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PUBLICCITIZEN NEWS

Americans Rise Against Trump's Power Grab

BY KATIE GARCIA

It was a bright October afternoon in Washington, D.C., with warm sunlight glinting off the Capitol dome as chants rolled down Pennsylvania Avenue. On Oct. 18, more than 200,000 people filled the streets in the nation's capital, dancing in inflatable costumes, waving American flags, and shouting in unison: "No Thrones! No Crowns! No Kings!"

The chorus of defiance echoed far beyond the capital – reverberating across 2,700 peaceful No Kings events where more than 7 million people took to the streets in the largest nationwide turnout in American history (see page 3). Public Citizen was proud to be at the heart of this unprecedented

popular mobilization against authoritarianism.

In the days leading up to the peaceful demonstrations, Republican leaders had scrambled to contain the movement's momentum. They falsely claimed that No Kings was behind the government shutdown, spread lies about "paid protestors," and slanderously linked the events to political violence. All this was done to distract from a simple truth: the majority of Americans oppose their authoritarian drift. Undaunted by Republican leaders' demonization of No Kings' community-led rallies, Public Citizen members and fellow Americans showed up in full force on Oct.

see **No Kings**, page 4 ►



Photo of the No Kings mobilization in Washington, D.C., courtesy of Ben Israel.

Method to the Madness: How Trump's Chaotic Trade Agenda Benefits Big Tech

BY RISHAB BAILEY

To most people, President Trump's trade policy appears chaotic and incoherent. Yet a recent Public Citizen report reveals that his tariff threats and secretive "trade deals" are actually quite consistent in one important aspect: unabashedly promoting the interests of Big Tech companies. Rather than supporting American communities and workers, his trade policy is nothing but a shakedown on behalf of Big Tech.

Big Tech's Anti-People Agenda

Big Tech has consistently sought to use the trade arena as a means to block regulation around the world. Under Trump, Big Tech's deregulatory efforts have been even more successful, perhaps due to the close links between the administration and the industry.

Big Tech has made enormous financial contributions to Trump – more than \$1 billion in inauguration donations, super PACs, and payments to Trump's private

businesses. His administration has made no secret of its work for Big Tech, using tariff threats and secretive trade negotiations to roll back critical regulation of the digital ecosystem.

Public Citizen has released a tool that maps the regulations in Big Tech's crosshairs. Our research into the comments submitted by tech lobby groups to the U.S. Trade Representative's (USTR) "reciprocal tariff report" – upon which Trump has based his so-called "reciprocal tariffs" – shows that

see **Trade**, page 4 ►

Big Pharma Lobbies to Erode Landmark Drug Pricing Reform

BY MEGAN WHITEMAN

Big Pharma is pulling out all the stops to kill the most impactful drug pricing reform in decades. The Medicare Drug Price Negotiation Program, established by the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, empowered Medicare to directly negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. The program is projected to save billions of dollars for Medicare and lower costs for millions of Americans, with the first round of negotiated drug prices alone

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GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN MEGAN WHITEMAN

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers



Megan Whiteman is a researcher with Public Citizen's Access to Medicines program, where she works on issues related to drug pricing and access.

A native Marylander, she received her bachelor's degree in public health science from the University of Maryland and her master's degree in health policy from the University of Edinburgh. In her spare time, she enjoys running, hiking, reading, spending time with family and friends, and traveling.

How did you end up at Public Citizen??

Whiteman: I am interested in the different things that influence our health and the obstacles that prevent people from accessing health care. While pursuing my undergraduate degree, I interned at PharmedOut, a project at Georgetown University Medical Center that works on evidence-based prescribing and provides health care professionals with educational resources free from pharmaceutical industry influence. From there, I became more interested in policy as an area to push for top-down change, and in finding ways to support those working to promote health from the bottom up. I find it shocking that corporations can have such an outsized influence on people's health. Public Citizen has offered me the opportunity to advocate for accountability and lifesaving policies.

What's one research project you worked on at Public Citizen that you're especially proud of or would want to highlight?

Whiteman: In 2024, an infectious disease called mpox spread rapidly through several countries in Africa. Public Citizen's Access to Medicines team challenged the manufacturer of a key mpox vaccine on its unaffordable pricing; urged global health organizations to negotiate a fair price for the vaccine; supported calls to share vaccine manufacturing technology; and underscored the

inherent injustice of vaccine doses being unavailable in places where they are most needed. As with COVID-19, recent mpox outbreaks emphasize the inadequacy of relying on monopoly suppliers to provide medical tools to the world and the need for global action to advance equitable access, prevent suffering, and curb outbreaks.

What does a typical work day look like for you?

Whiteman: I typically start each day by reading news related to health and access to medicines. I share relevant stories with my team at Public Citizen and with hundreds of health advocates through two listservs that we maintain. This helps me keep up with the latest developments and can help inform advocacy priorities. For the rest of my day, I research health topics and policies and analyze their potential impacts on access and affordability.

What's your superpower?

Whiteman: I'm curious and enjoy exploring new spaces, learning new things, and broadening my understanding to improve my work and generate impact.

What do you enjoy about working with the Access to Medicines team?

Whiteman: The team puts expertise, clarity, and compassion to work every day to promote the public interest and support equitable access to medicines. We also collaborate with advocates across countries who bring their own experience and knowledge to the fight. I'm grateful to be part of a team and an organization working for progress in the U.S. and coordinating globally to bring down monopoly barriers that keep medicines out of reach for so many. ■

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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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No Kings: Seven Million Voices for Democracy

Some 7 million people took part in over 2,700 “No Kings” rallies in October (see story on page 1). Millions and millions more were there in spirit and participating remotely by watching coverage on television or online. It was, remarkably, the largest single day of protest in American history.

Together, the American people showed that resistance to the Trump regime’s authoritarianism is coming from every corner of this great country. We demonstrated

the weaponization of the Justice Department, attacks on free speech, the effort to whitewash American history, and more.

Second, it was shameful and ridiculous for Speaker of the House Mike Johnson and other Republican figures to say these were “Hate America” rallies, to disparage participants, and to denigrate protest itself.

As was evidenced by anyone who attended or watched any footage from the rallies, these were patriotic rallies that sought to defend our democracy and the best of our values. Given the out-of-control rhetoric from the Trump regime, Johnson used coded language that suggested the rallies verged on domestic terrorism. That was a disgraceful attack on First Amendment expression.

As we said over and over, “No Kings” takes its place in the long and honorable tradition of American protest. Every single

major social advance in American history has come as the result of protest. Our nation’s very independence originated in protest.

Third, this was a protest with a purpose. Donald Trump and his cronies have spread the lie that they have overwhelming support and their policies are inevitable. “No Kings” proved those claims untrue. The Trump regime wants to intimidate opponents and chill dissent. They want people to be scared and isolated. With “No Kings,” we joined together to feel, and feed, our power – in overwhelming numbers.

Politicians were watching. Just as the prior large nationwide demonstrations this year – “Hands Off!” and the first “No Kings” – stiffened their spines just a bit, what they witnessed this weekend is already making them stronger in the very difficult fights ahead.

We and our allied organizations designed No Kings so that it would be a launching pad for more actions to follow, many of which have already occurred and others of which are underway:

- Call-in days to demand Democrats continue to stand

up for health care in the current government shutdown fight.

- Actions to support immigrant families against ICE raids.
 - Email campaigns to block schemes that would make voter suppression even worse.
 - State initiatives against Trump-demanded mid-term gerrymanders.
 - Campaigns against corporations preparing to fund Trump’s White House ballroom.
 - Campus projects to ensure universities reject Trump’s proposed “racist” compact.
- And so much more.

Ultimately, mass mobilizations remind us of the power of solidarity and love. We have great challenges ahead to defeat Trump’s authoritarianism. But – animated by the spirit and energy of “No Kings” – we will prevail. ■

Lisa Gilbert
Robert Weissman



CO-PRESIDENTS’ VIEW
LISA GILBERT AND ROBERT WEISSMAN

our commitment to nonviolence, our patriotism, our anger at the needless harm Trump is inflicting on the nation, our rejection of his dictatorial ambitions, and – not least – our sense of humor.

We have no doubt that history will mark No Kings as a decisive moment in the growth of a movement that defeated Trump’s authoritarianism.

Public Citizen played an essential role in helping build the protests, as one of the core organizing groups. We did everything from identify and assist local protest leaders to recruit co-sponsoring organizations (more than 300!). We helped develop the protest themes, drive turnout and manage logistics.

Each of us spoke to a lot of media outlets about the protests, including *CNN*, *NPR*, *Fox News*, *The Guardian*, *PBS’s Newshour*, *USA Today*, and a lot more.

In these conversations, we made three essential points:

First, Americans are outraged about Trump’s authoritarianism and what it is doing to our country.

They are furious about ICE kidnappings on our streets, the illegal deployment of National Guard troops, illegal firings of federal workers who protect our health, the illegal shutdown of agencies like the consumer bureau that protects us from financial fraud,



Photo of the No Kings mobilization in Washington, D.C., in October courtesy of Ben Israel.

► **No Kings**, from page 1

18. Their message was clear: power belongs to the people, not to a would-be monarch.

The October demonstrations built on the impact of the first No Kings Day of Defiance on June 14, when more than 5 million people across all 50 states joined in the largest coordinated protest since Trump's return to office. The fall day of action was the next step in a growing movement that is channeling the energy of the earlier community-centered events into a united response to Trump's lawless abuse of power. Staff from Public Citizen's democracy and communications teams, alongside several interns, worked tirelessly behind the scenes – mobilizing crowds, amplifying the movement across media platforms, and reminding Americans of their collective power.

They were joined by a broad alliance of civic, labor, and human rights organizations, including the ACLU, American Federation of Teachers, Common Defense, 50501, Human Rights Campaign, Indivisible, League of Conservation Voters, MoveOn, National Nurses United, SEIU, and United We Dream, among others.

Public Citizen Co-Presidents Lisa Gilbert and Robert Weissman emerged as key voices in the flood of news coverage around the protests, speaking to multiple outlets, including *CNN*, *ABC News*, *PBS*, *Rolling Stone*, *NPR*, and even Fox News.

“Since the first No Kings Day in June, Trump has intensified his autocratic clampdown, but resistance is also rising to meet the moment,” said Weissman. “We’re seeing that with successful litigation; the national outcry that brought Jimmy Kimmel back

to the airwaves; a Republican governor speaking out against National Guard deployments, airports rejecting administration-directed partisan content, universities rebuffing Trump's racist and oppressive compact, and more.”

Even as Donald Trump and his cronies try to stoke fear and propagate misinformation, the No Kings movement grows stronger. Building on the resistance movement to Trump's authoritarianism, No Kings rallies are unifying rural communities and big cities and people of all ages and backgrounds against Trump's destructive agenda. Just days after the second iteration of No Kings, *Axios* released data that told a striking story: people were galvanized by a range of issues, including health care, immigration, voting rights, and federal workforce cuts – but the single most unifying force was Donald Trump himself.

“Donald Trump has absolutely no clue what a public servant is,” said Gilbert. “In less than 10 months, he's ticked off every box of a king's playbook. He has plastered his face on banners across D.C., weaponized National Guard troops against our communities, deported people without due process, attempted to sabotage elections, and trivialized the power of Congress and the courts. He has violated the Constitution again and again.”

“The American people are fed up with Trump's pathetic attempt at wearing the crown,” added Weissman. “The No Kings movement pushes him aside and focuses on those who matter most: our friends, our neighbors, working families – all of us who build and sustain our country. All of us who actually make America great.” ■

► **Trade**, from page 1

they are targeting scores of laws in over 45 countries.

Big Tech companies' hit list includes laws that target their monopolistic business practices, and that seek to ensure consumer protection and online safety – whether in the context of social media services, AI systems, or ensuring privacy and data protection rights for users.

These are issues that Americans care about. For instance, a Pew Research study found support for increased regulation of Big Tech companies. Yet, the Trump administration is doing all it can to ensure that Big Tech companies enjoy fewer restrictions both domestically and abroad.

Tariffs Being Used to Force Deregulation

Trump has explicitly threatened sweeping “reciprocal tariffs” to bully other countries to deregulate the tech ecosystem. This was evident in his social media post of Aug. 25, 2025, in which he threatened to impose tariffs, set export controls, and take other punitive action against countries that dared regulate U.S. tech companies' operations within their territories.

Faced with the threat of tariffs, countries are often forced to bow to Trump's wishes.

For example:

- The White House claims that a trade deal with Indonesia will force the country to recognize the U.S. as a jurisdiction providing adequate data protection standards under its privacy law, thereby enabling free

flows of data from Indonesia to the U.S. The U.S. does not have significant privacy protections at the federal level, particularly for personal data of non-citizens. Indonesia has also reportedly agreed to sign up to the World Trade Organization's controversial E-Commerce Moratorium, which will prevent it from implementing taxes on the import of digital products and services.

- Canada agreed to withdraw its digital services tax due to President Trump's threats to suspend negotiations on a trade deal. This means that Big Tech companies can avoid paying their fair share of taxes in Canada.
- A number of countries, such as Vietnam, Pakistan, and Lesotho, have agreed to allow entry of Elon Musk's Starlink, easing compliance norms and even amending domestic laws to ensure quick entry of a service that raises security and other concerns.
- Several countries have also apparently made concessions by pausing enforcement of digital economy-related regulations in advance of negotiations with the U.S. government. For example, India has withdrawn its “equalization levy,” a tax on advertising revenues of Big Tech companies, while Australia appears to be slow-walking enforcement of its news media bargaining code, which requires Big Tech companies to share revenue with local content producers whose work they use.

These concessions have not guaranteed a reprieve from further bullying. Countries that have signed supposed “deals” with the Trump administration continue to face pressure to further deregulate.

For example, after announcing a U.S.-EU framework deal, Trump threatened punitive actions against the European Union for its independent regulatory findings that Apple and Google breached their obligations under the EU's digital rulebook. Similar threats have been made against Korea and Japan. Trump has also ruthlessly used trade threats against Brazil, for purely political reasons, on behalf of his buddy and fellow coup attempter Jair Bolsonaro.

Trump's Agenda: Big Tech First

Contrary to Trump's rhetoric, his trade chaos does not serve the interests of American consumers, workers, or small enterprises. Rather than reshoring manufacturing, creating good jobs in the services sector, or enabling small businesses to flourish by limiting the malpractices of Big Tech companies, his administration is wielding trade policy to further enrich tech billionaires, whom President Trump has been wining and dining. And all this at the expense of global consumer rights and other critical public interests.

“President Trump's trade policy should be seen for what it is: a policy that comes at the cost of crucial public interest regulation that could make the global digital ecosystem safer and fairer,” said Melinda St. Louis, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade

Watch.

U.S. trade policy is now echoing Trump's domestic deregulatory agenda in advancing the interests of Big Tech companies. The domestic agenda includes tax breaks for U.S.-based multinational corporations; dozens of dropped enforcement actions against tech companies; defanged consumer protection organizations such as the Federal Trade Commission and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau; and attempts to introduce legislation that would ensure that Big Tech cannot be held accountable to the public.

Forcing countries to stop implementing laws that regulate the excesses of Big Tech companies raises questions about similar regulatory efforts at home. For instance, states as different as Montana and California have enacted laws that regulate the unrestricted export of personal data, such as genetic and other medical information. These laws could be questioned in trade forums, given the Trump administration's trade policy, which appears to target any attempts at regulating completely free data flows, even to protect critical interests such as privacy rights.

“Big Tech wants to eliminate checks on its power, both at home and abroad,” said St. Louis. “That's why we are standing in solidarity with domestic and international partners against Trump's tech oligopolist agenda and striving to build a world that works for all of us, not just the wealthy few.” ■

Crypto Corruption on Overdrive

BY DAVID ROSEN

Cryptocurrency may not be on everyone's radar, but it is a massive and growing multi-trillion-dollar industry that poses significant risks to our economy. Altogether, bitcoin is valued at \$2 trillion, and the tens of thousands of other cryptocurrencies combined are valued at more than \$1 trillion.

Responding to political pressure from crypto executives, Congress is advancing dangerous legislation that would enable and expand the industry. Public Citizen opposes these measures – one of which already became law and the other of which is likely to face a vote in the Senate in the weeks or months ahead.

The GENIUS Act, which was signed into law in July, legitimizes a category of cryptocurrency known as stablecoins.

Stablecoins are pegged to national currencies and aim to maintain a stable value against regular currencies. One dollar buys one token of, say, Tether, which is the most widely used cryptocurrency in the illegal drug trade, arms trade, and for human trafficking.

Stablecoins are commonly used for fast, cross-border, and largely anonymous transactions. Georgetown University researchers estimate that stablecoins now account for at least \$50 billion worth of illicit transactions per

year, a figure that will likely continue to grow by billions every year.

Even Donald Trump now owns a stablecoin, which is used by a Middle Eastern financial power, helping Trump get richer. For the sponsor of one, a stablecoin works like an interest-free loan. Abu Dhabi sends Trump \$2 billion as payment for \$2 billion worth of his newly created token. Until they redeem tokens for their dollars, Trump can use them to buy Treasuries and pocket the interest.

"Trump's crypto gifting amounts to the greatest corruption in presidential history," said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. "Both the crypto bill that has already passed and the one still to come stamp a congressional seal of approval on that corruption."

The second bill, smugly named the Responsible Financial Innovation Act (RFIA), concerns all other cryptocurrencies, including bitcoin.

Bitcoin is a classic Ponzi scheme. Buying bitcoin does not get the purchaser a dividend, an interest payment, material goods, or services. An owner must find another buyer – a greater fool – willing to pay a higher price.

Trump used to dismiss bitcoin as a scam. It's just "thin air," he once correctly sniffed. That echoes the views of Public Citizen and many Americans, a major-

ity of whom view crypto dimly. Polling has found that more than three out of five Americans have no confidence in the reliability and safety of cryptocurrencies.

But now that he is profiting from it, Trump has proclaimed himself the crypto president, and a compliant Congress may back him up.

The RFIA, or legislation similar to it, is slated to be taken up by the Senate in the coming weeks. The bill would weaken oversight of cryptocurrencies by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission; expose people's retirement accounts and the entire banking system to the crypto's market volatility; and weaken protections against fraud.

Boosting cryptocurrencies will fuel illicit finance – whether it's the illegal arms trade, terrorism, money laundering, white collar crime, human trafficking, or tax evasion. The bill is a recipe for a fintech bubble of fraud and abuse that sooner or later will pop and cause a painful economic downturn that could take years to climb out of.

Despite the enormous risks, the bill has big money backing it.

Wealthy crypto bros and CEOs are behind an unprecedented tsunami of political spending aimed at passing this industry-enabling legislation. Public Citizen's money-in-politics researchers are tracking it.

Public Citizen found that crypto bros spent more than \$119 million on the 2024 election as of August that year – more than any other industry in the history of such expenditures.

Infamously, the crypto sector spent \$10 million contesting the California Senate primary bid of former Rep. Katie Porter (D-Calif.), whom they identified as anti-crypto. Porter's muted public pronouncements on crypto mostly addressed the enormous energy costs required to compute and confirm transactions, known as "mining."

Crypto bros also spent some \$40 million defeating Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), one of the most caustic crypto critics on Capitol Hill.

Notably, the crypto industry's political ads never mention crypto. Recognizing that most voters either oppose crypto or don't care enough to have an opinion, the ads focus on unrelated attributes of the candidates they support or oppose. This is how a great deal of industry- and billionaire-backed political spending works in practice. They run ads that deliberately avoid drawing any attention to the corrupt, toxic, and wildly unpopular agendas of their funders.

"Political spending has an unfortunate way of swamping politicians' legitimate and serious concerns with a multi-trillion-dollar scam that enables illicit finance, energy waste, and Trump's crypto gifting," said Bartlett Naylor, financial policy advocate for Public Citizen.

Already, the crypto bros have amassed a \$100 million war chest for the 2026 midterm elections, which they have publicized threateningly.

Some senators may calculate that it's safer to vote with crypto – especially if voting against the industry means facing a deluge of hostile attack ads during election season without bringing many additional votes at the ballot box.

In September, Public Citizen launched an op-ed campaign to dissuade senators across the country from backing another crypto bill they know is wrong. But financially, we are badly outmatched.

No matter which party they're in, contact your two senators and tell them to oppose another corrupt giveaway to the crypto bros.



Graphic courtesy of Pexels.

Public Citizen Fights Trump's Illegal Firing of Consumer Safety Experts

BY NICOLAS SANSONE



Everyday items Americans take for granted — a baby's crib, a bicycle helmet, a bottle of aspirin — are safe, thanks to the vigilance of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). For more than 50 years, this independent federal agency has issued rules, recalled dangerous products, and conducted research on safety issues.

That independence is now under threat. In early May, President Trump abruptly and unlawfully dismissed three of the CPSC's five commissioners — Mary Boyle, Alexander Hoehn-Saric, and Richard Trumka Jr. — without cause, violating longstanding legal safeguards designed to keep the agency free from political interference. Within days, the two remaining commissioners, both Trump appointees, moved to dismantle key safety initiatives and slash the agency's staff.

Public Citizen's Litigation Group stepped in, filing suit on behalf of the ousted commissioners to restore them to office and defend the law protecting the CPSC's autonomy. Their case has already seen remarkable twists: a swift victory in trial court, emergency intervention by the Supreme Court, and now an appeal that will be decided against the backdrop of a rapidly changing legal regime.

When Congress created the CPSC in 1972, it recognized the importance of insulating the federal agency from political pressures that could compromise its commitment to consumer safety.

To guard against this, lawmakers required that the agency be headed by a body of five commissioners, each of whom must have expertise in consumer safety. By law, no more than three commissioners may be associated with the same political party. The statute also stipulated that commissioners could not be removed simply for their views on how best to protect public safety. A president could fire them only for "neglect of duty or malfeasance in office."

Trump ignored that safeguard. He gave no justification for firing Boyle, Hoehn-Saric, and Trumka Jr., who had been appointed by his predecessor. As soon as the fired commissioners had been kicked out of their offices, the remaining two commissioners — both of whom had been appointed by Trump — began taking steps to stall important product safety regulations that had been in development, terminate agency staff, and approve agency reorganization plans that left important offices vacant or understaffed.

Represented by Public Citizen Litigation Group, the three fired commissioners filed a lawsuit on May 21, 2025, to get their jobs back. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the trial court fast-tracked the case, and in mid-June, ruled in their favor. On June 16, Boyle, Hoehn-Saric, and Trumka returned to work.

The judge held that Trump had plainly violated the law, which forbids terminating CPSC commissioners absent neglect of duty or malfeasance in office. Interestingly, the administration never argued that the president *complied* with that law. It instead argued that the law itself was unconstitutional, claiming that

because the president heads the Executive Branch, he has unlimited power to remove agency leaders. The trial judge rejected that claim, citing the Supreme Court's landmark 1935 decision in *Humphrey's Executor v. United States*. In that unanimous ruling, the Court held that Congress may permissibly confer job protection on the heads of multimember expert agencies that conduct investigations, make regulations, and determine whether regulated companies are complying with the law. The judge found that the CPSC, much like the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in *Humphrey's Executor*, fit that description.

But the victory was short-lived. The government quickly appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and asked both the trial court and the appellate court to "stay" the ruling — essentially freezing it while the appeal proceeded. Both courts refused. The administration then went to the Supreme Court, which, on July 23, granted the stay by a divided vote.

That decision blocked the commissioners from returning to their posts, despite the trial court's finding that their firing was illegal. In her dissent, Justice Elena Kagan warned of the broader implications: "By allowing the President to remove commissioners for no reason other than their party affiliation, the majority has negated Congress's choice of agency bipartisanship and independence." Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Ketanji Brown Jackson joined her dissent.

The CPSC case is part of a troubling pattern. Congress has conferred tenure protections on the heads of many other agencies to insulate them from presidential

control, but Trump has been overriding those protections left and right. Since his inauguration, he has fired leaders of the National Labor Relations Board, which enforces federal labor laws; the Merit Systems Protection Board, which protects the employment rights of federal workers; and the FTC. He has offered no justification for these terminations, and his administration has insisted that the Constitution gives him the right to fire agency heads at will. Each removal chips away at the structure Congress built to ensure expertise and accountability over partisanship.

Ultimately, the fate of independent agencies rests with the Supreme Court. In late September, the Court agreed to hear the case of the former FTC Commissioner Rebecca Slaughter, which will directly address whether *Humphrey's Executor* should be overturned. Public Citizen Litigation Group plans to file an amicus brief in November, urging the Court to reaffirm Congress's authority to protect the independence of agencies, like the CPSC, from political control.

The Supreme Court's decision will shape more than just the future of the CPSC or the commissioners who led it. It will help determine whether the nation's watchdog agencies can continue their essential mission without fear of political retaliation.

For consumers, the stakes are stark: whether the products in our homes remain as safe as we've come to expect, or whether that safety becomes another casualty of unchecked presidential power ■

The Hidden Cost of Home Insurance

BY BRYA ARCEMENT

Home insurance premiums are climbing across the U.S., in significant part because the climate crisis is destroying homes with fire and catastrophic weather events. A recent report from Public Citizen and Americans for Financial Reform shows that these rising costs will impact everyone, but not equally. While it may seem that insurance premiums are

based only on factors that affect a home's risk, they also depend on credit scores and neighborhood demographics.

When Insurance Bills Become Mortgage Problems

Most people pay home insurance alongside their monthly mortgage payments. When insurance payments jump by hundreds of dol-

lars, the total housing cost rises. For families already stretching to make ends meet, that small increase each month can easily break their budget.

Public Citizen's report features Federal Reserve research showing that just a \$500 annual insurance increase makes homeowners 20% more likely to miss mortgage payments. As insurance costs skyrocket, thousands of families risk

sliding toward foreclosure.

The financial strain manifests in other ways, too. To cover the gap, families rack up credit card debt to keep up their insurance payments, but frequently fall behind on credit card payments as well. Some homeowners decide to sell their homes in order to pay off their mortgage early. Others make the riskier decision to drop their

see **Insurance**, page 7 ►

Regulating AI in the States

BY ILANA BELLER

As artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly reshapes the contours of daily life – deciding insurance claims, meddling in elections, even chatting with teens – the rules meant to keep it in check are lagging far behind. That’s why Public Citizen has stepped in, leading a nationwide push to establish guardrails that protect people from AI’s most dangerous uses. From combating deepfakes in elections to shielding kids from manipulative and dangerous “AI companions,” the organization is helping lawmakers in nearly every state turn concern into action.

Two years ago, we launched an initiative to pass legislation regulating deepfakes in election communications in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. Ever since, we have substantially expanded upon this work, building relationships with Democratic and Republican lawmakers interested in regulating AI in most states. We have been intimately involved in the enactment of AI legislation in states across the nation. To date, we have drafted five model bills that provide common-sense leg-

islative solutions to mitigate some of the most obvious and dangerous harms of unregulated AI.

Our latest model legislation addresses the risks posed by emotionally manipulative AI companions, including chatbots. These AI companions are designed to engage in conversations that mimic human interactions and drive emotional engagement. Tech companies typically design these AI companions to maximize user engagement. This means that the companions tend to validate statements from users, even when they are troubling. Common Sense Media reported that 72% of teens interact with AI companions, with many engaging with bots at least a few times a month.

The American Psychological Association has expressed significant concern that children’s relationships with AI companions may hinder their ability to develop social skills and real-life emotional connections while creating unhealthy dependencies on the technology.

Making matters worse, conversations with AI companions can become highly sexualized – even when the user has identified

as a minor. A *Wall Street Journal* investigation revealed that Meta’s (Facebook’s parent company) AI companions continued to engage in sexual discussions after learning users were minors, making explicit references to their ages before proceeding with graphic exchanges.

In some extreme cases, AI companions can also encourage people to commit serious harm to themselves and others. Sixteen-year-old Adam Raine struggled with suicidal thoughts, but was allegedly discouraged by ChatGPT from seeking any outside help. Message logs revealed that the chatbot gave him advice on covering red marks on his neck from an attempted hanging and further helped him assess the effectiveness of a specific noose.

“There is serious reason to be worried about the impact of AI companions on minors, both for extreme cases as well as the more general impact on adolescent development and social well-being,” said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. “Big Tech and AI companies are rapidly advancing this technology. Our children should not be

the guinea pigs in such a reckless social experiment, particularly when we have so much early evidence of harm.”

Public Citizen is taking aggressive action, engaging legislators nationwide to confront this crisis head-on and pass protections for children. Our new model bill, created in partnership with the Young People’s Alliance, addresses concerns about emotionally manipulative AI and its impact on kids. We are discussing this legislation with lawmakers across the country, sharing our model and supporting them in passing the bill in their state legislatures.

In the coming years, we are committed to working tirelessly to rein in and regulate AI across the board for a better future for our society, and nowhere is that more pressing or critical than in the need to establish clear guardrails for our children’s safety from AI companions.

If you or someone you know needs help, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988. You can also reach a crisis counselor by messaging the Crisis Text Line at 741741. ■

► Insurance, from page 6

coverage entirely.

Renters aren’t safe either. In some parts of the country, landlords paid twice as much for insurance in 2024 as they did in 2021, and those costs will be passed on to renters.

Affordable housing providers are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and higher insurance premiums, especially when they rent to families who use housing vouchers. Unlike market-rate landlords, they can’t easily pass costs to tenants or defer maintenance. Ultimately, this leaves fewer affordable units available to families who need them most.

The Gamble of Going Without Insurance

Even families who maintain coverage may be in trouble. Many homeowners don’t realize their policies won’t fully cover rebuilding costs. Systemic inequality is built into the insurance system. In 47 states, companies can charge different rates based on credit scores rather than focusing solely on the risk to the property. This means two

identical houses on the same street might have completely different insurance costs, just because of who owns them.

Public Citizen’s research highlights that homeowners with low credit scores pay 30% more than those with excellent credit for insuring similar properties. There’s no evidence that this practice helps insurance companies better predict losses. It does, however, guarantee that families with fewer financial resources pay more for protection they can ill afford to lose.

Due to longstanding wealth gaps, systemic discrimination, and unequal access to mainstream banking, Black and Latino homeowners typically have lower credit scores than white homeowners, even at similar income levels. When insurers price based on credit, they’re effectively charging people of color more.

Beyond the issue of coverage, there’s an even deeper problem with insurance pricing. Folks living in neighborhoods with more residents of color pay higher premiums than white homeowners facing the same disaster risks. The pattern is a glaring legacy of

the insurance industry’s history of redlining, a form of explicit discrimination against Black communities and communities of color. With companies now using vast amounts of personal data and artificial intelligence to set prices, these disparities may actually be getting worse.

Legal protections exist on paper. Federal fair housing law prohibits discrimination, and most states have some restrictions. But enforcement is weak, and state regulators have failed to collect the data needed to prove discrimination. To make matters worse, the Trump administration has told federal agencies to stop prioritizing cases in which policies harm protected groups if such policies were not intentionally designed to discriminate.

Because insurance is regulated at the state level, state regulators and legislators can act to change these practices. However, change will require action – not just to end one discriminatory practice but to bring long-overdue enforcement to a secretive industry. “It’s time to not only end the use of credit scores for insurance pricing but also to insist on public oversight of

insurance rates,” said Carly Fabian, Public Citizen’s senior insurance policy advocate.

Without urgent action, the costs of climate change and unequal treatment will intensify. “Elected officials need to be hyper-focused on bringing home insurance prices down for current and future homeowners and renters through investments in climate mitigation and resilience,” noted Caroline Nagy, associate director of housing policy at Americans for Financial Reform Education Fund.

Without significant action to mitigate climate change and protect access to affordable insurance, millions of families will face an impossible choice: pay premiums they can’t afford, go without protection, or give up homeownership altogether. The dream of stable housing and wealth building through homeownership is slipping further and further from the reach of communities of color and working class families. The path forward requires acknowledging that disaster and insurance costs are linked to questions of fairness and equality and acting accordingly. ■

Trump's Tariffs on Brazil Support Big Tech and the Far Right

BY ALANA MATTHEW

What do you get when you mix Trump's obsession with tariffs, his fellow attempted-coup pal Jair Bolsonaro, and Big Tech's lobbying dollars? Apparently, a "national emergency" tailor-made for Big Tech's wishlist and his personal agenda. On July 9, President Donald Trump sent a letter to Brazilian President Lula da Silva imposing "emergency" tariffs of 50% on Brazilian imports to the U.S. Less than a week later, the U.S. Trade Representative's Office (USTR) announced a formal investigation into Brazil's trade practices – the first step in imposing additional tariffs.

While strategic tariffs in specific areas can be an important tool to support good jobs, these sweeping tariffs against Brazil are nothing but a politically motivated misuse of trade law to advance Trump's authoritarian agenda. The justification for these tariffs is nonexistent. Trump's letter – based on a form letter sent to dozens of countries – claimed that the tariffs are necessary to counter our trade deficit with Brazil. But the U.S. government's own data shows we have a trade surplus with Brazil, not a deficit.

Recognizing the danger of this politically motivated misuse of trade tools, Public Citizen mobilized quickly. Along with Data Privacy Brasil Research, a São Paulo-based digital rights organization, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division, led by Director Melinda St. Louis, submitted comments to the investigation. And in early September, St. Louis testified before USTR, warning against letting U.S. trade law become a weapon for personal or corporate gain. She cautioned that Brazil's digital regulations on data protection, social media accountability, and digital payments are not arbitrary or discriminatory, but legitimate measures that Big Tech and Trump dislike because they threaten profits and unchecked power.

The prime motivation for these actions was not driven by any real economic or legal factors, but rather an attempt to interfere in Brazil's domestic judicial processes on behalf of Trump's long-time friend and ally, Brazil's former President Bolsonaro, as

he was facing prosecution for his role in an attempted coup. In his letter announcing tariffs, Trump called the case a "witch hunt" that should end immediately.

He also took aim at Brazil's social media accountability laws and other digital regulations. Trump's allies in Big Tech – who spent more than \$1 billion in political contributions, lobbying, and gifts to Trump's private businesses – have long opposed Brazil's efforts to regulate digital platforms and protect consumer privacy.

Brazil, as a sovereign democracy, is fully entitled to regulate companies operating within its borders, just as the U.S. does with foreign firms here. The digital policies under attack on data protection, social media, and e-payments apply to all companies regardless of where they are based. They are not discriminatory against U.S. companies, as Trump and Big Tech want us to believe. In the big picture, challenging Brazil's digital laws risks undermining similar efforts to protect privacy and hold Big Tech accountable in the U.S.

Brazil has advanced proposals like a network usage fee and a new digital competition law, plus the enactment of a privacy framework. U.S. Big Tech companies hate these practices, not because they're unfair or discriminatory, but because they threaten their profits and exploitative business models that depend heavily on weak regulation to thrive.

Brazil's battle with social media platforms like Facebook and the company formerly known as Twitter underscores these stakes. The spread of misinformation during Brazil's election cycle, particularly among Bolsonaro supporters, who helped incite an attempted coup, showed how unchecked platforms can destabilize democ-

racy. Is this sounding familiar?

Brazil's courts ruled that companies like Meta and X have a duty to police harmful and illegal content. This led to a dramatic public conflict with Elon Musk in which his company, X, refused to comply, resulting in the platform's suspension in Brazil for about 40 days.

Once again, Trump is wielding the power of the office as a weapon to benefit his inner circle. This is the oldest trick in the authoritarian playbook: invent a national emergency, expand executive power, and advance personal interests under the guise of state action. It's imperialism, it's illegal, and it's an attack on Brazil's sovereignty, which leaves other countries vulnerable to the same tricks.

"By carrying out this unjustified investigation against Brazil, the USTR discredits this important tool, shakes global faith in the U.S. as a country governed by the rule of law, and weakens the case against adversary nations that take similarly illegal actions," said St. Louis in her testimony in September.

Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch also helped bring this issue to the broader public, publishing an analysis exposing Trump's "bizarre, authoritarian, Big Tech-friendly tariffs on Brazil." And through a detailed new visualization, we mapped the digital laws and regulations that Big Tech lobbyists have urged Trump to target in tariff negotiations. That analysis revealed Brazil as one of the top countries targeted, thanks to pressure from the Chamber of Commerce and some of the larg-

est technology companies in the world.

We are continuing to work with members of Congress to sound the alarm. Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-Calif.), top Democrat on the House Trade Subcommittee, has called the Trump administration's investigation against Brazil "anti-democratic and corrupt." Public Citizen has also endorsed a resolution introduced by Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) that would terminate the so-called emergency justifying the tariffs.

"What's at stake is far bigger than a tariff dispute," said St. Louis. "This is about U.S. trade law being twisted into a blunt instrument for political bullying and how Trump has called the USTR's legitimacy into question."

When Big Tech and Trump's personal agenda are at the wheel and the USTR is reduced to being their vehicle, the result is a reckless crash into the sovereignty of another country's democracy. This time, Brazil was the target precisely because it has been leading efforts to regulate the digital ecosystem in the public interest, something Big Tech has long opposed.

Trump blatantly punished Brazil for pursuing reforms that reflect a growing global consensus that the mis- and disinformation that he and others like him tend to push need to be curbed before causing more harm.

But what's key to remember is: resistance works. Brazil continued with its trial, convicting Bolsonaro for instigating a coup, and it has refused to cave in to Trump's tariff-backed demands. ■



Graphic courtesy of Shawn Thew-Pool/Getty Images.

Texas Turns Toward the Sun: Public Citizen Celebrates Solar Power

BY JOSÉ MEDINA

Texas is known for its abundant resources, including the vast amounts of oil and gas that have been extracted for decades and shipped around the world. The state also benefits from another energy source that happens to be free: sunshine.

It might surprise many that the state known for its fossil fuels is also a leader in utility-scale solar-generated energy. It's something that should be celebrated. That's precisely what Public Citizen did this fall. On Sept. 21, members of our Texas office co-sponsored SUN DAY with the climate action group Third Act, celebrating renewable energy and encouraging rooftop solar adoption.

"Solar power is not only growing – it's also saving Texas during periods of peak demand," said Haley Schulz, Public Citizen's Houston-area organizer who participated in the Bayou City's SUN DAY event.

The Austin celebration was symbolically held on the grounds of the state Capitol, a place where

policy decisions can make or break entire industries. The event featured informational talks on solar and other clean energy topics. It included a presentation by Kaiba White, a climate policy and outreach specialist with Public Citizen's Texas office, who explained how homeowners can become solar adopters.

At the San Antonio SUN DAY event, Public Citizen's Texas Director Adrian Shelley spoke about energy legislation considered during this year's session of the Texas Legislature, which concluded in June.

In Houston, Schulz provided information and updates on Public Citizen's work at both national and local levels, highlighting the clean energy transition campaign with the group Close Parish Coal, which aims to end the use of coal at the WA Parish power plant in neighboring Fort Bend County.

There were approximately 450 SUN DAY events held nationwide, with additional celebrations in other countries. The current iteration of SUN DAY is the brain-

child of journalist and activist Bill McKibben. He recently explained the idea in an interview with the *New York Times*:

"Solar power is no longer the 'Whole Foods of energy – nice but pricey.' It has become the 'Costco of power – cheap, available in bulk, and on the shelf ready to go.'"

Texas has come to the same conclusion. Renewable sources of energy have stabilized the state's grid and lowered prices.

In the years since the deadly Winter Storm Uri left millions of Texans without power in 2021, Texas has faced other close calls, with state officials urging the public to conserve energy to avoid outages. Happily, the state has avoided another power outage disaster thanks largely to the booming solar and wind industries, which have, at times, provided more than half the energy Texans need to keep the lights on and homes cool.

Still, Texas has plenty of room to grow its renewable usage. While it leads in large-scale wind

and solar power generation, it lags behind other states in small-scale installations commonly seen in homes and businesses. Public Citizen is actively working in several Texas cities to support local policies that make such installations easier and more financially sound.

"Rooftop solar minimizes environmental impact, which reduces electric bills. The challenge is in financing the up-front investment needed to access those benefits," said White, whose work in Austin includes efforts to decarbonize the city's electric utility and convincing the city council to support solar installations on city buildings as well as residential solar incentive programs.

"Texas has big skies and lots of sunshine year-round," White added. "We should harness that energy in order to power the world into the future. It will happen if we get the word out with events like SUN DAY and strong pro-renewable advocacy at every level of government." ■



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

Public Citizen Pressures Toyota to End Greenwashing, Build More EVs

BY PATRICK DAVIS

At a high-profile Climate Week event in September hosted by Toyota Motor Corp., activists from Public Citizen seized the spotlight – calling out the automaker for greenwashing and demanding accountability on its electric vehicle promises. Toyota had previously announced that it plans to sell seven EV models in the U.S. by mid-2027, up from just two currently available. But despite that pledge, the company ranks last among major automakers in EV production and remains one of the most aggressive anti-EV lobbyists and top financiers of climate deniers.

As Toyota's lead North American lobbyist Tom Stricker prepared to speak at the New York climate event about his company's supposed climate leadership, activists disrupted the presentation, unfurling a banner that read, "Toyota: Stop Driving Climate Denial!" and chanting, "Hey Toyota, stop toying with the

climate!"

After Stricker's remarks, activists placed hundreds of reports around the conference venue. The report, titled "Toyota: Moving Forward Together?," laid out how the company has become the auto industry's largest financier of climate deniers, backing more than 200 congressional campaigns since 2020.

"Toyota should be ashamed of itself for greenwashing its abysmal climate record," said Adam Zuckerman, senior clean vehicles campaigner with Public Citizen's Climate Program. "How can the automaker keep a straight face while it funds a small army of climate change-denying lawmakers and lobbies to repeal our emissions and fuel economy standards? Toyota is not a climate success story – it's a cautionary tale of how a once-green darling became a climate obstructionist."

The Climate Week protest came on the heels of another sym-

bolic moment for Toyota's public image. This year's Environmental Media Association (EMA) Awards marked the final year that Toyota would serve as the lead sponsor. Working with climate advocate Jane Fonda and other Hollywood celebrities, Public Citizen led a quiet pressure campaign urging the EMA to end its relationship with Toyota after mounting evidence showed the automaker's record does not match its green marketing.

The company has used such partnerships to project an image of environmental responsibility, even as it has dragged its feet on electrifying its fleet and continued to promote gas-powered hybrids over zero-emission vehicles. Public Citizen has tracked Toyota's record for years, documenting the gap between its marketing and its policy positions. A 2025 report from the group provided extensive evidence of that gap, revealing that Toyota (through

its political action committee) had donated tens of thousands of dollars between 2020-2024 to the congressional campaigns of candidates who denied or questioned climate change.

Despite its early reputation as a hybrid innovator with the Prius, Toyota now lags behind competitors in the transition to electric vehicles. Its executives have repeatedly questioned the need for all-electric adoption and have pushed for policies that would slow the clean-energy transition. Public Citizen's campaign calls on Toyota to end these obstructionist tactics and to commit to 100% zero-emission vehicles.

"Toyota is the largest automaker in the world and one of the worst electric vehicle laggards in the world," Zuckerman told Climate Colored Goggles in October. "[It is] attempting to ensure that electric vehicles do not become the future." ■



Photo of activists calling on Toyota to end the company's greenwashing tactics at a New York Climate Week event courtesy of Erik Rivas.

Public Citizen Exposes Mining Industry Greenwashing at Climate Week

BY PATRICK DAVIS

In September, approximately 100,000 people flocked to New York City to participate in this year's Climate Week, an opportunity for activists, scientists, engineers, and global leaders to come together and discuss solutions to one of the most pressing crises humanity currently faces.

Climate Week also presents a chance for industry executives to brag about their climate-related initiatives, often painting a much rosier picture of the impact a company's efforts will have on the climate, compared to the environmental or other harms their corporations might be perpetrating. Advocates in the space refer to this as "greenwashing" – an attempt by a company or industry to mislead the public with the aim of presenting an environmentally responsible public image.

At this year's event, Public Citizen took on corporate greenwashing. As mining associations promoted their member companies as climate leaders, Public Citizen's Climate Program called on the mining sector's recently created Consolidated Mining Standard Initiative (CMSI), the group of mining industry stakeholders attempting to create a new industry-led certification program, to set stronger, more stringent and transparent safeguards for the

"We cannot expect the industry responsible for causing destruction to write its own rules and credit itself as following them."

— Chelsea Hodgkins, Public Citizen's senior EV supply chain policy advocate

industry.

This industry group is trying to combine four weak, industry-created voluntary standards into a single standard that mining companies can use to greenwash their mines, attempting to mislead their customers into believing the materials they are buying meet good environmental, governance, and human rights standards. At the September event, Public Citizen announced a global public campaign, pressuring the CMSI to seek more engagement from civil society groups as it builds the new standards.

Public Citizen brought problems with the CMSI into clear view with a video truck asking CMSI's CEO to engage with civil society groups; protests both inside and outside of spaces where mining industry events were being held; and a consumer petition.

"We cannot expect the industry responsible for causing destruction to write its own rules and credit itself as following them," said Public Citizen's Senior EV Supply Chain Policy Advocate Chelsea Hodgkins. "The Consolidated

Mining Standard Initiative is a clear conflict of interest."

Mining companies frequently cause environmental damage, commit human rights abuses, incite violence, and foster corruption.

"Moving the CMSI forward would amount to a rubber stamp for a mining industry that fails to address the harms to its workers, Indigenous peoples, and communities," said Hodgkins.

In a January report, Public Citizen found that the first draft of CMSI's Consolidated Standard set a low bar for companies' social and environmental performance and failed to establish oversight systems needed to prevent harmful industry practices.

The report recommended that automakers sourcing minerals from mining companies take immediate action by pressuring the CMSI to strengthen the draft to meet international minimum standards, calling for clear governance structures and robust monitoring mechanisms to address environmental and human rights harms, and insisting on significant

improvements to the standard before its adoption.

The latest draft of the standard was released by CMSI two weeks after Public Citizen's action at Climate Week. While some improvements were made, the standard still falls short of international laws and norms and gives mining companies too much control over the program's administration.

For automakers planning more battery-powered automobiles, voluntary standards are a key tool to reduce harm across their supply chains and to comply with due diligence laws. Weak standards, like those proposed by CMSI, undermine automakers' efforts to become more sustainable.

"Minerals are the bedrock of electrification and decarbonization, and the standards set for the mining industry to protect social and environmental priorities must align with the public interest," said Hodgkins. "The proposed standard falls short of the level of rigor, credibility, or trustworthy governance needed to protect communities and workers." ■

Public Citizen Recommends ...

"The Right of the People: Democracy and the Case for a New American Founding"

By Osita Nwanevu; \$31; Random House

In the introduction to his astute nonfiction debut, writer Osita Nwanevu opens with the blunt declaration that existing approaches to defending American democracy have proven inadequate. He lays the blame first and foremost on his own industry: American political journalism.

In the wake of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, Nwanevu describes being "dog-tired" and "weary" of the ways the American mainstream media largely failed to meet the political moment. Partly undertaken as a therapeutic exercise, Nwanevu set out to write a book that reimagines how the country, facing catastrophic times, might undergo an extreme

democracy makeover. The result is a compelling read that both nourishes and inspires.

Written in the run-up to the 2024 elections and their aftermath, "The Right of the People" fuses academic research with a practical action plan. The book's first half surveys the history of democracy, starting with Greek city-states. Nwanevu then ticks through some familiar critiques of democracy – it's inefficient, voters don't know enough, people are too polarized – before concluding, in Churchillian fashion, that democracy is not just the best of a bad set of options, but the best way to ensure that the people rule over the government.

In the book's second half, Nwanevu traces the formation, evolution, and limitations of American democracy. "It would take at least another book, and

likely several," he writes, "to give a full account of how woefully the American political system falls short of democratic ideals even today, more than two centuries after its founding." Nevertheless, he extensively details many flaws: a House of Representatives wildly distorted by gerrymandering; a Senate stymied by the filibuster; and a sclerotic Electoral College that can override the popular vote. Big Money exerts a further distorting effect on American politics, Nwanevu avers.

And yet, hope springs forth from bold, ambitious, and transformative ideas. Nwanevu calls for deep constitutional reform and empowered "economic democracy." He advocates for grassroots organizing to build support for amendments and for revitalizing unions, worker ownership, and corporate governance reforms. Transforming the American economy by empowering workers, he

writes, would vastly improve corporate accountability and responsibility while also making democracy more viable to those who've come to doubt it. Nearly 250 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, whether our democracy will survive is an open question. How do we withstand daily waves of financial and ethical corruption from the Trump administration, the weaponization of justice, and the erosion of vital checks and balances built into the Constitution? For starters, Nwanevu suggests we look in the mirror. Despite setbacks, he asks how many of the positive strides our country has made in the last century would have seemed plausible to an American in 1925. This book is a useful reminder that nothing is inevitable and that everything is possible. — Jon Golinger ■

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

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► Big Pharma, from page 1

estimated to save \$1.5 billion for Medicare beneficiaries and \$6 billion for taxpayers.

Big Pharma has filed a slew of lawsuits to derail price negotiations, but the courts have thus far rejected the industry's court challenges. Public Citizen filed amicus briefs in the cases on behalf of consumer and health groups in support of the negotiation program.

Big Pharma doesn't easily take no – or "lessen your price gouging" – for an answer, and the industry and its allies in Congress and the White House are pushing legislation that threatens to undermine the negotiation program's ability to deliver savings to taxpayers and Medicare patients.

A recent Public Citizen analysis shines a light on how Big Pharma has dispatched hundreds of lobbyists to defang Medicare price negotiation. We examined lobbying activity during the first half of 2025 on three bills that would either delay negotiations on certain drugs or exempt some drugs entirely. Some key findings include:

- There were 515 unique lobbyist-client relationships, wherein a client (a company, trade group, or nonprofit organization) hired an individual to lobby on at least one of three bills that would weaken Medicare price negotiations.
- Over 90% (471) of the lobbyist hires were made by clients supportive of the three harmful bills, outnumbering opposition 20-to-1. Supporters were either pharmaceutical companies, groups with pharmaceutical company members, or groups with ties to the industry.

"The loopholes and restrictions included in the Inflation Reduction Act already impose limits on savings for patients and taxpayers."

— Steve Knievel, advocate with Public Citizen's Access to Medicines program

- Big Pharma and its allies sent lobbyists to influence Congress, the White House, and various federal agencies, including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Department of Health and Human Services. Big Pharma's efforts have paid off handsomely. One of the three bills we analyzed – the ORPHAN Cures Act – passed into law through congressional Republicans' July 2025 budget reconciliation bill. It will delay and exempt some of the most profitable drugs from negotiations. In an April executive order, Trump essentially endorsed another bill that would prevent negotiations for 11 years. Extending this already long delay risks permanently excluding many medicines from negotiations or providing patients access to lower drug prices for only one or two fleeting years.

Public Citizen is mobilizing to offset Big Pharma's lobby and money power. We are lobbying members of Congress on the importance of preserving Medicare drug price negotiation. We have published issue briefs that explain how legislative proposals would exclude even blockbuster drugs from negotiation, and underscore that these bills do nothing for innovation but instead protect Big Pharma's profits. We published a report that revealed how pharmaceutical company Amgen abused patents to prolong its monopoly on the autoimmune drug Enbrel, depriving Medicare

of lower-cost alternatives.

In April, Public Citizen and dozens of other organizations wrote to members of Congress, urging them to oppose any legislative efforts to undermine the drug price negotiation program and to ensure the program can continue delivering lower costs for seniors and people with disabilities who rely on Medicare.

The negotiation program is an important tool in the fight to rein in Big Pharma's runaway drug prices. But the work doesn't stop at defending Medicare from corporate attacks. The program should be improved upon and expanded. "The loopholes and restrictions included in the Inflation Reduction Act already impose limits on sav-

ings for patients and taxpayers," said Steve Knievel, an advocate with Public Citizen's Access to Medicines program. "Instead of undermining the negotiation program, Congress should improve it to deliver lower prices for more drugs and more patients, including people with other kinds of insurance."

The vast majority of Americans support Medicare drug price negotiations and support expanding the program to negotiate prices for all its prescription drugs to prices no higher than what other wealthy nations pay. Public Citizen is intent not just on defending the modest wins recently obtained, but delivering the fundamental reform that Americans support and need. ■



Graphic courtesy of Pexels.

Are your medicines SAFE?

Many drugs that come to market have risks that outweigh their benefits. Others, found to have risks only after they are approved, are left on the market for dangerously long periods of time. Find out which drugs are safe—and which you should avoid—with Public Citizen’s WorstPills.org and *Worst Pills, Best Pills News*.

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen

On the “No Kings” protests: *CNN, Fox News, PBS, ABC News, Newsnation*. **On Open-AI silencing nonprofits:** *NBC News*. **On the White House ballroom:** *The Washington Post*. **On the OpenAI-Microsoft partnership:** *Associated Press*. **On partisan AI:** *Politico*. **On a new group formed by top drug manufacturers seeking to stop the expansion of Medicare drug price negotiations:** *Bloomberg Law*. **On Interior Secretary Doug Burgum for desecrating our national historic sites:** *Black Star News*. **On attorneys general taking seriously their obligation to enforce the non-profit mission on OpenAI:** *San Francisco Examiner*. **On AI toys that might inflict “real damage on children”:** *Futurism*. **On the Trump administration conjuring vast, imaginary conspiracies as a thinly veiled ruse to crack down on political opponents:** *The Independent*.

Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen

On nearly 1,000 “Workers Over Billionaires” protests on Labor Day: *The Guardian, Common Dreams*. **On the “No Kings” protests:** *USA Today*. **On Trump’s threat to target the “radical left”:** *Associated Press, The Los Angeles Times*. **On the Senate confirming Stephen Miran to the Federal Reserve Board:** *NPR*. **On the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk:** *CNN*. **On Jeanine Pirro spreading false election claims as Fox News host:** *USA Today*. **On a massive breach of Social Security data:** *The Independent*. **On the harmful and perfectly avoidable government shutdown:** *Common Dreams*. **On Trump ticking off every box of a king’s playbook:** *Common Dreams*.

Public Citizen Litigation Group

On the Supreme Court allowing Trump to withhold \$4 billion in foreign aid funding: *The New York Times, The Associated Press, The Boston Globe, NBC News*. **On the Trump administration going to “unprecedented lengths” to use government infrastructure to “shift the public debate in its favor”:** *NBC News*. **On the Trump administration destroying key protections against the risks climate change poses to our economy:** *Reuters*. **On a lawsuit Public Citizen filed arguing the taxpayer information is largely confidential except under limited circumstances:** *Houston Chronicle*. **On a federal worker union suing over automatic email responses**

that blame Democrats for the government shutdown: *The Hill*.

Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen’s Energy Program

On surging electricity prices: *Barron’s*. **On the American Clean Power Association:** *Inside Climate News*.

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

On the ouster of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Susan Monarez: *Forbes, Associated Press, CNN, The Independent, The Week*. **On the Trump administration eroding scientists’ ability to probe the safety of pharmaceuticals:** *CBS News*. **On a sane approach to immunizations:** *Forbes*. **On Florida’s decision to erase school vaccine requirements:** *Common Dreams, Florida Phoenix*.

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

On the Trump administration using taxpayer dollars to plaster partisan screeds on government homepages: *MSNBC News, CBS News, Government Executive, Politico, The Independent*. **On Trump gutting ethics oversight of the federal government:** *The Guardian, ProPublica*. **On Rep. Tom Suozzi’s lateness in filing required disclosures of several investment moves:** *Newsday*. **On a commonsense legislative measure to ban congressional stock trading:** *Common Dreams*. **On U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement seeking to spend \$100 million on 1,000 more SUVs to support Trump’s mass deportation efforts:** *The Independent*.

David Arkush, director of Public Citizen’s Climate Program

On debunking some of Joe Rogan’s most common talking points in a YouTube video: *Forbes*.

Rick Claypool, research director for Public Citizen

On distinguishing between human and AI conversants: *Forbes*. **On Trump hosting tech CEOs amid calls for AI regulation:** *KRQE News*.

Power to the People, Not Billionaires

BY KATIE GARCIA

Poet and grassroots activist Mokokoma Mokhonoana once said, “There is more to life than making a living. Do not work more than you live.” It’s a philosophy everyone should be able to follow, but in 2025, doing so has become harder than ever. Corporations and billionaires are hoarding wealth at the expense of working Americans who are struggling to survive, much less truly live.

Families are burdened by the cost of essentials, including groceries, prescription medications, and housing. Meanwhile, President Trump and his billionaire friends are turning the government into a slush fund for the wealthy, gutting Medicaid, firing federal workers, and tearing families apart through Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids.

That’s why this past Labor Day, Public Citizen and other organizations in the May Day Strong Coalition mobilized hundreds of thousands of people for Workers Over Billionaires. On Sept. 1, communities came together at more than 1,000 events nationwide to protest the billionaire takeover through collective action. Among their demands: fair pay, decent benefits, and safer working conditions.

Public Citizen co-president Robert Weissman noted that many employers have failed to meet these basic demands and so, working people are rising up to reclaim their power.

“There is an undeniable energy across this country, and it’s driving historic organizing,” he remarked. “In hospitals, on

“Workers deserve an economy that isn’t rigged to benefit billionaires and big corporations at our expense.”

— Public Citizen co-president Robert Weissman

college campuses, in restaurants, and in ‘right-to-work’ states in the South, workers are taking on massive corporations like Starbucks, Amazon, Disney, and Sony. They’re winning first-in-the-nation contracts, and the momentum is only building.”

Public Citizen co-president Lisa Gilbert added that reclaiming the power of the people does not begin and end in the workplace.

“The fight for workers’ rights begins with the fight for our democracy – the fight for the soul of our nation, the fight against the vindictive authoritarian oves that

Trump and the billionaire class are making to steal from working people and to concentrate power,” she said. “We stand together to once again say that this is our country. We are the workers, the teachers, the voters, and we will not back down.”

Weissman added that the democracy Americans have fought for is on track to erode further as the ultra-rich go unchecked and the government enables a pay-to-play system.

“Workers deserve an economy that isn’t rigged to benefit billionaires and big corporations

at our expense,” he said. “That means winning power in the workplace and a government that works for everyday people, not the donor class. To achieve Mokohonoana’s vision, workers must stand in solidarity and build collective power. Everyone deserves to live in a world where families don’t have to struggle to afford food, housing and health care; where no one is targeted for who they are or where they were born; and where we can raise children and retire in dignity. ■



Photo of people participating in the 2025 Workers Over Billionaires event courtesy of Mobilize.us.

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AGE WHEN PAYMENTS BEGIN	SINGLE LIFE ANNUITY RATE	SINGLE LIFE ANNUAL PAYMENT	TWO LIVES ANNUITY RATE	TWO LIVES ANNUAL PAYMENT
65 years	5.7%	\$570	5.0%	\$500
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

For a confidential, free sample illustration, or more information, please contact Genevieve Chase at 202-588-7712 or gchase@citizen.org.

