junk fees:** *Scripps News*.

Peter Maybarduk, director of Public Citizen’s Access to Medicines Program

On Trump’s defense chief ordering the

Pentagon to make cuts as IRS workers face mass layoffs: *The Guardian*. **On Trump’s freeze on foreign aid funds:** *Reuters*, *The Guardian*, *ABC News*. **On high drug prices and gene therapy costs:** *ProPublica*.

Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen’s Energy Program

On an inauguration watch party celebrating fossil fuels: *The New York Times*. **On Trump’s declaration of a sham energy emergency:** *The Hill*, *Common Dreams*. **On the potential impact of Trump’s energy agenda:** *E&E News*. **On LNG exports raising gas prices for consumers:** *Utility Dive*.

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

On state medical boards: *NPR Weekend Edition*. **On Trump’s Department of Health and Human Services purge:** *MedPage Today*. **On the firing of U.S. Food and Drug Administration medical device center employees:** *Common Dreams*.

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

On Kash Patel’s conflicts of interest: *Reuters*, *The Intercept*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Associated Press*, *Politico*. **On Trump’s inauguration:** *The New York Times*, *Town & Country*, *Democracy Now!*. **On the D.C. Council preparing to expel Trayon White:** *The Washington Post*. **On Musk’s conflicts of interest in government:** *Mother Jones*. **On the ethics requirements for people in the Trump administration:** *The Hill*, *Politico*. **On how Trump’s billionaires will have to navigate a complex web of possible conflicts of interest:** *Business Insider*.

Public Citizen Litigation Group

On legal challenges to Trump’s foreign aid freeze: *The New York Times*, *ABC News*, *Politico*, *The Hill*, *Roll Call*, *USA Today*. **On restoring deleted government health pages:** *Associated Press*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg*, *The New Republic*. **On a lawsuit accusing DOGE of illegally sharing confidential student data:** *USA Today*, *Newsmax*, *Washington Post*, *Bloomberg*, *NBC News*. **On how Trump’s firings leave independent panels in legal turmoil:** *Bloomberg Law*.

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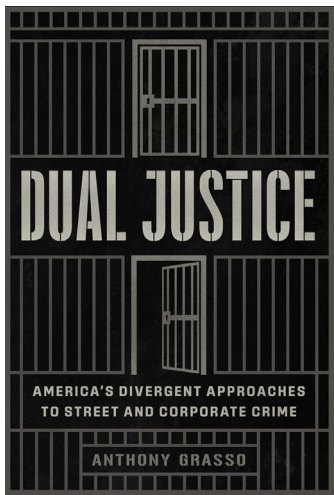
"Dual Justice: America's Divergent Approaches to Street and Corporate Crime"

By Anthony Grasso; \$32.50; University of Chicago Press

President Trump and other right-wing politicians use the rhetoric of "law and order" and being "tough on crime" to justify harsh crackdowns on immigrants and low-level offenses like shoplifting. At the same time, Trump and others paradoxically turn a blind eye to corporate crime, though it is widely recognized that corporate lawbreaking causes harms that are far more widespread than "street" crimes.

Research by the Economic Policy Institute, for example, estimates that wage theft collectively costs American workers \$50 billion a year, while all the robberies, burglaries, larcenies, and motor vehicle thefts put together cost the public \$14 billion, according to the FBI. Yet, while offenders accused of the crimes tracked by the FBI can face years in prison,

businesses that rob workers of their wages face only the repay-



ment of illegally withheld wages (sometimes with additional penalties, sometimes not) and only, of course, if they are caught and held accountable.

Public Citizen documented plummeting corporate enforcement the first time Trump took office, and we are diligently tracking the enforcement decline in real time during the current Trump administration.

Anthony Grasso's "Dual Justice" traces the historic roots of the US legal system's tendencies to mete out harsh penalties for those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder while protecting corporate offenders. Widely accepted Social Darwinist and eugenicist thinking influenced the development of the U.S. system for imprisoning offenders during the late 19th century, creating penal systems designed to focus punishment on individuals, sorted by the system into those who can be reformed, and those who are hopelessly "incorrigible." Built on a toxic foundation of race "science" and bias against the poor, immigrants, and working classes, the penal system developed over the decades into the instrument of mass incarceration we know today.

Corporate offenders, meanwhile, were largely shielded from criminal prosecution by regulatory regimes constructed to constrain illegal misconduct by executives and big business. When legisla-

tion to hold corporations and executives criminally liable for misconduct gains momentum and popularity, defenders of big business take advantage of biases against the poor and working classes to argue against punishment for corporate crime. While populist fury against corporate misconduct – such as the reform movement spurred by Ralph Nader – can claim numerous victories, backlashes by big business and billionaires that resent any type of oversight are a constant threat to progress.

While relaying these twin histories, Grasso argues for a more humane penal system that applies the leniency of the regulatory approach for low-level offenders, while also noting that fighting corporate crime requires preserving the credible threat of prosecution for egregious misconduct. In this, it offers a thoughtful vision of a new direction while we endure the worst of both worlds.

— Rick Claypool ■

To order books, contact the publisher or visit your local bookstore or library.

New Coalition Fights Oil and Gas Giveaways

BY ALAN ZIBEL

In his second term in office, President Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress have made clear they will do everything possible to give massive handouts to the fossil fuel industry.

Public Citizen and its allies are fighting back. A coalition of anti-corruption, economic justice, faith, youth, and climate leaders launched a new coalition in February aimed at ending government handouts to fossil fuel companies.

The broad coalition, United to End Polluter Handouts, calls for the \$170 billion in projected fossil fuel subsidies over the next decade to be redirected to benefit society rather than destroy the planet.

“Big Oil has for decades deployed its political power to generate a geyser of taxpayer handouts and subsidies – and the oil and gas corporations are coming back for more,” said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. “This time, however, a mobilized public will work to stop the flow of taxpayer money to this industry, which threatens human existence on this planet.”

Oil and gas executives and their lobbyists want to preserve and expand specific tax breaks benefiting the industry, making the industry’s existing business model even more profitable. Sen. James Lankford (R-Okla), a key oil and gas industry ally, has been pushing to do so, claiming it is necessary to stimulate economic growth.

Republicans also want to require the government to regularly auction off massive amounts of public lands and offshore waters for oil and gas drilling, while rolling back federal and state efforts to

promote renewable energy and diminish fossil fuel consumption.

In addition to combating efforts to extend new tax breaks for oil and gas, the coalition aims to raise awareness on Capitol Hill and in the public about longtime public subsidies for the climate destroying oil and gas industry. These handouts include:

- **Unfair deduction for drilling costs:** Fossil fuel companies are allowed to add up the costs of developing an oil or gas well and immediately count them against the company’s taxable income in a single year – a departure from normal corporate tax accounting practices requiring companies to make those deductions over the life of the asset. Called the “intangible drilling costs” deduction, this tax break increases profitability

for U.S. oil fields by 11% and gas fields by 8%, according to the Stockholm Environmental Institute and Earth Track.

- **Tax dodges for overseas profits:** Extractive industries can classify payments to foreign governments as taxes rather than royalties, enabling them to take credit against their U.S. taxes. This is a de facto subsidy for payments to some of the most corrupt regimes. In 2023, Exxon paid \$7.4 billion in taxes and royalties to the United Arab Emirates, more than it paid in taxes to the United States or any other country.
- **Tax handouts just for Big Oil & Gas:** All overseas oil and gas extraction profits are allowed to be repatriated back to the United States without paying any U.S. taxes. Such preferential treatment is not

awarded to any other industry.

The coalition includes a diverse range of organizations, including Public Citizen, Hip Hop Caucus, Zero Hour, Friends of the Earth, and Our Revolution. Coalition leaders plan to engage a broad-based movement to pressure Congress to end the subsidies and redirect the funds toward clean energy, environmental justice, and community needs.

“Every day, Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and [their] minions are putting communities directly in the line of fire from polluters – handing over billions in fossil fuel subsidies to mega-wealthy Big Oil and Big Gas executives, while everyday Americans struggle to pay their energy bills and face the costs of rebuilding homes and communities after disasters supercharged by climate change,” noted Sen. Ed Markey, (D-Mass.). ■



Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman speaks at the launch of the United to End Polluter Handouts campaign on Feb. 12, 2025 in the Capital Visitors Center in Washington. Photo courtesy of Paul Morigi/AP Content Services for United to End Polluter Handouts.

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