



## From Outrage to Action: ICE Under Fire

BY RUBÉN LEBRÓN

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is no longer operating in the shadows, and Americans are taking notice. In January 2026, Renée Nicole Good was senselessly shot in her car by an ICE agent in Minneapolis. Cell phone video of the killing quickly spread online, jolting public attention. In response, Public Citizen and community organizations across the country mobilized to denounce the Trump administration's immigration enforcement practices and demand accountability.

The surge in enforcement did not happen in a vacuum. In 2025, Congress passed the "Big Ugly Bill," expanding ICE's bud-

get from \$10 billion to \$85 billion over four years – a level of funding that rivals the military budgets of many countries. Before Donald Trump's second term, the agency rarely dominated national political debate. Now, barely a year into that term, ICE is operating with expanded resources and explicit political backing. Masked agents have recklessly carried out aggressive operations in pursuit of the administration's heinous deportation agenda, and they're killing people in doing so.

Communities across the country have watched ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) operations unfold online and in their neighborhoods. Reports have

see ICE, page 4 ▶



Photo of Jan. 8 "ICE Out" protest in Washington, D.C., courtesy of Geoff Livingston Flickr.

## Pushing Back Against Don and Marco's Bogus Venezuela Journey

BY ALAN ZIBEL

In the early hours of Jan. 3, more than 150 U.S. fighter jets launched airstrikes on the Venezuelan capital of Caracas. Later that day, Donald Trump announced from Mar-a-Lago that U.S. forces had captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, who were taken to New York to face federal charges of narco-terrorism.

In the immediate aftermath of the military operation, which killed 75 to 100 people, Trump declared that the United States would "run" the country's oil

sector, facilitate investment by U.S. oil companies, and reimburse those companies for their costs. Such commitments could saddle American taxpayers with hundreds of billions of dollars to modernize Venezuela's oil infrastructure so Big Oil can profit – without addressing Americans' energy affordability crisis.

Public Citizen and allied organizations are backing legislation to prevent American taxpayer dollars from subsidizing U.S. oil companies' investments in Venezuela.

"Big Oil won't return to

Venezuela unless Uncle Sam provides guarantees for these highly risky ventures," said Tyson Slocum, director of Public Citizen's energy program. "With Americans paying dramatically higher utility bills, American taxpayers should not be paying for Trump and Big Oil's profit-driven exploitation of another country."

Rep. Mike Levin (D-Calif.) and Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore) have introduced legislation that would bar federal funding from supporting petroleum industry infrastructure in Venezuela. "Americans'

see Venezuela, page 5 ▶

## The MAHA Wellness Grift

BY EILEEN O'GRADY

With Robert F. Kennedy Jr. leading the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the "Make America Healthy Again" (MAHA) movement has shifted from the fringes to the mainstream. As a result, the trillion-dollar "Big Wellness" industry – spanning nutritional supplements, fitness products, and alternative health services – now boasts unprecedented political influence.

A new Public Citizen report, "MAHA, Means, Money," reveals how prominent MAHA influencers are exploiting vulnerabilities

see MAHA, page 7 ▶



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### INSIDE

CHALLENGING TRUMP'S ILLEGAL PAY-TO-PLAY VISA PROGRAM, PAGE 7

ARTIFICIAL REGULATION: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S USE OF AI IN FEDERAL RULEMAKING, PAGE 9

# IN THIS ISSUE

VOL. 46, NO. 2 • MARCH/APRIL 2026

## DEMOCRACY

- 1 From Outrage to Action: ICE Under Fire

## ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

- 10 2026: The Year of the (Fight Against) Data Centers

## GLOBALIZATION & TRADE

- 11 Public Citizen Exposes Trump's Trade Deals for Critical Minerals

## GOVERNMENT & FINANCIAL REFORM

- 1 Pushing Back Against Don and Marco's Bogus Venezuela Journey
- 6 In Trump's First Year, Corporate Crime Enforcement Plummeted, Rewarding Top Donors
- 9 Artificial Regulation

## HEALTH & SAFETY

- 1 The MAHA Wellness Grift
- 8 Public Citizen Petitions FDA To Improve Pregnancy Warnings for Common Antidepressants

## LITIGATION

- 7 Challenging Trump's Illegal Pay-to-Play Visa Program

## OTHER

- 2 Get to Know Public Citizen
- 4 On Learning to Dissect Fetal Pigs
- 11 Public Citizen Recommends
- 15 In the Spotlight

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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## GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN J.B. BRANCH

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers



J.B. Branch is the AI Governance and Technology Policy Counsel for Public Citizen's Congress Watch division, where he focuses on artificial intelligence governance, data privacy, platform oversight, and consumer protections. He grew up in Lebanon, Pa., and earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Penn State's Schreyer Honors College before receiving a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center and a master of public administration from Harvard Kennedy School. Despite working daily at the center of digital platforms and online power, Branch largely avoids social media in his personal life, preferring to spend his time outdoors. When he steps away from policy debates and enforcement battles, he spends his time hiking, biking, and walking with his two dogs.

### Can you tell readers about your path to Public Citizen?

**Branch:** I once had the chance to see Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen, speak at Harvard Law School about authoritarian governments – and how the Trump administration was acting like one – in between classes and thought, “That guy might be on to something.” It turned out that Public Citizen was hiring for exactly the kind of role I was looking for.

### As Public Citizen's Big Tech accountability advocate, what issue keeps you up at night right now – AI, data privacy, or platform power?

**Branch:** All of them. AI is transforming how information is produced and slanted. Consumers are being taken advantage of by large corporations that abuse personal data to manipulate the costs of groceries, flights, and hotels, to name a few. Platforms are also increasingly aligned with the Trump administration, and there is a rich history of digital platforms enabling digital authoritarianism. All of it is deeply concerning.

### What is one thing you would change about tech or AI policy, given a magic wand?

**Branch:** I would strengthen enforcement. I want federal and state governments to doggedly hold companies accountable when they harm people or undermine democratic institutions.

### What's one thing policymakers consistently get wrong about AI governance?

**Branch:** Some lawmakers believe national security depends on “winning the AI race.” That framing is wrong. First, consumers do not have access to defense-level AI systems, which are restricted for security reasons. Secondly, they think the national economy is inseparable from AI development, which is also incorrect. We do not have to choose between strong consumer protections and AI leadership. Many global economies have enacted AI regulations and are performing just as well, if not better, than the U.S. economy.

### Before Public Citizen, you helped build Louisiana's automated expungement system. What did that project teach you about the real-world stakes of automated decision-making?

**Branch:** Expungement is a very important topic for people with prior criminal records. It allows certain criminal records to be removed from public view, which provides the individual opportunities like jobs, housing, or even a driver's license. It's critical in the process of rehabilitation and reentry to society. It showed me that technology can be used for far more than social media or profit-driven tech platforms. If we want technology to work for everyday people, it can. The real question is whether those in power care enough to make that happen.

### Can you tell us more about a new or recent project?

**Branch:** I am closely monitoring the federal deployment of Elon Musk's Grok AI system. Grok has spread conspiracy theories, produced antisemitic and racist content, and most recently generated nonconsensual images of women and children. ■

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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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# Trump's Illegal War With Iran

On Feb. 28, President Donald Trump initiated a deadly and unconstitutional regime-change war against Iran.

We immediately denounced the military operation. We pointed out that:

- There was no congressional declaration of war nor authorization for the use of force in Iran, making Trump's actions transparently unconstitutional and illegal.
- Even with congressional

*Citizen News* goes to press – flows directly from our longstanding People Over Pentagon campaign, which aims to reduce Pentagon spending and reallocate it to priority human needs. Even before the war, Trump had announced plans to seek a staggering \$500 billion annual increase in Pentagon spending, a financial commitment that would starve funding for non-military priorities.

Working to end an unconstitutional war reflects another reality as well: Conducting a war is inherently in tension with operating a robust democracy in the best of times. When an autocratic leader foments war on pretextual and bad-faith grounds, the threats to democracy are far more grave.

- The war is already further concentrating power in the executive and undermining the constitutional separation of powers. Trump has barely nodded to Congress's sole constitutional authority to declare war. For an administration that is pushing extremist theories of inherent executive authority, the war – and Congress's failure to assert its constitutional authority – is a gift.

- War is frequently used to justify expanded domestic surveillance operations. It was 9/11 that brought us the Patriot Act and the modern system of domestic surveillance. If the war persists, we should not be surprised by demands for enhanced surveillance powers – or the regime unilaterally implementing stepped-up surveillance programs.

- War paves the way for attacks on civil society, suppression of civil liberties, and targeting of disfavored minorities. Even before the start of the Iran war, the Trump administration had unleashed an out-control paramilitary ICE gang targeting immigrants; arrested political enemies on fanciful charges; and threatened to crack down on groups it claimed supported “domestic terrorism.” If the war is prolonged, we should expect to see repressive measures intensify. And already Republicans are saying the war necessitates unlocking funding for the Department of Homeland Security, monies currently on hold because Republicans refuse to agree to modest reforms to stop some of ICE and Customs and Border Protection's unconstitutional and immoral practices.

Overall, war puts the nation on emergency footing, justifying the subordination of democratic practices and protections. It generates demands for rally-around-the-flag fidelity, with dissent

characterized as support for the enemy. It normalizes secrecy and lying to the public (admittedly, this was already a defining feature of the Trump presidency). And it demands that the other branches of government defer to the executive in the name of national security.

If the war persists, all of this is poised to exacerbate the worst and most dangerous features of the Trump autocracy. And, with worries high about how Trump may seek to undermine the November elections, war footing and alleged national security risks may provide a pretext for the most aggressive election sabotage schemes.

Against all this, there is but one thing to do: Ensure that Americans exercise their rights and refuse to be intimidated. One advantage we have compared to prior war situations is that the Trump administration's military aggression is overwhelmingly unpopular from the outset. With strong majorities opposing the war, it is harder for the administration to denigrate and repress its opposition – all the more so if we vigorously oppose the war and the entirety of Trump's authoritarian project. That's exactly what we aim to do. ■

*Robert Weissman*  
*Lisa Gilbert*



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

approval, Trump's actions in Iran would violate international law.

- Iran poses no imminent security threat to the United States.
- Exactly like the Iraq war that Trump claimed to oppose, this is a war of choice driven by arrogance and imperial ambition.
- And exactly like the Iraq war, the risks are manifold – with needless short-term deaths inevitable and long-term consequences unknowable.

We sought an immediate end to the war, urging Congress to pass a War Powers Resolution to force an end to hostilities. Although the vote failed, a surge of grassroots pressure and the incoherence of the Trump administration's justification led nearly every congressional Democrat to support the resolution.

Immediately following the close votes on the War Powers Resolutions, we switched gears and began campaigning to block Congress from approving new funding for the war.

With a bumbling Trump advocating an expanded and protracted war in Iran, halting new funding is crucial to prevent a repeat of the Iraq war and the death and destruction it wrought.

This work on Iran war funding – very much ongoing as *Public*



Photo of U.S. aircraft sitting on the flight deck of USS Abraham Lincoln in support of Operation Epic Fury courtesy of Wikimedia.

► **ICE**, from page 1

documented ICE operations targeting churches, schools, and homes, raising serious concerns about warrants and due process. Agents have arrested parents in carpool lines, used children to lure caregivers into custody, and detained peaceful protestors and elected officials. ICE agents have dragged individuals into unmarked vehicles and disappeared them in a detention system that increasingly resembles a black box. In the first months of 2026 alone, six people have died in ICE custody, and three were killed during enforcement actions.

Good's killing and status as a U.S. citizen broke through the news cycle and unsettled millions of Americans. Out of the resulting grief and outrage came a wave of

organized action. Good became a symbol of resistance and the namesake of "ICE Out for Good," a nationwide protest movement calling for accountability and limits on immigration enforcement.

Disappeared in America, a campaign of the Not Above the Law coalition chaired by Public Citizen co-president Lisa Gilbert, joined partners including Indivisible, MoveOn, and the American Civil Liberties Union to organize the ICE Out For Good Weekend of Action in early January. Within 48 hours of Good's killing, nearly 1,200 peaceful events took place across all 50 states and Washington, D.C. Vigils, rallies, teach-ins, and prayer circles filled public squares and small-town sidewalks. Organizers called on Congress to withhold additional funding for the Department of

Homeland Security (DHS) unless strict limits were placed on ICE, as well as an end to the expansion of immigration raids into local communities. Participants were urged to call their senators and representatives and demand meaningful oversight and enforceable restrictions in any funding legislation.

Despite mounting public opposition, ICE's violent actions continued. Less than three weeks after Good's death – and days after medical examiners ruled the death of Geraldo Lunas Campos in ICE detention a homicide – ICE agents beat, shot, and killed Alex Pretti.

"Alex Pretti, Keith Porter Jr., Renée Good, and Geraldo Lunas Campos should all still be alive today," said Lisa Gilbert. "The Department of Homeland Security must get ICE off our streets now

and congressional Republicans must answer for these killings."

As negotiations over DHS funding stalled, lawmakers faced growing pressure from constituents mobilized during the weekend of action. The standoff ultimately led to a lapse in funding and a temporary DHS shutdown.

Public opinion on ICE and Trump's immigration policies is noticeably shifting. A YouGov survey conducted after the Minneapolis shooting found that opposition to ICE had increased compared with earlier in the month, with more Americans expressing support for abolishing the agency than opposing it – a notable departure from past polling. Other national surveys indicate that approval of President

see **ICE**, page 5 ►

*The following is a poem by Renée Nicole Macklin Good, who was killed by ICE in Minneapolis on Jan. 7.*

## On Learning to Dissect Fetal Pigs

i want back my rocking chairs,

solipsist sunsets,

& coastal jungle sounds that are tercets from cicadas and pentameter from the hairy legs  
of cockroaches.

i've donated bibles to thrift stores

(mashed them in plastic trash bags with an acidic himalayan salt lamp—

the post-baptism bibles, the ones plucked from street corners from the meaty hands of  
zealots, the dumbed-down, easy-to-read, parasitic kind):

remember more the slick rubber smell of high gloss biology textbook pictures; they burned  
the hairs inside my nostrils,

& salt & ink that rubbed off on my palms.

under clippings of the moon at two forty five AM I study&repeat

ribosome

endoplasmic—

lactic acid

stamen

at the IHOP on the corner of powers and stetson hills—

i repeated & scribbled until it picked its way & stagnated somewhere i can't point to

anymore, maybe my gut—

maybe there in-between my pancreas & large intestine is the piddly brook of my soul.

it's the ruler by which i reduce all things now; hard-edged & splintering from knowledge  
that used to sit, a cloth against fevered forehead.

can i let them both be? this fickle faith and this college science that heckles from the back  
of the classroom

now i can't believe—

that the bible and qur'an and bhagavad gita are sliding long hairs behind my ear like

mom used to & exhaling from their mouths "make room for wonder"—

all my understanding dribbles down the chin onto the chest & is summarized as:

*life is merely*

*to ovum and sperm*

*and where those two meet*

*and how often and how well*

*and what dies there.*

► **Venezuela**, from page 1

money should never be used for backroom deals, and taxpayers should not be on the hook for costly foreign projects that provide them no benefit,” Levin said.

Meanwhile, under pressure from the Trump administration, the Venezuelan National Assembly passed legislation weeks after the invasion, facilitating investment by U.S. oil companies.

Still, despite Trump’s bluster and his administration’s sweeping plans, interest from U.S. oil and gas

companies has been more muted than Trump initially predicted. At a White House meeting with oil executives just days after the invasion, the CEO of ExxonMobil described Venezuela as “uninvestable” without significant policy changes and firm assurances from the Trump administration.

Elites who bankrolled Trump’s presidential campaign and continue bankrolling his political operation are likely to reap the largest financial rewards. Among Trump’s prominent supporters is billionaire Paul Singer, whose

hedge fund, Elliott Management, acquired Citgo in the fall of 2025. Citgo is the U.S.-based former subsidiary of Venezuela’s state-run oil company, PDVSA.

Gulf Coast refiners also stand to benefit, including Citgo and competitors Valero Energy, Chevron, Phillips 66, and Marathon Petroleum, whose facilities already import Venezuelan heavy crude and could increase imports. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a television interview that “Our refineries in the Gulf Coast of the United States are the best in terms

of refining the heavy crude” and predicted “tremendous demand and interest from private industry.”

“Trump is deploying drone and gunboat diplomacy to coerce Venezuela into giving up its oil resources for Big Oil,” said Public Citizen co-president Robert Weissman. “Yet U.S. oil companies will likely be reluctant to invest heavily in Venezuela without U.S. government guarantees – a probable next step in Trump’s oil imperialism, unless Congress moves proactively to block it.” ■

► **ICE**, from page 4

Trump’s handling of immigration fell from the mid-40 percent range to the mid-30s following the recent incidents.

Public pressure has also produced tangible results. Activist coalitions secured the release of five-year-old Liam Ramos, who had been held in ICE detention and used as bait to try to lure family members into custody. Images of Liam wearing a bunny hat and

a Spider Man backpack circulated widely on social media, intensifying public outrage. Weeks later, amid continued community resistance, “border czar” Tom Homan announced the end of the ICE surge operation in Minneapolis.

Despite these encouraging developments, Public Citizen and its partners continue to press for reforms. We and other organizations are hosting in-district events and urging members of Congress to insist that any funding agree-

ment include enforceable oversight mechanisms, independent investigations into abuses, and clear accountability for misconduct within DHS. The message remains clear: No blank checks and no additional funding.

The anger that sparked this movement is rooted in lives cut short and families and communities shaken and upended. What followed, however, has been organized, peaceful civic engagement on a scale few anticipated. People

who had never attended a protest stood outdoors in the cold with candles. Voters who had rarely engaged beyond Election Day began calling their senators to demand oversight and accountability. What began in grief and outrage has evolved into a story of hope.

Americans have stepped forward to say “ICE Out for Good.” Now Congress must do the same. ■



Protestors in front of ICE headquarters in Washington, D.C., in January courtesy of Wikimedia.

# In Trump's First Year, Corporate Crime Enforcement Plummeted, Rewarding Top Donors

BY DAVID ROSEN

One year into the second Trump administration, hardly any corner of the federal government remains untouched by corruption, self-dealing, and policymaking aimed at showering favors on the wealthy and powerful. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and other regulatory agencies charged with stopping corporate lawbreakers are no exception.

Since the beginning of 2025, the Trump administration has canceled or halted a total of 159 enforcement actions against 166 corporations, according to a report Public Citizen released in January. As a result of this drop-off in enforcement, at least 18 corporations accused of lawbreaking avoided paying a total of \$3.1 billion in penalties for misconduct.

This marks a dramatic and unprecedented retreat from enforcement against corporate crime and lawbreaking.

“The Trump administration is canceling accountability for corporate predators that cheat consumers, exploit workers, and illegally abuse their power at home and abroad,” said Rick Claypool, a Public Citizen research director and author of the report. “The ‘law enforcement’ claims the White House uses as pretext for authoritarian anti-immigrant crackdowns, city occupations, and imperial resource seizures abroad lose all credibility when cast against the lawlessness Trump allows for the pursuit of corporate profits.”

The report is based on Public Citizen’s Corporate Enforcement Tracker, which monitors federal enforcement actions brought against corporations that Trump inherited from the Biden administration. These enforcement actions include investigations, lawsuits, and other accountability measures for alleged lawbreaking by many of the largest and most powerful corporations, from Amazon to Zoom, and hundreds more.

Public Citizen’s report found that giant corporations with close ties to Trump and his administration are benefiting the most from canceled and frozen enforcement. More than 30 made donations to fund Trump’s inauguration or White House ballroom. Seventeen have revolving-door or insider connections with the administration. Twelve hired lobbyists who are closely allied with the admin-

**Corporations With Ties to the Trump Administration Benefiting from Canceled, Frozen, or Weakened Enforcement**

Corporation	Enforcement Agency	Subject of Investigation or Allegation	Trump Administration Intervention
Amazon	EEOC	Discrimination against pregnant workers	After Trump signed an executive order directing agencies not to rely on disparate impact, EEOC dismissed the case.
Bank of America	CFPB	Alleged misconduct related to Zelle Network banks not doing enough to reimburse customers who were defrauded by scammers using the network	The Trump administration filed to dismiss the Zelle Network cases on March 4, 2025.
Coinbase	SEC	Charged with operating its crypto asset trading platform as an unregistered national securities exchange, broker, and clearing agency. The SEC also charged Coinbase for failing to register the offer and sale of its crypto asset staking-as-a-service program.	Trump's SEC agreed to dismiss its case.
Exxon Mobil and Pioneer Natural Resources	FTC	The FTC in 2024 alleged Sheffield attempted to collude with OPEC to reduce output of oil and gas, resulting in Americans paying higher prices at the pump and inflating profits for his company	Trump's FTC reopened the final consent order so Sheffield is no longer formally barred from joining Exxon's board.
Meta	CFPB	Allegations that it improperly used financial data obtained from third parties in its highly-lucrative advertising business	Meta disclosed Trump's CFPB concluded its investigation in September 2025. The Trump administration ordered a freeze on all CFPB investigations and cases on Feb. 3, 2025.
Microsoft	FTC	Anticompetitive Microsoft-Activision merger sought	After losing an effort to temporarily block the merger, Trump's FTC dismissed the case instead of bringing it to trial.
PepsiCo	FTC	Allegedly engaging in illegal price discrimination by providing one customer — a large, big box retailer — with unfair pricing advantages, while raising prices for competing retailers and customers	Trump's FTC voted to dismiss the lawsuit against Pepsi on May 22, 2025.
Scale AI	DOL	Compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act	Trump's DOL closed the investigation into Scale AI, Upwork, and HireArt on May 9, 2025. Trump's DOL on May 1, 2025 announced a retreat from enforcing a 2024 DOL rule finalized under Biden to protect workers from misclassification as contractors.
SpaceX	DOJ Civil Rights	Accuses SpaceX of discriminating against asylees and refugees in hiring decisions	Trump's DOJ filed to dismiss the case on Feb. 20, 2025
Tesla	DOL	Potential workplace discrimination	A Trump Executive Order halted anti-discrimination enforcement by the Labor Department's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs. OFCCP staff informed Tesla that its investigation stopped.
Toyota	CFPB	Directing customers to dead-end cancellation hotline, withholding refunds, and knowingly tarnishing credit reports with false data	Trump's CFPB terminated the consent order early, specifically waiving requirements that Toyota pay tens of millions of dollars in refunds and redress to allegedly harmed consumers.
Walmart	CFPB	For forcing delivery drivers to use costly deposit accounts to get paid and for deceiving workers — “last mile” drivers in Walmart’s Spark Driver program — about how they could access their earnings	Trump's CFPB dismissed the case against Walmart and Branch Messenger on May 13, 2025. The Trump administration ordered a freeze on all CFPB investigations and cases on Feb. 3, 2025.

istration. Ten have business relationships with Trump’s private companies. And nine made political contributions backing Trump’s presidential campaign.

Pfizer, the pharmaceutical giant and previous employer of Attorney General Pam Bondi, is the top beneficiary of Trump’s canceled corporate enforcement, with three enforcement actions led by the DOJ canceled since Trump took

office.

But Trump’s canceled and halted enforcement actions are not distributed evenly across the government. One third (53) of the enforcement actions involved halted investigations, lawsuits, and other accountability measures at the DOJ. Canceled and frozen cases at the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau make up nearly another third (45). Other agencies

where the Trump administration called off or halted a disproportionate number of enforcement actions include the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (30), the Federal Trade Commission (11), and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (10).

Consumer protection enforcement has particularly suffered under Trump. Forty percent of the see **Enforcement**, page 9 ▶

# Challenging Trump's Illegal Pay-to-Play Visa Program

BY ADAM PULVER



Should multi-millionaires get to spend their way to preferential treatment in the U.S. immigration system, at the expense of others who qualify for a U.S. visa on merit? Public Citizen says no – and has gone to court to stop what it calls an unlawful “pay-to-play” visa program created by the Trump administration.

In September 2025, President Donald Trump issued an executive order directing the secretaries of Commerce, Homeland Security, and State to establish a “Gold Card” visa program. Under the program, wealthy individuals would be able to bypass standard procedures for obtaining certain immigrant visas by making large donations. Soon after the order, the agencies announced that the program was underway.

Like other Trump administration programs and policies, the Gold Card scheme favors the

rich. It allows foreign people who donate at least \$1 million to the federal government – or corporations that donate at least \$2 million – plus a nonrefundable \$15,000 processing fee, to buy eligibility for a limited number of EB-1 and EB-2 visas, even if they do not meet the statutory requirements. Congress created these visa categories to admit foreign nationals with extraordinary abilities so they could contribute to the work of U.S. universities, laboratories, and other institutions. Eligibility for visas in these categories turns on talent, achievement, and professional qualifications – not wealth. The program also grants donors special priority in having their applications processed.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has boasted that he “sold” 1,000 Gold Cards in a single day, telling prospective donors they could pay to “have the right to be in America.”

Prioritizing the processing of applications for millionaire donors increases wait times for

researchers, scholars, artists, and other qualified applicants without vast financial resources. Because the total number of EB-1 and EB-2 visas is capped each year, wealthy donors may take slots from qualified applicants.

“This case concerns yet another of the many instances in which this administration is defying federal statutes to advance short-term policy preferences,” said Allison Zieve, director of Public Citizen Litigation Group and one of the organization’s lawyers working on the case. “It also concerns yet another of the many instances in which this administration is defying the Constitution, under which no administration – and no president – is above the law.”

Congress set specific eligibility requirements for EB-1 and EB-2 visas, and being rich enough to make million-dollar donations to the United States is not one of them.

In January, Public Citizen filed a lawsuit challenging the program. Along with Democracy Defenders

Fund and the law firm Colombo & Hurd, we brought the lawsuit on behalf of the American Association of University Professors, which represents higher education employees nationwide, and six professionals from around the world who have applied for, or intend to apply for, EB-1 or EB-2 visas under the criteria established by law. The lawsuit, *American Association of University Professors v. Department of Homeland Security*, contends that the Gold Card program violates the statutory framework governing EB-1 and EB-2 visas. It also argues that the administration lacked authority to create the program, that prioritizing wealthy donors over qualified applicants is arbitrary and capricious, and that the government failed to provide notice and an opportunity for public comment before implementing the program.

The plaintiffs are asking the district court to set aside the Gold Card program and declare it unlawful. ■

## ► MAHA, from page 1

in the U.S. health care system to promote unproven treatments and largely unregulated health supplements, while undermining trust in accredited health care providers.

Some already hold – or are poised to hold – influential government roles. Dr. Casey Means is President Donald Trump’s nominee for U.S. surgeon general. As this issue of *Public Citizen News* went to print, she had not completed a surgical residency, was not board-certified, and had an inactive medical license.

Rather than practicing medi-

cine, Means built a career as a wellness entrepreneur and influencer. Her metabolic testing company could benefit from Secretary Kennedy’s promotion of wearable health tracking devices. She has disclosed receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in sponsorship and affiliate fees tied to products promoted through her newsletter and social media accounts, including from companies in which she is also an investor.

In many cases, she failed to clearly inform her audience that she had paid sponsorship arrangements with product companies. Public Citizen reviewed

140 social media posts in which she promoted products from companies with which she has financial ties. In 79 of these posts, she failed to disclose her relationship. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) rules require that consumers be informed when content is advertised by someone with a financial incentive. Public Citizen has asked the FTC

to investigate.

Some of the companies that Means has promoted have faced scrutiny of their own. One at-home testing company paid a \$43 million settlement related to medically unnecessary testing. A protein powder company marketing “100% Plant Protein” was found to contain between 400% and 600% of the daily acceptable limit for lead.

Means’ brother, Calley Means, serves as a senior adviser to Secretary Kennedy at HHS. He has espoused dangerous and false health claims, including that “fluoridation in water is an attack on lower income kids”; that “covid vaccines are a war crime”; and that “kids should be drinking more raw milk and less juice.”

Calley Means also founded TrueMed, a company that helps customers use tax-advantaged Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) and Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) to purchase items that typically would not qualify for reimbursement. Products marketed through the model include \$900 luxury bidets, \$8,000 saunas, and capsules containing desiccated organ meat.

Other MAHA-aligned influencers do not hold formal government positions but maintain close personal and financial ties to admin-

istration officials. For example, Mark Hyman, a friend of Secretary Kennedy and business partner of both Means siblings, oversees a health testing and supplement empire that could benefit from HHS policies.

Paul Saladino, a vocal proponent of the carnivore diet who peddles organ-meat-based nutritional supplements, has appeared drinking raw milk shots with Secretary Kennedy at the White House and doing pull-ups alongside Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy at Reagan National Airport.

MAHA influencers may strike a chord with some Americans because they highlight legitimate concerns about corporate influence in health care. But rather than advancing reforms to lower drug prices, strengthen patient protections, or build a more equitable health system, they promote costly testing regimens, underregulated supplements, and dubious assurances that only their products hold the key to better health.

“Their track record suggests that instead of reducing undue corporate influence at the Department of Health and Human Services, the MAHA movement risks replacing one set of powerful corporate health care interests with another,” said Public Citizen co-president Lisa Gilbert. ■



Photo of Casey Means courtesy of Wikimedia.

# Public Citizen Petitions FDA To Improve Pregnancy Warnings for Common Antidepressants

BY AZZA ABUDAGGA, PH.D.

Expectant mothers struggling with depression often face a difficult dilemma: Take medication and worry about their baby, or avoid treatment and risk their own health? Public Citizen is urging federal regulators to make that choice less confusing.

On Nov. 14, 2025, Public Citizen petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to strengthen pregnancy warnings for widely prescribed classes of antidepressants known as serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SRIs). These drugs, which include selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), are commonly used to treat depression, anxiety, panic disorder, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

According to an FDA-funded study, at least 6% of pregnant women in the U.S. take SSRIs. That translates to more than 200,000 fetuses exposed to these medications each year. Yet current drug labels often fail to clearly explain what is known – and not known – about potential risks to babies exposed during pregnancy.

Public Citizen's petition asks the FDA to require balanced, evidence-based warnings so families and clinicians can make informed decisions about the use of SRIs during pregnancy.

Common SSRIs include citalopram (Celexa and generics) and fluoxetine (Prozac and generics), and common SNRIs include desvenlafaxine (Pristiq and generics) and venlafaxine (Effexor XR and generics).

## Balancing Potential Benefits and Risks

Depression during pregnancy is not a minor condition. Untreated maternal depression has been linked to serious health consequences for both mother and baby. For the mother, it can interfere with daily functioning, increase the risk of preeclampsia (pregnancy-induced high blood pressure) and postpartum depression, impair bonding with a newborn, limit engagement in medical care, and raise the risk of self-harm or suicide. Pregnancy-associated suicide causes more deaths among pregnant women in the U.S. than hemorrhage or preeclampsia.

For infants, untreated mater-

nal depression has been associated with preterm birth, low birth weight, developmental delays, and a higher likelihood of depression later in life.

Because of these risks, treating maternal mental illness is often essential. But questions remain about the long-term safety of prenatal exposure to SRIs. These drugs cross the placenta and animal studies have suggested that they can possibly have adverse neurodevelopmental effects. In humans, however, the evidence is limited and inconclusive. There are no randomized controlled trials – largely for ethical reasons – examining prenatal SRI exposure. Population-based studies generally have not shown strong links between these drugs and cognitive impairment in offspring.

Some research has suggested possible associations with emotional or behavioral outcomes later in life, but in several studies those differences disappeared after researchers adjusted for factors such as the mother's underlying depression. Even where studies found small differences in speech, language, or motor development in the exposed offspring, the effects were minor and of uncertain clinical significance.

Given these uncertainties, Public Citizen is calling on the FDA to require SRI manufacturers to conduct a comprehensive post-marketing safety surveillance study to examine both short- and

long-term outcomes of prenatal exposure.

In the meantime, drug labels should clearly state that SRIs should be used during pregnancy only when the potential benefits outweigh the potential risks, taking into account the harms of untreated mental illness.

For mild to moderate depression, non-drug treatments such as psychotherapy and physical activity are often appropriate first steps. When use of medications is necessary – particularly for patients already stable on an SRI before pregnancy – clinicians should prescribe the lowest effective dose for the shortest duration, when necessary. Expectant mothers should not stop these medications abruptly, as doing so can trigger withdrawal symptoms or relapse of the underlying mental health condition.

## Withdrawal Reactions After Birth

The petition also calls for stronger warnings about poor neonatal adaptation syndrome (PNAS), sometimes referred to as neonatal abstinence syndrome, in newborns exposed to SRIs late in pregnancy.

PNAS can include breathing difficulties, persistent crying, feeding problems, vomiting, low blood sugar, temperature instability, irritability, or seizures. Evidence suggests that up to 30% of infants exposed to SRIs in the

third trimester may experience these symptoms. The condition is usually temporary, but its severity may increase with higher doses, and symptoms may last beyond the first two weeks of life.

Public Citizen is urging the FDA to require clearer labeling so that pregnant patients better understand these risks. The petition also recommends advising patients taking SRIs to deliver in a hospital where neonatal specialists are available, if needed. In addition, the petition calls for a warning against combining SRIs in late pregnancy with benzodiazepines, such as diazepam (Valium and generics), or other central nervous system depressants, which may worsen newborn withdrawal symptoms.

Importantly, the petition addresses only the use of SRIs during pregnancy. The filing was not in any way influenced by the Make America Healthy Again movement or views expressed at the controversial FDA's July 21, 2025, expert panel on SSRIs and pregnancy.

Like many of Public Citizen's petitions to the FDA, this one is grounded in the available evidence and aimed at improving public health. Families deserve clear, accurate information – not guesswork – when making decisions about treating depression during pregnancy. Public Citizen is urging the FDA to act. ■



The Food and Drug Administration campus in Silver Spring, Md., in 2015. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia.

# Artificial Regulation: The Trump Administration's Use of AI in Federal Rulemaking

BY ELIZABETH SKERRY

The Trump administration has announced disturbing plans to use artificial intelligence (AI) in the federal rulemaking process. The stated aim is speed. The likely result is deregulation – including corporate-friendly, poorly constructed rules – delivered at scale and at haste. Public Citizen is proposing policy solutions and recommending guardrails.

According to *ProPublica*, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) will now use AI – specifically Google Gemini – to draft regulations. That decision should alarm anyone who depends on the agency to keep the public safe. Generative AI outputs are hollow. They're rooted in statistical probabilities of which words are most likely to appear together. Their outputs are not grounded in subject-matter expertise, institutional knowledge, or the judgment of career staff with decades of rule-writing experience.

The technology functions much like predictive text on a smartphone, guessing which word comes next. But federal regulations are not text messages. They are highly technical, legally binding documents that require scientific rigor, statutory interpretation, and careful analysis. AI systems are prone to error and “hallucination,” generating false and fabricated claims.

“Introducing that instability into the regulatory process is dangerous and totally unnecessary,” said Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. “Agencies are not supposed to produce rules that gamble on safety, efficacy, and fact.”

Even DOT leadership appears unconcerned about quality. *ProPublica* reports that the agency's general counsel, Gregory Zerzan, described the department as “the first agency that is fully enabled to use AI to draft rules,” adding that DOT does not “even

**“Federal agencies are charged with acting in the public interest. Relying on unproven, resource-intensive technology that carries well-documented risks undermines that mission.”**

— Public Citizen co-president Robert Weissman

need a very good rule on XYZ.”

That admission raises serious safety concerns. DOT oversees aviation, highways, pipelines, railroads, and vehicle safety – areas where regulatory precision can mean the difference between life and death. Yet Zerzan praised the fact that a draft rule could be produced in 20 minutes and sent to the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, or OIRA, for review within 30 days.

Speed is not necessarily a virtue when public safety is at stake. According to *ProPublica*, a DOT employee who attended a staff presentation in December, DOT employees’ “jobs would be to proofread” AI-generated regulations. In addition to the danger this poses to the public, it sets a troubling precedent for other agencies responsible for health, safety, and consumer protection.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration is expanding its deregulatory ambitions.

*WIRED* reports that officials plan to roll out a new AI tool called SweetREX Deregulation AI Plan Builder, or SweetREX DAIP, designed to slash regulations across the government. Created by DOGE associates inside the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the tool was first discussed during an Office of Management and Budget video call in August 2025. Its purpose is to advance President Trump's “Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation” executive order. *ProPublica* reports that the tool is intended to “identify sections of regulations that aren't required by statute” and eliminate them

quickly.

The link between DOGE and SweetREX is deeply problematic. Many DOGE associates have ties to Elon Musk, whose companies, xAI and Grok, have been linked to outputting white supremacist content. Embedding AI systems shaped by those networks into federal decision-making raises serious concerns about bias. The Trump administration has already signaled that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) regulations are a target.

Those risks are not theoretical. Algorithmic systems often replicate and amplify existing discrimination. Across multiple sectors, AI tools have denied people government benefits, job interviews, and loans based on race, gender, and other protected characteristics.

Given these deficiencies, Public Citizen maintains that the most prudent course is a moratorium on AI use in rulemaking – at a minimum until additional research, safety assessments, transparency reporting, and enforceable guardrails are in place.

The regulatory process is a particularly inappropriate testing ground. AI systems frequently hallucinate case law, fabricate citations in the United States Code, and produce false – occasionally dangerous and life-threatening – information across subject matters.

The concerns extend beyond rulemaking mechanics. AI systems impose substantial environmental and social costs. Data centers consume enormous amounts of water and energy, driving up electricity bills and increasing air pollution in surrounding communities –

burdens that fall disproportionately on historically marginalized groups.

“Federal agencies are charged with acting in the public interest. Relying on unproven, resource-intensive technology that carries well-documented risks undermines that mission,” remarked Weissman.

Absent an outright ban on the use of AI in rulemaking, Public Citizen proposes the following guardrails:

- Agencies must disclose how AI is used in the rulemaking process, including plain-language explanations of why and how the system affects public outcomes. Documents produced in whole or in part by AI should include a clear disclosure;
- AI systems must undergo pre-deployment testing, risk assessment, and continuous monitoring. Systems deemed unsafe or unreliable, including those with documented safety concerns, such as Grok, must not be used. Public Citizen has advocated for the removal of Grok from federal agencies;
- Federal workers and their unions must be consulted regarding AI deployment;
- Human verification must be employed when agencies use AI. Decisions should never be fully automated;

The federal rulemaking process exists to protect the public. Replacing expertise with automated guesswork would be reckless. When lives are on the line, experimentation is not innovation – it is negligence. ■

## ► Enforcement, from page 6

canceled or frozen enforcement actions were against corporations for alleged consumer protection violations. Other significant areas of retreat include cryptocurrency enforcement (22), worker protection (18), antitrust and competition-related enforcement (17), and foreign corruption and bribery (15).

Corporations that have benefited from two canceled enforcement actions each include Bank of America, Binance, Capital One, Charles River Laboratories International, GE Healthcare, Globe Life, Peloton, and Toyota. In addition, Paypal has one canceled and one frozen enforcement action.

“When it comes to fraud and

corporate misconduct, there's a very direct relationship between enforcement and compliance,” added Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen. “The result of the administration's corporate enforcement cancellation will be more than unmerited relief for the companies escaping punishment from ongoing enforcement. We should anticipate a tsunami of

fraud and corporate misconduct to follow.” ■

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE...

Public Citizen challenges a bitcoin mining company seeking to acquire fossil fuel power plants outside D.C.

# 2026: The Year of the (Fight Against) Data Centers

BY JOSÉ MEDINA

The newest version of the infamous Texas land grab isn't for oil or gas, but for sprawling warehouses packed with computers that power artificial intelligence. As tech giants like Google and Meta race to build data centers across the Lone Star State, a resistance has formed, with Public Citizen's Texas office leading the charge.

From the Austin suburb of Round Rock to rural Hood County near Dallas-Fort Worth, Public Citizen is working to limit the negative impacts of AI data centers. These facilities can drive up utility costs and often have negative impacts on communities that don't want to host them.

Data centers are massive warehouses filled with servers that store internet data or provide computing power for now-ubiquitous AI tools. They typically employ only a few dozen workers, but they require significant electricity and depend on large amounts of water for cooling. Some also generate persistent low-frequency noise that has been linked to health harms.

For communities weighing whether to welcome such projects, those trade-offs are significant. That's why Public Citizen's Texas office has declared 2026 the year to organize against the unchecked spread of data centers and for guardrails that protect local communities.

## Round Rock: Where Eight Data Centers Are Apparently Not Enough

Round Rock, a suburb just north of Austin, is already home to multiple data centers. In February, the Round Rock City Council unanimously approved a rezoning ordinance for a new Skybox AI data center. While city leaders touted the project as an economic opportunity, Public Citizen and local advocates packed the meeting to present a different story to council members.

When currently approved projects are completed, this single suburban city will host nine data centers.

"The Round Rock City Council's message was clear: Corporate interests come before the well-being of the people they were elected to represent," said Adrian Shelley, director of Public Citizen's Texas office. "Council members ignored more than 3,000 petition signatures and a room full of residents who were unambiguous about their opposition to a data center they believe will lower their quality of life with little benefit to the community."

## Hood County Shows the Opposition to Data Centers Cuts Across Party and Ideological Lines

In Hood County, near Fort Worth,

opposition to data center expansion has crossed party and ideological lines. Conservative landowners and rural residents have joined progressive environmental groups, including Public Citizen, in questioning large-scale industrial development. At a February meeting, county commissioners considered a one-year, countywide moratorium on new industrial facilities, including data centers.

The proposal was narrowly defeated after pressure from a state senator who does not represent Hood County and who suggested the Texas attorney general might sue the county if the measure passed. Even so, Public Citizen and local residents forced a public discussion about the cumulative environmental impacts of data centers. Advocates say the debate is far from over.

## Communities Across Texas

Public Citizen is also monitoring and challenging data center proposals in San Antonio, San Marcos, and El Paso. In San Antonio, the organization has raised concerns about the facilities' heavy energy demands and their potential impact on customers of the municipally owned utility CPS Energy. Public Citizen has endorsed a City Council proposal calling for a study of data centers and their effects on one of the fast-

est-growing cities in the country.

In El Paso, Public Citizen is tracking how proposed data centers would draw on the limited water supplies and operate diesel-powered generators.

In the coming months, Public Citizen's Texas office plans to take its concerns to the Texas Legislature, calling for statewide standards to address data center growth. The group is advocating for transparency about water and electricity use, strict noise and environmental safeguards, and other common-sense policies to ensure that Texas communities are no longer left vulnerable to data center growth.

To support that effort, Public Citizen released "Reining in Big Tech: Policy Solutions to Address the Data Center Buildout," a comprehensive policy guide outlining potential regulatory reforms. Among other recommendations, the handbook calls for ending nondisclosure agreements that obscure resource consumption, requiring data centers to invest in their own renewable energy generation, and ensuring that tech giants – not ordinary Texans – shoulder the massive costs of grid and transmission upgrades.

Public Citizen is equipping Texans with the tools to demand a future where technological growth does not come at the expense of transparency or community well-being. ■



Adrian Shelley, the Texas director of Public Citizen, leads a march to the Round Rock, Texas, city hall on Feb. 12, when the council of the Austin suburb considered a rezoning request that would allow for the construction of a new data center. Photo courtesy of Anita Goodwin.

# Public Citizen Exposes Trump's Trade Deals for Critical Minerals

BY ALANA MATTHEW

Charging your phone rarely brings the periodic table of elements to mind, yet critical minerals like cobalt and lithium underpin the technologies we use every day. As demand for these minerals increases, policymakers are determining what kind of global system will govern how they're extracted, processed, and traded across borders.

Human rights abuses are widespread in the minerals supply chain. These include the displacement of Indigenous peoples, forced and child labor, environmental destruction, deforestation from nickel extraction, and water contamination. Despite this, governments and corporations invoke the clean energy transition to justify a massive expansion of mining. Environmental justice demands accountability, transparency, and the highest labor and environmental standards in any trade, investment, or cooperation agreement tied to critical minerals.

Under the Trump administration, the push to secure critical minerals has intensified. The rationale for the nation's pursuit of minerals abroad has shifted from supporting a green transition to

a blunt acknowledgement of the minerals' utility for tech dominance and military applications.

Wielding sweeping tariffs as a cudgel, the Trump administration is pursuing opaque trade negotiations with numerous countries. Early this year, President Donald Trump issued an executive order directing the U.S. Trade Representative to initiate and complete negotiations focused on critical minerals. While some such negotiations were already underway, the order marked an escalation in both pace and pressure, reinforcing a deal-making approach that prioritizes speed and bargaining power over transparency and democratic accountability.

Public Citizen and partners, such as Friends of the Congo and Earthworks, have been working together to track and analyze these deals and raise awareness among decision-makers. We joined 35 civil society, environmental, faith, and human rights organizations to call on the Trump administration to halt any ongoing negotiations on critical minerals agreements until the process is opened to public input and affected communities are meaningfully consulted.

Even experts closely tracking

trade policy struggle to identify which countries have actually reached agreements – and under what terms. The administration often announces “deals” long before finalizing details. Memoranda of understanding, “framework agreements,” and “action plans” are routinely touted as major breakthroughs despite being explicitly nonbinding and often limited to vague commitments to “cooperate” or “facilitate” future mining and investment.

But it's not all smoke and mirrors. Some of the minerals deals that Trump has inked contain binding provisions that rob developing countries of the economic benefits of their resources, and incentivize a new wave of dangerous, dirty mining without meaningful labor or environmental safeguards.

For example, the administration has announced several Agreements on Reciprocal Trade (ARTs) – lopsided deals in which countries like Cambodia, El Salvador, Argentina, and others agree to a litany of concessions in exchange for relief from Trump's so-called “reciprocal” tariffs.

Malaysia's ART includes a legally binding commitment not to restrict exports of critical min-

erals or rare earth elements to the United States. This eliminates an important industrial policy tool that resource-rich countries can use to promote domestic processing and retain more of the value from their minerals. In neighboring Indonesia, export bans, quotas, and domestic processing requirements transformed the country's nickel sector and attracted massive downstream investment after the government prohibited the export of raw ore.

Tariffs have not been Trump's only leverage, as he has also crafted “minerals for security” arrangements, in which the U.S. offers military assistance, weapons, or security cooperation to countries experiencing conflict in exchange for preferential access to their mineral resources.

At the end of 2025, the administration announced the Washington Accords – a set of pacts among the U.S., the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Rwanda that were ostensibly aimed at establishing peace in the region. At the center of these deals is the far-reaching U.S.-DRC Strategic Partnership Agreement, which fundamentally reshapes who con-

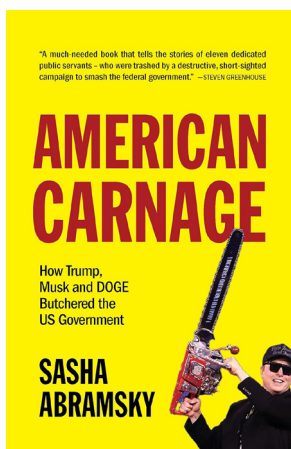
see **Minerals**, page 16 ▶

## Public Citizen Recommends ...

**"American Carnage: How Trump, Musk, and DOGE Butchered the U.S. Government"**

By Sasha Abramsky; \$31; OR Books

In “American Carnage,” longtime *Nation* writer Sasha Abramsky chronicles the human cost – and the startling wastefulness – of Elon Musk's so-called “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE) during the first year of the second Trump administration. Abramsky started writing the book to bear witness in the first months of 2025, “in something of a rush as the chaotic and cruel purges of government workers got underway.” Reading the book's painfully personal accounts of 11 federal workers, I often felt wide-



eyed, as if watching an epic disaster film unspool across a giant screen. Complete with heroes, villains, cliffhangers, losses, and hard-won victories, Abramsky's brisk tale documents what happened to these fired federal workers who, in his telling, symbolize what happened to so many other dedicated civil servants.

The book spans agencies across the federal government that were blasted by a weaponized DOGE, from frontal assaults on United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to attacks on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Geological Survey, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Abramsky describes how some were fired for fictional causes, others were pressured to resign, and still others were subjected to convoluted cycles of being fired, rehired, and fired again. We read about people who handled the ordeal with grace and others who fled as far away as possible to recover. There are those who accepted the purge and moved on, those who fought valiantly until there was nothing left to fight, and those who managed to hang on and survive.

Abramsky traces the experiences of senior government officials on the cusp of retirement whose carefully crafted plans were shattered by a single email. Some of these didn't even come from people but from newly created government email addresses that sent out mass emails with phishing-like subject lines such as “Read this immediately.”

Abramsky also follows mid-career workers who were doing their best to make the country healthier and stronger, only to be sidelined for arbitrary reasons unrelated to job performance. We also meet newly hired, bright-eyed government employees eager to serve the American people, who were abruptly told to go home just a few months after they were hired and play video games instead.

Abramsky ends the book on a note of resistance. In late May, an ex-NOAA worker wrote him a long note from her Washington, D.C., apartment, explaining how resilient she and her colleagues remain: “If we all work together and play to our strengths, we just might get through this and come out the other side better ... If we want a better world, we have to make it better.” The sentiment applies not only to the workers whose stories fill this book, but to all of us.

– Jon Golinger ■

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

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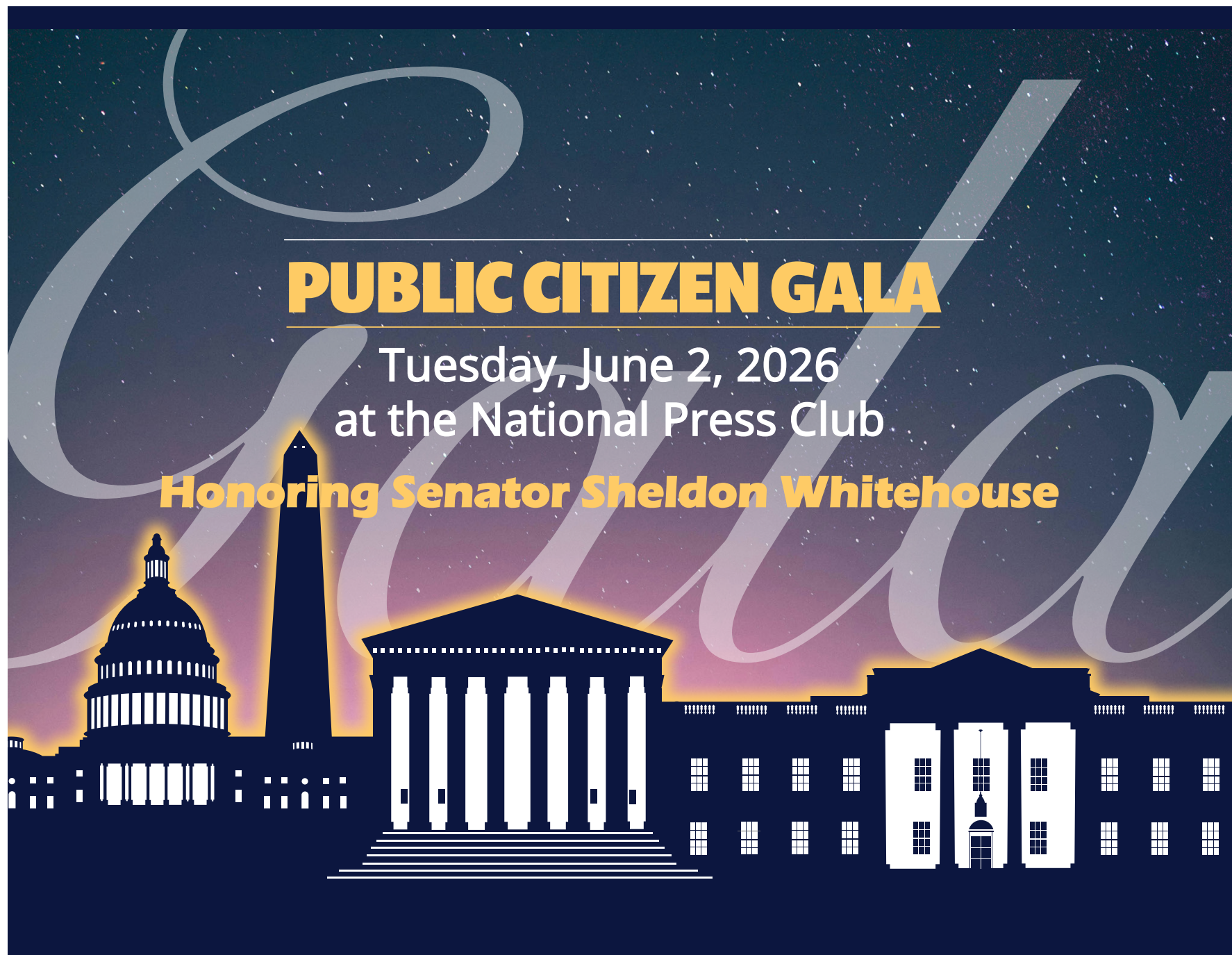
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# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

## Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen

**On the Trump administration taking another stake in the rare earth sector:** *The New York Times*. **On UAE royal’s investment in the Trump family’s crypto firm:** *ABC News*, *POLITICO*. **On a Los Angeles manufacturer accusing a law firm of filing fraudulent asbestos lawsuits:** *The Los Angeles Times*. **On the Trump administration placing speed over corporate accountability and ethical safeguards when pushing rare earths mining:** *E&E News* by *POLITICO*. **On the Minnesota fraud scandal:** *ABC 6 News*. **On Russell Vought, the director of the White House’s Office of Management and Budget, getting his security detail paid for with slashed USAID cash:** *The Independent*. **On Trump’s consummate salesmanship:** *The Morning Call*. **On No Kings rallies scheduled for March:** *Common Dreams*. **On the investors behind Critical Metals Corp:** *Daily Kos*. **On Trump deploying drone and gunboat diplomacy to coerce Venezuela into serving up its oil resources to Big Oil:** *Common Dreams*.

## Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen

**On journalist Don Lemon being taken into custody after a Minnesota church protest:** *CNN*. **On Trump’s \$10 billion suit against his own government:** *NBC News*. **On the data of thousands of taxpayers wrongly shared with DHS:** *PBS*. **On Amazon’s documentary deal with Melania Trump:** *ARTNews*. **On Trump’s DOJ targeting Fed chair in unprecedented escalation against central bank independence:** *Nation of Change*. **On No Kings rallies scheduled for March:** *Common Dreams*.

## Public Citizen Litigation Group

**On Vietnam War veterans suing to block construction of Trump’s Independence Arch plan:** *The Washington Post*, *NPR*, *Politico*, *The Hill*, *Bloomberg Law*. **On Trump’s “gold card” visa program:** *The New York Times*, *Bloomberg Law*. **On the legal battle to keep U.S. foreign aid alive:** *Devox*. **On the destruction of federal records:** *ProPublica*.

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

**On Trump promising oil executives “total safety” if they invest in Venezuela:** *Associated Press*, *The Boston Globe*. **On consumer groups slamming Trump’s meeting with oil companies:** *CBS News*. **On Trump’s war on offshore**

**wind:** *POLITICO*. **On surging U.S. gas and electricity prices:** *Financial Times*. **On natural gas price spikes during winter:** *E&E News* by *POLITICO*. **On Florida mulling rules for AI data centers to protect consumers:** *Tampa Bay Times*. **On Trump’s embrace of natural gas exports driving up energy bills for consumers:** *Truthout*. **On grid operators preparing for Winter Storm Fern:** *Utility Dive*. **On Trump blocking offshore wind projects using bogus U.S. military and national security claims:** *MarketWatch*.

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

**On the Trump administration treating experts as adversaries to be weakened:** *The Nation*. **On the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention narrowing routine childhood vaccine guidance:** *Nation of Change*. **On AI autonomously writing prescription refills in Utah:** *ARS Technica*. **On the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s proposal of a new approval pathway for a rare disease gene therapy:** *MedPage Today*. **On a former Michigan Medicine dean who omitted multimillion-dollar pharma ties in multiple publications:** *The Michigan Daily*.

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

**On a new White House design team aiming for “delightful” websites:** *Government Executive*. **On Hakeem Jeffries’ aides:** *New York Post*. **On Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer using the public dole for self-indulgence:** *Washington Examiner*. **On allegations of Brandon Phillips’ misuse of public funds:** *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*. **On Kelly Loeffler being embroiled in scandals:** *Notus*. **On a GOP stock trading bill:** *Sludge*. **On congressional conflicts:** *The Center Square*.

## J.B. Branch, Big Tech accountability advocate

**On the AI arms race:** *San Francisco Chronicle*. **On the Pentagon’s AI Strategy as it plans for future space missions:** *Austin American-Statesman Online*, *Decrypt*. **On OpenAI’s plans to release a health chatbot:** *Inside Health Policy*. **On Trump’s nutrition website directing users to Elon Musk’s Grok:** *Government Executive*. **On AI policy in 2026:** *Tech Policy Press*.

► **Minerals**, from page 11

trols access to the DRC’s vast cobalt reserves. The deal is a gift to U.S. mining companies, which are guaranteed special tax incentives, fast-tracked permits, and a “right of first offer,” prioritizing their bids even ahead of domestic investors.

Members of Congress have begun to push back, demanding greater transparency and accountability from the administration. Representative Linda Sánchez has led more than 50 members in calling for full disclosure and con-

gressional oversight of the critical minerals agreement with the DRC, underscoring the growing recognition that these deals carry profound implications for human rights, environmental protection, and U.S. credibility abroad.

International partners are taking a stand, too. Congolese civil society, legal experts, and lawmakers are challenging the U.S.-DRC deal, arguing that it violates the constitutional guarantee of sovereignty over natural resources. In Malaysia, hundreds have taken to the streets protesting the unpop-

ular U.S. agreement, which still must be ratified by the Malaysian government.

The stakes are high. Trade policy is not neutral; it determines whose interests are prioritized and whose voices are excluded. It can support sustainable development and protect workers’ rights, or worsen inequality and environmental destruction. In the rush to secure critical minerals, the Trump administration is using trade for hoarding power rather than for shared progress.

A different approach is both

possible and necessary. Trade and cooperation on critical minerals should be transparent, subject to democratic oversight, and grounded in binding commitments to labor rights, environmental protection, and community consent. Resource-rich countries must retain the ability to shape their own development paths as their sovereignty demands and capture fair value from their resources. Anything less risks reproducing the colonial extractive injustices of the past. ■



Photo of Congolese miners digging courtesy of Junior Kannah, AFP via Getty.

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85	9.1%	\$910	8.1%	\$810
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