



VOL. 46, NO. 5  
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# PUBLICCITIZEN NEWS

## Swamp Things: The Insiders Running Your Government

BY ZACH EVERSON

A consultant for a space-based weather company was helping his client sell data to the government. In today's Trump administration, he runs the government agency that would buy it.

He's far from the only Trump official riddled with conflicts of interest. An official previously honored as a "top lobbyist" now oversees the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the U.S. Census Bureau. An 18-year veteran of an advocacy association for the cleaning products industry is the Environmental Protection Agency's assistant administrator for toxic substances.

Although President Donald Trump's conflicts of interest often

make headlines, his appointees' rarely do, though they are the ones deciding what chemicals stay on shelves, which mergers clear, and what the government's own economic data says.

Public Citizen's recently rebooted Trump Conflict of Interests tracker shines a light on the underlings implementing Trump's corporate-friendly agenda. Updated weekly, it identifies Trump administration officials with financial or professional ties to the corporations and industries they are now positioned to regulate, reinforcing a broader pattern of corporate influence throughout the federal government.

"Again and again, the Trump administration has installed for-

mer corporate executives and industry leaders in positions overseeing the very sectors that made them wealthy," said Robert Weissman and Lisa Gilbert, co-

presidents of Public Citizen. "Too often, recusals are being treated as a substitute for eliminating conflicts altogether. The public

see **Swamp Things**, page 4 ►



## Passing State Laws to Meet the Moment

BY LIZ IACOBUCCI

State legislatures across the nation have passed bills to protect elections and public officials by wide, bipartisan margins, thanks in significant part to the work of Public Citizen and our allies.

Public Citizen has led the coalition's work on state legislation to protect public officials and elections, while partnering organizations in the Not Above the Law coalition that Public Citizen co-

chairs have led campaigns to limit surveillance, create guardrails on federal agents' actions, and prevent misuse of the National Guard.

"With all the attention that's been paid to partisan divisions at the federal level, it was refreshing to see the unanimity and near-unanimity on so many of these votes," said Liz Iacobucci, Protect Elections campaign coordinator for Public Citizen. "Public

servants need to be able to do their jobs without fearing for themselves or their families. Voters need to be able to trust that

our elections are free and fair, and that ballots are counted properly. Legislators agreed on those fundamentals across the country and across party lines, and they passed dozens of bills to strengthen and fill gaps in state laws."

The campaigns kicked off last December with an online briefing attended by state lawmakers and staff members from across the country. Public Citizen created resource documents with statutory language for each of its policy recommendations to protect public officials and elections, which were distributed to webinar attendees and others. Public Citizen also provided oral and

see **State Laws**, page 5 ►

## Public Citizen Sues Over Alleged Asylum Data Sharing With Iran

BY KELLY LEW



When people come to the United States seeking asylum, they are often required to describe the most private and sensitive facts about their lives, such as their political activity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, the names of relatives and friends, and the reasons they fear returning to their home country.

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## GET TO KNOW PUBLIC CITIZEN KATIE TRACY

An ongoing series profiling Public Citizen leaders and staffers



For Katie Tracy, regulatory policy sits at the intersection of issues that first drew her to public-interest law: protecting workers, safeguarding consumers, and holding institutions accountable for their impact on communities and the environment. Her career has given her a view of those challenges from multiple sides of the regulatory process, including nonprofit advocacy and federal government service. As senior regulatory policy advocate at Public Citizen, she now brings that perspective to work focused on strengthening the laws and policies that protect people's health and economic security.

Tracy earned her undergraduate degree in business administration from the College of Charleston before getting a law degree at American University Washington College of Law, where her interests in climate change, workers' rights, and consumer protection led her to administrative law. Her professional experiences have reinforced her belief in the importance of effective government, collaboration, and public-interest advocacy. Outside of work, she enjoys spending her time with her family and traveling.

**You first came to Public Citizen as a regulatory policy intern in 2011 and now have returned as a senior regulatory policy advocate. How does it feel to come back to an organization where your public-interest career first began?**

**Tracy:** It feels full circle. I'm honored to have the opportunity to bring what I've learned over the past decade to this premier advocacy organization. At Public Citizen, I get to work with an incredible team to ensure corporations are stopped from taking dangerous and unethical shortcuts that harm people's health and economic security.

**Could you briefly describe your work at the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission?**

**Tracy:** At OSHRC, I served as chief counsel to Chair Cynthia L. Attwood. My primary responsibility was to provide legal counsel to the chair on all cases pending review before the commission. I also served as the congressional and White House liaison on commissioner nominations and as chief of staff on administrative matters. My government experience was invaluable in many ways. In particular, it reinforced my respect for the expertise, dedication, and resilience of the federal workforce. As I pursue my current work, I often reflect on how various proposals affect federal agencies' missions and the employees who have dedicated their careers to carrying them out.

**What does a typical day at Public Citizen look like?**

**Tracy:** Every day is a little bit different. Some days are spent opining on proposed bills, while others are spent on deep research. What is always consistent is the mission and collaborative nature of the work. I get to collaborate daily with partners within and outside Public Citizen to advance meaningful legal and policy reforms that improve people's daily lives.

**You've worked in advocacy and government. How have those different vantage points changed the way you approach your work?**

**Tracy:** I've been fortunate to be surrounded by exceptional thinkers and doers. Through mentorship and guidance, I've learned many cross-cutting skills that have made me better at my work. I've found that the most meaningful and successful work happens with early and frequent collaboration with others.

**Regulatory policy can involve incremental victories. What keeps you motivated during the slower stretches?**

**Tracy:** I remember how lucky I am to have a job as an advocate doing something I'm passionate about. Not everyone has the opportunity to work toward something they find rewarding. Not every day is a victory, but I know I am contributing to a positive vision of society. ■

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

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Lisa Gilbert and Robert Weissman

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## Defending the Vote

Interfering with mail voting is a key part of Donald Trump's scheme to sabotage this November's election. In March, he signed an executive order requiring the creation of a national eligible voter list, ordering the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to make rules requiring states to apprise them of voters who want mail-in ballots, and preventing these voters from receiving mail-in ballots if they are not on the USPS list.

While the Supreme Court

the process for judges and officials to have their personal data removed from commercial data brokers' databases.

This makes California the ninth state to enact such legislation this year, and one of 28 states that introduced legislation across party lines to protect public officials in this cycle.

Public Citizen has been supporting and tracking these bills, as rates of in-person and digital threats against those who step up and serve the American public reach new heights.

In recent elections, election workers have faced harassment, abuse, and threats from MAGA goons and other far-right extremists. And as Trump recklessly amplifies completely false charges of widespread voter fraud, those threats

will become even more dangerous in these closing weeks of the election. Personal address protection, security against credible threats, and penalties for all perpetrators – including federal agents – who violate officials' rights are among the policies we are pursuing across the country. These policies

go beyond election administrators to protect the judges who uphold election laws and protections at the most crucial moments, the governors and state legislators who enact laws and appoint electors, and other public servants whose work touches the election sphere.

We are also working to improve the security of the voting equipment, ballots, systems, and records that have been targeted by those seeking to undermine current and future elections. Making state laws clearer in this area can only benefit overtaxed local attorneys who must respond when bad actors come knocking.

Public Citizen is connecting directly with state election officials to identify their needs, recruiting poll workers, and tapping our networks of activists and college students to provide election officials with additional support.

In the immediate run-up to Election Day and beyond, Public Citizen is focusing on several key areas.

First, we are preparing for nationwide public mobilization if we see election subversion. People power is our most valuable protection against Donald Trump's assault on this election and on our democracy in general. That's why

we've invested so much energy into building coalitions and leading demonstrations, including our work on the steering committee of No Kings. In the last No Kings protest in March 2026, for example, more than 8 million people came out in more than 3,300 communities – the largest day of protest in American history.

Second, we are doing intensive community empowerment and voter engagement work, both of which are critical right now. As students return to college, we're expanding organizing on college campuses to drive get-out-the-vote efforts.

Finally, we're recruiting a legion of poll watchers to make sure voting goes smoothly. We're preparing for a massive early voting drive, which we will do in partnership with our allies in the broad No Kings movement. And we'll help coordinate parties at the polls to celebrate the voting process and make sure everyone feels safe casting their ballot.

Defending the vote is a core priority for protecting our nation against this administration's attacks. And we will not let up. ■

*Robert Warren*  
*Lisa Gilbert*



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

refused to stand in the way of Trump's efforts to limit mail-in voting, the issue is still being litigated in lower courts. A whistleblower has warned that the USPS is trying to move ahead despite the litigation and is poised to launch a computer system that could derail mail-in voting.

Voting by mail is safe and secure. Trump himself voted by mail just last month. All of these efforts are simply a craven attempt to try and interfere with our elections.

But we are going to stop him.

Public Citizen is investing resources in many important campaigns. In the near- and medium-term, we're putting a check on Trump's corruption and fascism. But for the next two months, nothing is more critical than our work to stop Trump from rigging this year's midterms. It is the next great battle in our generation's fight to defend American democracy.

This urgent work builds on our efforts of the past several years to establish important election safeguards. We have been making good progress prodding states to increase protections for election workers and public officials. For example, at the end of August, California state legislators passed Assembly Bill 883, which, if signed by the Governor, will streamline



Photo courtesy of Pexels.

► **Swamp Things**, from page 1

deserves confidence that government decisions are being made in the public interest instead of for personal financial gain.”

### How Insiders Are Running the Department of Commerce

The Department of Commerce was the focus of a major recent update to Public Citizen’s conflicts tracker. In reviewing the financial disclosures of about 110 senior Trump officials appointed to the department, researchers identified around 30 appointees with significant conflicts of interest. The research uncovered emerging trends across the administration, including Commerce officials’ repeated ties to the American Petroleum Institute, Energy Secretary Chris Wright’s former

company, Liberty Energy, and the cryptocurrency industry. Another major finding was that officials have opted to recuse themselves from matters involving former employers or financial interests rather than fully divesting those interests.

Most notable is billionaire Howard Lutnick, who serves as commerce secretary and has had ties to at least 800 businesses. In addition, Commerce’s top export control official represented more than 50 clients, as well as a foreign government, before taking over the bureau meant to regulate them.

These findings led to a separate report, “Corporate Capture at Commerce: How Industry Insiders Are Running the Department of Commerce.” It underscores the plethora of lobbyists, corporate executives, corporate lawyers, and defense and technology industry

staffers within the department who are poised to financially benefit or help their previous employers and clients through their appointments.

### Help Close the Revolving Door

To address some of the problems uncovered by the tracker, Public Citizen proposes several fixes.

Executive branch personnel subject to appointment or confirmation, as well as senior White House personnel, should sign an enforceable pledge agreement to recuse themselves from taking any official action that affects a former employer or client from the past two years. They also should recuse themselves from matters they personally lobbied on or that involve a specific party or parties related to a former employer or client from the previous two years, including

regulations and contracts.

Waivers from ethics requirements for senior executive branch personnel should be issued only for cause. They should be made in writing and available for public inspection in a centralized database.

Each agency and division within the executive branch should appoint its own designated agency ethics officials (DAEOs) to advise on and enforce ethics laws and rules among agency personnel.

The Office of Government Ethics (OGE) should also establish a public clearinghouse for executive branch ethics laws and rules, advisory opinions, enforcement actions, transparency records, and waivers.

Public Citizen will continue to update the tracker weekly, with new entries added and existing ones revised or removed to reflect turns in the revolving door. ■

# The Trump Administration’s \$11 Billion Resignation Program

BY DOUGLAS S. PASTERNAK

In the private sector, a chief executive officer who forced out thousands of the company’s workers, only to be forced to rehire hundreds of those same employees months later, would likely be summarily dismissed by the company’s board of directors or public shareholders.

As embarrassing and nonsensical as that sounds, it is exactly what President Donald J. Trump has done.

The administration’s Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) spent between \$11 billion and \$15 billion to pay 140,000 federal workers to stay home and not work for months prior to their resignations, according to a Public Citizen report, “Trump’s \$11 Billion Resignation Program.”

The administration initiated the Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) on Jan. 28, 2025, with Elon Musk’s “Fork in the Road” email. That email told federal workers they could continue to get paid, but would be prevented from working for months until they resigned or retired.

The administration conducted two rounds of the DRP in 2025 and Public Citizen has documented some agencies conducting additional rounds in 2026.

“This was a classic example of incompetence and ineptitude,” said Lisa Gilbert, Public Citizen’s co-president. “There was no strategic thought given to who was pushed out the door, the demands of the agency, or the needs of the

**“There was no strategic thought given to who was pushed out the door, the demands of the agency, or the needs of the American public.”**

— Public Citizen Co-president Lisa Gilbert

American public.”

DRP cuts didn’t just impact the employees prematurely forced out of government — it hurt the broader public, which relies on the delivery of services. The processing of Social Security checks, Internal Revenue Service refunds, and federal student loans has already been severely affected. At the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), more than 8,500 VA employees took part in the DRP, according to OPM data, leading to reported disruptions in obtaining medical appointments and mental health services for the more than 9 million veterans the agency serves.

Ironically, federal employees who have chosen to retire in the past year have also experienced months of delays in obtaining benefits due to the reduction of more than 1,000 employees at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) since January 2025.

Many of the employees forced out have been rehired because even the Trump administration has, belatedly, recognized that their positions are necessary. The Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) fired more than 300 staff members last year and then urgently called nearly all of

them back to work when Trump appointees realized that safely maintaining our nation’s nuclear weapons arsenal is an important mission.

At the General Service Administration’s (GSA’s) Public Buildings Service, more than 40% of the staff were fired or took part in the DRP. Only after these layoffs occurred did GSA conduct a workforce analysis and realize they needed to hire back hundreds of employees.

The Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) also had to rehire federal workers who participated in the DRP. Most recently, the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), which cut roughly 1,000 employees last year, announced in March 2026 that it urgently needed to hire more than 300 “mission-critical” cybersecurity workers by the end of June 2026.

Our nation’s public health security has also been put at risk. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced in June 2026 that it was looking to hire 2,200 new workers after more than 3,000 were let go, including employees who participated in the DRP last year.

The Trump administration has argued that reducing the federal

workforce will generate savings over time. Unfortunately, that is not accurate, even just in monetary terms. The Budget Lab at Yale University estimated that a 22% reduction in Internal Revenue Service (IRS) staffing levels would result in a \$197.7 billion loss over a 10-year period, the overwhelming majority of which would come from top earners who will escape paying what they owe to the federal government. This is not hypothetical. From January to May 2025, IRS staff declined by 25%.

The billions of taxpayer dollars wasted on this program could have instead delivered meaningful benefits to the American public. Eleven billion dollars could have been used to purchase 5.8 billion school breakfasts, provide a full year of daycare for more than 837,000 children, cover premium annual health care payments for 1.2 million people, or pay the annual salaries of more than 149,000 public school teachers, or cover annual in-state tuition for more than 928,000 college students.

Instead, the DRP jeopardized our nation’s safety, security, and public health, and its consequences will have ripple effects for a long time to come. ■

written testimony during legislative hearings and worked one-on-one with lawmakers to improve draft legislation.

## Protecting Public Officials from Threats and Harm

In 10 states, Public Citizen worked with legislators this year to enact laws protecting state and local public officials from threats, harassment, assault, and other harms.

Bills in Alabama, Hawaii, and Indiana received unanimous votes in both chambers. Another measure in Tennessee received only one “no” vote in the Senate and passed unanimously in the House. Legislation in California passed unanimously in the Senate and with only two “noes” in the Assembly.

“Public safety for elected officials crosses partisan lines and political divides,” said Oklahoma Sen. Christi Gillespie (R). “As a former city councilor, I know that vitriol can quickly cross the line into concerning threats against an

elected official or their family.”

She sponsored a bill expanding protections against threats and doxing to cover local officials. The legislation passed the Oklahoma Senate unanimously and received only four “no” votes in the House.

“I want to ensure the great citizens of our communities aren’t discouraged from running for office because of fear for their families or workplace,” Gillespie said. “Public service is a hard enough job without having to fear for your safety or the safety of your loved ones.”

Other new laws protecting officials in Minnesota and Virginia were enacted with bipartisan votes in both chambers.

According to the latest BDI-CivicPulse survey, more than half of local officials reported experiencing at least one form of hostility during the previous three months, while more than three-quarters said concerns about threats made them less willing to participate in civic actions such as running for re-election or engaging on social media.

“Americans everywhere elect leaders who should be free to serve

the public without fear of threats or actual political violence,” said Aquene Freechild, co-director of Public Citizen’s Democracy Campaign. “By passing protections for state and local public officials, state leaders are also protecting the freedom of all voters to choose who governs and ensure those chosen can serve.”

## Protecting Elections from New Types of Threats

Public Citizen also worked with legislators to enact laws protecting elections in 13 states. “Elections are run at the state and local level,” Iacobucci said, “and there are a lot of differences between the states in how elections are run and the laws that help keep them free and fair.”

In this campaign, Public Citizen focused on strengthening existing state laws, particularly to protect voting machines and ballots from tampering, unauthorized access, or improper destruction, and to ensure election results are double-checked through post-election audits. “We’re seeing different threats to our elections

this year than we have in the past,” Iacobucci said, “and some statutes needed strengthening or updating.”

New laws in Alabama, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington passed by unanimous vote or consent in both chambers. Bills in California and Delaware were enacted by unanimous vote in the Senate and with only a handful of “no” votes in the lower chamber. In Oklahoma and Wyoming, legislation passed with large, bipartisan majorities in both chambers. A bipartisan post-election audit bill in Massachusetts remained pending as this issue of *Public Citizen News* went to print.

“The state legislators we worked with understand that free and fair elections are the bedrock of our ‘government by the people’ and that their constituents deserve to be able to trust the process,” Iacobucci said. “State after state, we found that people were willing to work ‘across the aisle’ to make our elections stronger, and we all benefit from that.” ■

# The Tide Is Turning Against Astronomical Pentagon Spending

BY DAVID ROSEN

President Donald Trump has demanded an eye-popping \$600 billion annual increase in Pentagon spending that would bring its total annual budget to \$1.5 trillion for the first time. The administration is aiming to reach this total through two or three separate spending bills.

The first legislative step will be passage of the fiscal year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The version drafted and passed by House Republicans in late July proposes a \$250 billion increase over the fiscal year 2026 Pentagon base budget, bringing the total to nearly \$1.15 trillion.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration hopes to add another \$350 billion to the Pentagon budget through a partisan budget reconciliation bill. On top of that, the president is seeking an additional \$67 billion through a supplemental appropriations bill to offset the costs of his illegal and unconstitutional war in Iran.

None of this is the routine but lamentable year-over-year increase in military spending. It would effectively double the Pentagon’s budget. This is budget depravity — a gift beyond the wildest imagination of the military-industrial complex, and a

monumental diversion of resources from domestic and human needs. That’s what Public Citizen and its allies have repeatedly told lawmakers in Congress, and for the first time in decades, many appear to be listening.

Even as millions of Americans struggle to pay for health insurance, prescription medications, housing, education, gas, electricity, water, and groceries, Trump and Republicans in Congress keep insisting that the nation cannot afford basic investments in human needs. Yet, at the same time, they are demanding astronomical sums

for Pentagon spending, military contractors, and an ill-conceived war in Iran that is driving up gas prices.

Trump kicked off his Pentagon spending spree in 2025 by slashing health care and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food assistance by \$1 trillion over the next 10 years while increasing Pentagon funding by \$150 billion. A year after Republicans handed that money over via reconciliation, the Pentagon has yet to obligate more than 80% of it.

Now, Trump’s proposed 2027 federal budget comes with even

more cuts to programs that invest in human needs. In April, Trump said, “We’re fighting wars ... It’s not possible for us to take care of day care, Medicaid, Medicare, all these individual things.” When asked about rising gas prices resulting from the war in Iran, Trump responded that he does not “think about Americans’ financial situation.”

Momentum is building in Congress to block Trump’s Pentagon spending plans. The Armed Services committees in both chambers of Congress have a

see **Pentagon**, page 7 ►



Photo of the Pentagon courtesy of Wikimedia.

# Public Citizen Endorses Landmark Resolution on Progressive Trade

BY MIA EL-YAFI

It's no secret that for the last four decades, bad trade policy, written by billionaires and executives at the richest corporations, has devastated American workers. But what does progressive trade policy look like? Public Citizen and its allies in Congress have an answer.

In May of this year, Public Citizen, along with 12 other labor, environmental, and civil society groups, endorsed the Fair Trade for Working Families Resolution. The resolution, introduced by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), sets clear standards for a progressive trade agenda.

For too long, representatives from both parties have supported "free trade" deals that have led to a race to the bottom for working people. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1994, corporations have sent millions of good-paying jobs overseas, destroying communities that depend on manufacturing for their livelihoods.

When jobs leave, towns lose tax revenue for schools and infrastructure, cities are hollowed out, and working people are left behind. Meanwhile, workers, family farms, and small businesses suffer, while multinational corporations, especially the executives at the very top, see unprecedented profits.

Donald Trump promised that his successor to NAFTA, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), would rectify these past wrongs. Unsurprisingly, it hasn't done much. Companies still take advantage of sweatshop wages

and lax environmental regulations abroad at the expense of American workers.

Trump once again claimed in his second term that he would fix these problems, but it is clear he has never prioritized working people. His chaotic tariff regime and corrupt foreign policy have alienated U.S. allies, created economic uncertainty, and increased the cost of living for American families – all while securing giveaways for his billionaire buddies.

The United States needs a bold, alternative vision for trade that doesn't repeat the pitfalls of the corporate past or the Trumpian chaos of the present. That's where the resolution comes into play.

It presents key points, including:

- Enforceable labor, wage, and environmental standards to raise the bar globally and prevent a race to the bottom
- Strong Made in America requirements to ensure public investment supports U.S. workers
- Protections for affordable medicine at home and abroad
- Provisions against AI-driven offshoring
- Tariff policies that defend domestic industry and do not bully our allies
- Support for independent farmers and rural communities
- Policymaking that prioritizes working people over corporations

Public Citizen endorsed the resolution along with the United Steelworkers (USW), United

Auto Workers (UAW), AFL-CIO, International Association of Machinists (IAM), Citizens Trade Campaign (CTC), Rethink Trade, Sierra Club, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, National Family Farm Coalition, BlueGreen Alliance, and International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE).

Public Citizen is a key coalition builder for the resolution, actively campaigning for constituents to write to their representatives and encourage them to sign on. At the press conference launching the resolution, Global Trade Watch Director Melinda St. Louis delivered remarks alongside congressional champions and labor union allies.

"We know that we're at a crossroads between a future where billionaires squeeze working people into oblivion, or a future where workers are respected, and where people who work for a living can actually earn a living," St. Louis said.

Rep. DeLauro led the event along with four other members of Congress, including Reps. Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.), Stephen Lynch (D-Mass.), Chris Deluzio (D-Pa.), and Becca Balint (D-Vt.), who discussed the necessity of a new trade vision in this moment.

"We are in a cost of living crisis today. The American people need relief – not just from high prices, but from decades of failed trade policy that have helped bring us to this point," DeLauro said.

As this issue of *Public Citizen News* goes to print, the resolution

has 52 cosponsors and counting, including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY); Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), top Democrat on the powerful China Select Committee; and Rep. Greg Casar (D-Texas), chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Members of Congress are realizing it is both important and possible to think about trade differently. Trade deals shouldn't cater to top executives – they can, and should, prioritize the people on the ground.

"It's working people at the center of our economy. It's working people that brought us the middle class, and it's working people that have to be at the center of the work that we do," Balint demanded.

The Trump administration has broken its promise to American workers. However, we can't return to the trade deals of the past, which themselves betrayed American workers.

Trade must no longer undermine a broader progressive agenda – it has to be an integral part of it. With a new vision for trade, we can ensure American workers have the protections they need to compete in the global marketplace. We can ensure family farms and small businesses are as valued as their conglomerate counterparts. We can ensure our trade policy allows us to hold Big Tech accountable as AI shapes the world we live in.

This resolution provides a clear path forward where the dignity of workers is valued above all else. We can, and will, govern trade better. ■



Public Citizen Global Trade Watch Director Melinda St. Louis speaking at the Fair Trade for Working Families press conference. Photo courtesy of Diane Krauthamer.

► **Iran**, from page 1

A recent lawsuit filed by Public Citizen's Litigation Group contends that the U.S. government did something extraordinary with information provided by asylum seekers from Iran: It gave sensitive details to representatives of the Iranian government – the very government the asylum seekers said they feared.

Public Citizen, on behalf of the Iranian American Legal Defense Fund (IALDF), filed a case in federal district court on July 7 against Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the State Department, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and other senior officials. The case centers on a basic promise of the asylum system: confidentiality. Federal regulations generally prohibit the government from disclosing information that would reveal, or allow someone to infer, that a person sought asylum. The reason is straightforward. Applicants often tell U.S. authorities exactly why their governments may want to imprison, torture, or otherwise punish them.

"The law couldn't be more clear that information in asylum applications is protected," Michael Kirkpatrick, the lead Public Citizen attorney representing IALDF, told the Washington Post after the lawsuit was filed. He described the alleged disclosures as "potentially a matter of life and death." The concern is not limited to the applicants themselves. Asylum applications can identify family members, political associates,

fellow protesters, or members of underground religious groups who remain in Iran.

The events behind the case began in March 2025, when U.S. officials apparently met with representatives of Iran's Interests Section, which operates through the Pakistani Embassy because the United States and Iran do not maintain formal diplomatic relations. According to press reports and the case filings, an Iranian official requested a list of Iranian nationals the United States wished to deport, and a U.S. liaison provided a list of approximately 150 names. In subsequent monthly meetings, the complaint alleges, ICE supplied Iranian representatives with immigration records, including information related to asylum cases.

This alleged cooperation developed alongside a renewed effort to deport Iranians in large groups on three occasions: roughly 50 to 60 people in September 2025, about 50 more in December 2025, and approximately 15 in late January 2026. The IALDF complaint says that some deportees were later questioned by Iranian authorities about why they had left Iran and sought asylum in the United States. News reports also described an agreement between the Iranian government and the Trump administration under which hundreds of Iranians could potentially be returned. Although these mass deportation flights were paused when the conflict between the United States and Iran began in February, Public Citizen and IALDF's lawsuit notes that document sharing between the

U.S. government and the Iranian Interests Section continued.

Some of IALDF's most significant evidence of the alleged information sharing comes from Iranian asylum seekers themselves. In sworn declarations, several say they were forced to speak with Iranian officials while in ICE custody. One asylum seeker said that an Iranian representative knew about his asylum claim and its status. Another, who had fled after a political protest, described a representative saying that she had the "whole case file in her hands," including the basis of the asylum claim and the transcript of the interview. Other detainees described Iranian officials knowing details about their immigration proceedings and encouraging them to return to Iran.

In addition, a declaration from civil rights lawyer Cyrus Mehri says that a senior official from the Iranian Interests Section unexpectedly called him on March 24, 2026, and later met with him. According to Mehri, the official described recurring contact with U.S. authorities and said ICE had provided immigration documents concerning detainees, including asylum-related records.

Mehri's account, together with the detainees' declarations, indicates that the disclosures were not isolated mistakes but part of a broader policy of sharing confidential information. That distinction is key to the case. Public Citizen and IALDF contend that the United States crossed a legal line by carrying out an unlawful policy of revealing protected asylum information that could identify

someone as a political dissident, Christian convert, LGBTQ person, or other perceived opponent of the Iranian government. The U.S. government, however, has denied that the policy exists. DHS told *Reuters* that the claim ICE shared asylum records with Iran was "FALSE." The agency claims that ICE works with foreign governments only to obtain travel documents and provide lawful consular access to detainees.

This lawsuit was brought under the Administrative Procedure Act, a federal law that allows courts to review actions by government agencies. Public Citizen and IALDF have asked the district court to declare the alleged policy unlawful and order it stopped. The suit also asks that people whose information was disclosed be notified so they have an opportunity to reopen their cases before they are deported. Without knowing whether their information was disclosed, asylum seekers cannot seek reconsideration.

Public Citizen and IALDF sought preliminary relief – a temporary order while the case proceeds – on July 15, and the judge held a hearing on Aug. 5. The judge has not yet ruled on IALDF's motion, saying that she needs more evidence before deciding whether to halt the alleged policy. The judge will hold an evidentiary hearing in the near future to hear live testimony and to consider a fuller factual record. At that hearing, Public Citizen will continue to advocate for the asylum seekers, whose protected asylum information cannot lawfully be handed to the Iranian government. ■

► **Pentagon**, from page 5

long tradition of rubber-stamping ever-higher Pentagon budgets, yet this time is different. In early June, 12 House Democrats and nine senators from both parties broke with tradition and voted in their respective committees to completely reject Trump's Pentagon budget.

In addition, an amendment to cut Trump's Pentagon budget by \$150 billion received 25 votes in the House Armed Services Committee. Nearly all the Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee backed a parallel amendment introduced by U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.).

Over the summer, 27 House Democratic appropriators voted against Trump's defense appropriations bill. And in July, Senate Democrats blocked the House version of the NDAA from advancing. This legislation usually enjoys

robust bipartisan support, but this time there was no rubber stamp.

These departures from tradition signal how galling a \$1.5 trillion Pentagon budget request is, especially now.

The U.S. already spends more on its military than the next several countries combined. The Pentagon has never passed an audit, cannot account for much of the money it receives, and has repeatedly proved unable to spend all the money it already has.

Polls show that most voters now see this clearly, with three out of five opposing Trump's Pentagon spending proposal.

The upcoming Senate vote on the NDAA, expected sometime during Congress's post-election work period, offers voters, lawmakers, and the media an opportunity to ask a straightforward question: If Congress can find hundreds of billions of additional dollars every

year for the Pentagon, why can't lawmakers find the resources to keep hospitals open, strengthen public education, and lower costs for working families?

The \$600 billion Trump wants to devote to additional Pentagon spending could instead be directed toward the needs of the American people, including restoring funding for health care, food, housing, and climate action.

The money would be enough to pay for ALL of the following:

- Restoring the cruel Medicaid and SNAP cuts included in the Republican reconciliation bill;
- Restoring Affordable Care Act subsidies;
- Providing universal day care and child care;
- Expanding Medicare to cover dental, hearing, vision, and home health care;
- Quadrupling the budget of the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency;

- Making massive investments to address the climate catastrophe;
- Ending homelessness in America;
- Making major investments in affordable housing; and
- Making college free for anyone from a low-income household.

The American people are fed up with spending more on bombs and less on basic needs. And they are furious with a pointless, deadly, illegal, unconstitutional, and protracted war that is costing lives and driving up gas prices.

Public Citizen and its allies will continue to pressure lawmakers to reject astronomical, accountability-free spending requests that do little more than line the pockets of war-mongering defense contractors.

What makes this moment different is that the tide is finally turning. ■

# As Millions Lose Obamacare, the Trump Administration Blames Cheaters. The Data Points Elsewhere.

BY PETER WHORISKEY

As millions of Americans lost health coverage this year, Trump administration officials were loath to admit that government cuts to Obamacare subsidies were driving the decline. Instead, they offered a politically expedient explanation that obscured the truth: They claimed the people falling off the rolls were cheaters who had enrolled and received benefits by misstating their income. As these ineligible enrollees were weeded out, the administration claimed, Obamacare enrollment was falling.

A recent Public Citizen report takes a closer look and shows that the government's own numbers tell a different story. "The report debunks the administration's fraud theory," said Dr. Robert Steinbrook, the director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group.

The reason that millions are losing health insurance – and why low- and middle-income families are leaving the Obamacare program – is that their premiums became unaffordable after Trump and congressional Republicans ended the enhanced Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies.

Enrollment in the ACA marketplaces has been shrinking this year, from 22.3 million people in 2025 to an estimated 17.5 million in 2026.

The deceptive explanation that only ineligible people are losing coverage is convenient for the administration and congressional Republicans. It shifts the blame for millions of Americans losing health insurance onto the enrollees themselves.

"The only people who lost coverage were people who were never

entitled to coverage," Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. testified at an April 21 hearing before the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Mehmet Oz, the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, has gone further, saying he would like to see millions more dropped because so many were wrongly enrolled.

But the administration's fraud explanation doesn't match the government's own numbers. The fraud theory fails for two reasons:

First, the decline is in the wrong income group. Under the administration's spurious theory, based on the work of the conservative Paragon Health Institute, cheating was concentrated among families reporting income just above the federal poverty line. At that point on the income scale, they argue, the financial incentive to overstate income is strongest. So, if the theory is correct, enrollment in that income group should be falling fastest as ineligible people are purged. But the opposite happened. Enrollment among people just above the poverty line rose from 7.1 million to 7.4 million between 2025 and 2026.

So who is leaving Obamacare? Almost half of the total enrollment decline came from people earning more than four times the poverty level. These are not families gaming the poverty threshold. They are middle-income households that lost their subsidies and can no longer absorb the premiums.

Indeed, among middle-class families losing coverage, the reason that Obamacare enrollment has fallen is easy to understand. Stacy Newton, her husband, and

their two children, of Wyoming, dropped their coverage this year after their premiums reached \$43,000 annually once subsidies were cut.

"The Trump administration keeps saying 'it's fraud, it's fraud, it's fraud,'" Newton said. "But I think they just want to break Obamacare and blame it on the people."

The second reason the government's explanation doesn't pass muster is that the enrollment decline is also in the wrong states. The fraud theory pushed by the administration predicts that most ineligible enrollees – more than 5 million of them – are clustered in the 10 states that declined to expand Medicaid. In those states, a coverage gap gives poor people a perverse incentive to exaggerate their income: By reporting income above the poverty line, they qualify for marketplace subsidies. Otherwise, they go uninsured.

If the administration's fraud theory were correct, enrollment losses would be concentrated in the states where that coverage gap exists.

But again, that's not what happened. Advocates of the fraud theory singled out Florida as a state where the problem was "particularly acute," estimating that it had more than 2.4 million ineligible enrollees. Yet Obamacare enrollment in Florida fell by less than one-tenth that amount and no faster than in the country as a whole.

There is a real phenomenon buried in Paragon's numbers, and it unintentionally highlights the plight of millions of people who have fallen into the coverage gap in the 10 states that refused

to expand Medicaid. They are too poor for subsidized Obamacare plans, which cover people with incomes above the poverty line, but have just enough income to be disqualified from their state's restricted Medicaid program. To escape that trap, some report income just above the cutoff to become eligible for coverage.

The enrollment data show the fingerprints of that behavior. A peer-reviewed study in the American Journal of Health Economics found a suspicious clustering of reported incomes just above the eligibility line of \$11,670 in 2015, with many enrollees reporting exactly \$11,670, \$11,700, or \$12,000. The authors concluded that some people in the coverage gap appeared to obtain subsidies, "perhaps by overreporting their income."

How many people are doing so is a matter of dispute. A Congressional Budget Office letter last August, cautioning that such estimates are "difficult," put the 2025 figure at 2.3 million. Paragon pegged it above 6 million, using a broader definition of impropriety.

But it's important to consider who these people are. They are not wealthy people claiming benefits meant for someone else. They are people whose earnings fall below the poverty line. They must estimate the following year's income, and if they estimate it above the poverty line, they get health insurance. The administration has called this fraud. It may be more apt to call it desperation in a health care system that arbitrarily leaves so many people behind. ■

## It's Time to Finally Ban Direct-To-Consumer Advertising of Prescription Drugs

BY NINA ZELDES

It's nearly impossible to avoid ads for prescription drugs. Whether you watch TV, listen to the radio, read a magazine, or browse the internet, you are likely constantly encouraged to ask your doctor if a certain drug is right for you.

Public Citizen always opposed these ads as contrary to the patient and the public interest. Since they have become widespread, the

organization has urged the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at least to strengthen rules governing these ads and to enforce the rules far more vigorously. But no amount of regulation can fix the damage these ads inflict, which is why, in July 2026, Public Citizen petitioned the FDA to ban direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising of prescription drugs altogether.

The United States is one of

only two developed nations that allow pharmaceutical companies to advertise prescription drugs directly to consumers. Nearly all other developed countries have long restricted DTC advertising because such ads can mislead patients and affect physicians' prescribing behaviors. Research has found that these ads can harm patients, the physician-patient relationship, and impose sub-

stantial economic burdens on the health care system.

DTC ads have not always been so ubiquitous in the United States. When the first ads were aired on TV in the early 1980s, the FDA required manufacturers to provide a full disclosure of a drug's side effects, contraindications, precautions, and warnings. Because this required a considerable amount of

see [Drugs](#), page 9 ►

# R.U.R. Here We Are

BY CLARA VONDRICH

*A version of this story ran in DeSmog in July*

Karel Čapek invented the word “robot” for his 1920 play R.U.R., Rossum’s Universal Robots, about a factory that churned out humanoid machines whose mission was to liberate people from work. Instead, the robots fomented a rebellion and killed off the human race. Today, the runaway expansion of AI and data centers makes science fiction seem plausible.

Public Citizen’s Climate Program isn’t focused on stopping a robot rebellion, but something almost as scary: the deadly climate impacts that will result if the AI data center buildout continues to be powered by fossil fuels. As the AI data center explosion hammers communities with higher energy bills; air, noise, and light pollution; obscene water use; and affronts to democracy as Silicon Valley juggernauts advance unpopular projects behind a thick veil of nondisclosure agreements, it is also racing toward ever-worsening climate impacts.

## Data centers need more power than most countries, and that power is fossil-fueled.

New research from the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) finds that global data center electricity use surpasses that of all but 10 countries and is projected to double over the next four years. In 2030, if data centers were a country, they would be the sixth-largest consumer of electricity, producing nearly 400 million metric tons of

carbon dioxide. That’s roughly the equivalent of Australia’s annual emissions.

The electricity powering data centers is not clean, much less renewable. Globally, coal and gas provide just under 60% of data center power. In the U.S., gas is the top power source for data centers, which is no better than coal for the climate since methane gas traps heat 80 times more effectively than carbon dioxide over 20 years.

## Our global carbon budget is spent.

The world may already have exceeded the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold that underpinned the Paris Agreement. This target was set more than a decade ago at the insistence of countries most vulnerable to climate impacts, especially low-lying island nations. In the intervening years, we have seen how extreme weather and climate disasters don’t discriminate: All of us are affected. In 2024, human-caused climate change added 41 days of dangerous heat for billions worldwide, fueling even more climate disasters, including hurricanes, floods, and fires.

This is just the beginning. Several climate tipping points have been crossed or imminently will be crossed, such as the collapse of warm-water reefs critical to ocean health, the disintegration of polar ice sheets that will add meters to sea level rise, the stalling of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) that warms Europe with the Gulf Stream, as well as the destruction of the Amazon. Don’t believe the scientists? Even JPMorgan admits we are approaching climate tip-

ping points from which there is no return. Only a drastically downsized and impoverished humanity will survive these changes.

## Big Tech is not only using fossil fuels to power AI but selling AI to find more fossil fuels.

Companies like Google and OpenAI promised that AI would accelerate the transition to renewable energy and drive a new generation of climate solutions. But Big Tech is not just powering AI with fossil fuels; it is selling AI tools to the oil and gas industry to turbocharge new fossil fuel exploration, discovery, and recovery.

Microsoft is the top cloud provider for the oil and gas industry. Amazon follows in second place, while Google is third. And chip manufacturer and AI innovator Nvidia, which has established goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, is now partnering with oil companies to build “AI Factories for Energy.” These are the same companies, along with Meta and others, that promised to zero out their emissions before 2040. Instead, Big Tech companies are driving the buildout of a new generation of gas plants, and some are even bringing coal back from the dead.

## By Doubling Down on Fossil Fuels, Big Tech is Burning Public Trust at Both Ends

The race to be fastest and first has blinded corporations that just a few years ago claimed to be clean energy champs to the catastrophic harms they are causing communities and the climate. Today,

more and more data centers are going off-grid, a perfect opportunity to build renewable-plus-battery-storage facilities fit for the 21st century. But the opposite is happening, with gas and diesel driving the day. While renewable power is not a panacea for all the complex challenges data centers pose, including water, land use, economic, and equity concerns, it is crucial to the climate and, therefore, every person on the planet.

Americans are keenly aware that AI is a Pandora’s box, and most already believe that its risks outweigh the benefits. If public opinion were driving the pace of AI and data center deployment, we would have long since entered a cooling-off period: 80% of Americans believe the government should regulate AI for safety, even if that means slowing down development. Instead, we have a race car without brakes.

A recent headline quipped that opposition to data centers is “the most bipartisan issue since beer.” Neighbors are banding together to block individual projects and communities are winning moratoriums at the city, county, and state levels. As of polling conducted in mid-August 2026, 75% of Americans oppose data center development near them. A month prior, New York enacted the first statewide moratorium on new hyperscale data centers.

The myth of AI was that it would lead to human flourishing and progress. But in the span of a few short years, Big Tech has gone from promising climate breakthroughs to breaking the climate. We have a very short window to change course. ■

## ► Drugs, from page 8

airtime, such ads were extremely rare. However, in 1997, the FDA loosened these requirements, allowing advertisers to omit or minimize these disclosures if they instead shared additional information about the drug’s effectiveness and safety in another format or location, such as a website, toll-free number, or through pharmacists or physicians. This opened the floodgates for DTC ads. Annual spending grew from approximately \$1.3 billion in 1998 to \$8 billion in 2024.

Although there are FDA regulations intended to ensure a “fair balance” in how safety and effec-

## “Even if perfectly enforced, DTC regulations cannot address the harms these ads pose because those harms are inherent in the advertising itself.”

— Robert Steinbrook, M.D., director of Public Citizen’s Health Research Group

tiveness information is presented and require that it be presented in a “clear, conspicuous, and neutral manner,” the FDA does not pre-approve DTC ads. Misleading or deceptive ads may therefore air for months or years before they are reviewed, during which time they may reach and potentially harm millions of consumers. Once an ad reaches a consumer, retrospective enforcement cannot undo that exposure.

In September 2025, the FDA announced a “crackdown” on deceptive drug advertising, including plans to initiate rule-making on DTC advertising and strengthen enforcement, with the goal of returning to the pre-1997 environment. However, as Robert Steinbrook, M.D., director of Public Citizen’s Health Research Group, explains, “greater enforcement and stronger regulations are not an adequate substitute for a ban on

DTC advertising. Even if perfectly enforced, DTC regulations cannot address the harms these ads pose because those harms are inherent in the advertising itself.”

How exactly do ads for prescription drugs harm patients and the health care system? As Public Citizen’s petition highlights, a substantial body of peer-reviewed evidence demonstrates that the presentation of a drug’s benefits see **Drugs**, page 10 ►

# The Wild West of Gambling on the Prediction Market

BY CRAIG HOLMAN, PH.D.

Placing bets on the so-called prediction market is, by any other name, still gambling. But, oddly, it is not treated as such. Public Citizen has been leading efforts to regulate gambling on elections and political events through these markets.

Unlike Las Vegas-style casinos, which are subject to certain restrictions and transparency requirements, regulators have failed to apply similar standards to the so-called “event contracts” offered by prediction market platforms such as Kalshi and Polymarket. It was once a little-known market in which investors bought and traded exchange contracts on whether a business would boom or bust. Prediction market companies claim and lobby that they are a type of commodities market, where investors buy and sell derivatives based on market prices. Trump regulators have accepted these claims, so that the industry has fallen outside the regulatory framework governing gambling. Instead, it is overseen by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), the federal agency that regulates commodities and derivatives markets.

But prediction markets have fundamentally changed within the last few years, expanding event contracts to elections, political outcomes, and sports. In 2024, Kalshi won a lawsuit against the CFTC, allowing the company to continue offering bets on election outcomes. The industry quickly expanded its platforms to cover almost any political outcome – not just elections, but whether a bill will pass or how long a cabinet member will stay in office, for example. Almost overnight, prediction markets blossomed into massive casinos, with global trading volumes surpassing \$64 billion in 2025.

Yet there remains very little oversight. The industry avoids the

transparency and regulations that apply to traditional gambling, and bets can be placed by anonymous players. The CFTC is supposed to be a five-member oversight commission. President Donald Trump has so far appointed only one commissioner, Michael Selig, as chair. Selig previously represented the prediction market industry as an attorney and is an avowed supporter of deregulation. “He’s not trying to pretend that he’s a normal regulator,” said an attorney who works on CFTC issues. “He’s acting more like a cheerleader for the industry.”

This deregulatory approach fits neatly with the Trump family business empire. Donald Trump Jr. is a paid adviser for Kalshi and an adviser and investor in Polymarket.

And thus the stage is set for insider trading on political events. Ever since the American invasions of Venezuela and Iran, a small number of people have placed very large bets moments before major developments, scoring millions in profits. Just hours before it happened, half a dozen very large bets were placed that the United States would invade Venezuela the next day and capture the nation’s leader, Nicolas Maduro. The bets paid off. Six anonymous bettors made \$1.2 million based on the timing of the American invasion.

Then came bets on the invasion of Iran, which also paid off by several million dollars. One person, anonymously named “Magamyman” – an apparent reference to MAGA – won \$553,000 on a bet that the leader of Iran would be out of power by a certain time. The bet was placed an hour before the Iranian leader was killed. On March 23, 2026, traders placed \$580 million in bets on the oil futures market just 15 minutes before Trump announced on social media that the United States was having “productive” talks with Iran on the flow of oil. The trad-

ers made a windfall after Trump’s comments triggered a drop in oil prices. The timing and accuracy of these bets strongly suggest insider trading, potentially by individuals with knowledge of developments within the Trump administration.

On March 5, Public Citizen filed an insider trading complaint with the CFTC following these highly suspicious trades involving the timing and developments of the American invasions of Venezuela and Iran. On April 30, Public Citizen and Better Markets urged the Commission to conduct rulemaking on prediction markets trading activity.

The CFTC has taken little action to investigate potential insider trading. Only after extensive news coverage of suspicious trading activity did Selig agree to rulemaking on prediction markets, proposing a policy that formally allows this type of betting on political events. Public Citizen submitted comments sharply critical of the proposed rule and urged the Commission to ban gambling on elections and political events, where the potential for insider trading is greatest. A final ruling has yet to be issued.

In the meantime, Selig has actively sought to block state efforts to regulate gambling and prediction markets. Several states ban or restrict gambling and are trying to apply those laws to prediction markets. Minnesota has gone so far as to ban any activity on these markets. Selig and the CFTC have intervened in court, filing lawsuits against such state actions. The Commission filed lawsuits against Arizona, Connecticut, and Illinois in an effort to prevent those states from banning gambling on prediction markets, asserting that the CFTC alone has the authority to regulate these markets.

The Commission also filed a lawsuit against Minnesota on the same grounds. “This Minnesota

law turns lawful operators and participants in prediction markets into felons overnight,” said CFTC Chairman Selig. “Minnesota farmers have relied on critical hedging products on weather and crop-related events for decades to mitigate their risks,” he asserted. In July 2026, a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction temporarily halting the state ban, ruling that federal commodities laws likely preempt Minnesota’s law. The case is currently on appeal.

Meanwhile, members of Congress from both parties have introduced a variety of bills to regulate prediction markets. These measures range from banning event contracts on sports, elections, and war to stopping public officials from trading on insider information.

Facing the prospect of such regulatory measures, Kalshi, Polymarket, and other prediction platforms have taken modest steps to self-regulate by enforcing internal trading rules and monitoring platform data for manipulation. In the first half of this year, Kalshi referred 32 possible insider traders to the CFTC for further investigation. Polymarket says it has referred more than 90 account holders to authorities in the United States and abroad. But only a few cases have resulted in enforcement actions, such as when Trump’s teleprompter operator was terminated after being caught placing bets on what Trump was about to say.

Self-regulation simply is not enough. Prediction market platforms have too much to gain to effectively regulate trading behavior. States should be empowered to ban gambling on prediction markets. More importantly, federal legislation is needed to ban insider trading where it is most likely to occur: on elections and political outcomes. ■

## Trump’s Disastrous LNG Pipeline is Billions Over Budget

BY LOIS PARSHLEY

For decades, Alaska politicians have dreamed of piping natural gas from the North Slope across the state for export to Asia. Those plans have never panned out. But the long-discussed idea has recently gained renewed momentum with federal support from President Trump, who claims the project would be “truly spectacular.”

The Alaska Gas Development

Corporation has spent over \$600 million planning, designing, and permitting an approximately 800-mile pipeline and export terminal. In 2025, the state gave a confidential, no-bid development contract to Glenfarne Group, a company that has never operated a commercial liquefied natural gas (LNG) export terminal.

There’s every reason to expect

costs for this deal to exceed projections. Public Citizen analyzed more than 20 terminals currently operating or under construction across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico and found that these projects frequently cost far more than industry backers admit. Using data from public filings, industry news, regulatory disclosures, and company announcements, the analysis

found that operating terminals had an average cost overrun of 59.7%. Construction delays were also common, particularly at larger and more complex facilities, with delays of approximately one to three years, and associated costs.

The Alaska project is being revived at a moment when the global LNG market is undergoing a historic expansion. The United  
see **Pipeline**, page 11 ►

# A Win for Houston's Port Communities

BY SARAH CINCO

For people who live near the Houston Ship Channel, risk is always present.

Communities like Channelview, Pleasantville, and Galena Park have a long history of destructive flooding and industrial facilities that pollute the air, land, and water. Another threat to public health may be on the horizon.

For more than a decade, members of the Healthy Port Communities Coalition (HPCC), including Public Citizen, have advocated for the health and well-being of communities living near the ship channel. As part of that mission, the coalition has pushed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Port Houston Authority (PHA) to stop using those communities as a dumping ground for toxic sludge.

The sludge in question, known as dredge spoils, is made up of the mud and anything else that USACE pulls from the channel floor as it dredges the waterway as part of regular maintenance and operations. Most recently, expansion projects to accommodate larger ships traveling from the Gulf of Mexico to Port Houston and back have exacerbated community concerns. This traffic can spill chemicals, oil, and other substances carried by the ships. The refineries and chemical facilities lining the channel can also contribute to waterway contamination, which eventually settles on the channel floor.

Rather than being properly disposed of, the USACE dumps this toxic sludge onto structurally unsound sites called Dredge Material Disposal Sites (DMPAs), which are adjacent to homes,

places of worship, and schools. Pedestrians run on dirt trails, and children play along the outskirts of these dump sites, without any signage warning of the dangers of contact with the material. These sites are woven into the community's social fabric; many people remember playing near them as kids or have never questioned what they are.

After years of extensive meetings, persistent advocacy, and rallying community members, a June letter from the port authority to area officials delivered good news: USACE agreed to dispose of the dredge spoils from offshore expansion efforts in the Gulf, two nautical miles from the Galveston Entrance Channel. According to the letter, USACE also plans to retire its existing Glendale and Filterbed land-based dump sites in Pleasantville.

"This letter brought a smile to my face and will bring a sigh of relief to the people who call this community home," said Bridgette Murray, founder and executive director of the HPCC-member organization Achieving Community Tasks Successfully (ACTS). "While port communities will continue to face other challenges that can harm public health and quality of life, their residents won't have to worry about adding another potential threat. It is a victory for the everyday people, experts, and advocates who attended many meetings, spoke at many port hearings, and tirelessly lobbied the Port and the Army Corps to find a better way."

In 2022, Project 11, the 11th expansion of the ship channel, began with Port Houston and USACE undertaking different

phases of dredging. As part of its upcoming phase, USACE intended to dispose of the dredge spoils at those decades-old dump sites in Channelview and Pleasantville.

There are plenty of reasons to worry about additional dredge spoils dumped where people live.

In 2024, samples taken from the perimeter of the existing dump sites showed the presence of the cancer-causing chemical arsenic, along with cadmium and benzopyrene. The arsenic levels in one sample were 45 times higher than what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers safe. HPCC, the Environmental Defense Fund, Lone Star Legal Aid, and the Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice conducted the testing.

Additionally, a 2025 review by retired USACE engineer William Empson, on behalf of HPCC, identified structural issues with the dump sites that could worsen flooding in the area and potentially displace the disposed dredge spoils into the community and municipal stormwater systems. Such was the case in 1957, when a containment area ruptured, "flooding much of Pleasantville with up to four feet of contaminated sludge that had been previously dredged from the bottom of the ship channel and stored in a settling basin," according to the Houston Flood Museum.

While the change in USACE's plans was unquestionably a win for vulnerable port neighborhoods, more risks are looming.

USACE is moving forward with expanding two other dump sites called House Tract and E2 Clinton. Each could pose health and safety risks to people in Houston,

including Galena Park, Jacinto City, and Fidelity/Clinton Park/Tri-Community.

HPCC has an ongoing campaign to engage with USACE and convince its leadership to stop the expansion. Although one risk in one community has been averted, USACE's expansion plans are the reality for other port communities, which are already overburdened by industrial pollution and underserved and underrepresented in local government.

Port-area residents have a long history of persevering through numerous environmental challenges. Longtime residents of those communities know another risk could come their way, but they shouldn't be asked to take on further risk.

Public Citizen and its fellow HPCC members remain committed to advocating for the health and safety of people living in port communities.

By organizing neighborhood town halls, presenting scientific data to public officials, and building strong partnerships, HPCC is ensuring that affected residents have a direct voice in their own environmental future and the decisions that directly impact them and their families. HPCC will continue to support and uplift port communities in demanding environmental and life safety assurance reviews, long-term soil monitoring, and transparent communication among USACE, the Port Authority, and neighbors in nearby port communities. HPCC believes that safer alternatives should be the norm, and that a better, cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable Houston is possible. ■

## ► Pipeline, from page 10

States is now the fastest-growing exporter of liquefied natural gas. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, North America's LNG export capacity is on track to more than double in the next three years. Although the U.S. did not export any liquefied gas before 2016, it is now the world's largest producer.

Multibillion-dollar cost overruns can alter these projects' expected financial returns, creating risks for investors and increasing American energy bills. This systemic underestimation matches historical norms for large-scale infrastructure projects. Oxford professor emeritus

Bent Flyvbjerg previously found that over nine out of 10 megaprojects go over budget or over schedule, and often both, and that cost overruns of "over 50 percent in real terms are common." He dubbed this tendency the "Iron Law of Mega Projects."

"We shouldn't be building any new LNG projects in the first place," said David Arkush, director of Public Citizen's Climate Program. "It's doubly problematic that governments are supporting them based on faulty cost estimates from those who get rich off of them."

Yet Alaska's LNG project demonstrates how difficult it can be to separate political ambition from financial reality. Its advocates have

clung to an outdated \$43.4 billion cost estimate for almost a decade, despite rising construction costs, inflation, and changing market conditions. Last year, Glenfarne hired a consultant to revisit the calculations but refused to release the results.

Applying the average overrun rate to Glenfarne's estimate suggests the real cost of the Alaska LNG project could be as high as \$104 billion. Still, Gov. Mike Dunleavy proposed replacing Alaska's 2% petroleum property tax with a volumetric gas tax. Different versions of the governor's proposed tax cuts for the project would decrease state and municipal tax revenue by an estimated \$10 to \$16 billion. The

proposal drew resistance from legislators wary of giving up billions in revenue for a project with no finalized cost or financing plan. After the regular session and two special sessions, lawmakers left Juneau without a deal.

The fight came to a head in July, when the Alaska House voted down a compromise version of the bill after Dunleavy threatened a veto over a provision that would have closed another tax exemption benefiting Hilcorp, the company with a near monopoly on the state's Cook Inlet gas production. Hilcorp founder Jeffery Hildebrand, whose company contributed to Dunleavy's gubernatorial campaign and who

see **Pipeline**, page 14 ►

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► **Drugs**, from page 9

and risks is often misleading, which can distort a patient’s understanding of drug safety and effectiveness. Ads often use specific word choices, small font sizes, and other visual or auditory distractions to downplay or distract from a product’s harms and emphasize its benefits. Manipulative and emotional appeals that downplay risks are inherent in DTC advertising, Public Citizen’s petition argues.

Importantly, most Americans aren’t trained in statistical analysis or biochemistry, and people have a tendency to underweight risks in these contexts. All this is precisely why the government requires a doctor to prescribe, and prohibits direct sales of prescription drugs to consumers.

And, with the advent of AI-driven personalized marketing and influencer-driven DTC advertising, the possibility of the government adequately monitoring DTC ads to ensure they at least comply with existing rules has effectively become impossible.

A large body of evidence – and common sense – shows that DTC ads interfere with the doctor-patient relationship. Patients who request advertised drugs are much more likely to receive a prescription than those who do not, even when physicians consider those prescriptions potentially clinically inappropriate. This pattern also contributes to overdiagnosis of disease and overprescription of medications.

Of course, the drugs that get advertised are not necessarily those that work the best, but those

that manufacturers want to sell the most. Evidence indicates that DTC advertising disproportionately promotes drugs with limited clinical benefit. Importantly, when newly approved drugs are advertised, their long-term effectiveness and safety are usually not yet adequately established. DTC advertising also contributes to the economic burden on the U.S. health care system by driving higher drug spending, inflating drug prices, and shifting state and federal health care expenditures toward drugs that are frequently advertised to consumers.

Any potential benefits DTC ads may have, such as leading to increased office visits or helping to identify undiagnosed or unrelated health conditions, are vastly outweighed by the many well-docu-

mented harms.

Proponents have long sought to defend DTC ads, irrespective of the merits, but waving the flag of the First Amendment, argued that banning ads in the U.S. would violate the First Amendment. Because DTC advertising is commercial advertising that is fundamentally misleading, a ban would comply with the First Amendment. Even if the ads were not inherently misleading, a ban is constitutionally permissible because it would directly advance substantial government interests, helping patients make informed, evidence-based medical decisions and curbing unnecessary health care expenditures.

It was a mistake ever to permit DTC ads. Now it’s time, finally, to join other rich countries and ban them. ■

► **Pipeline**, from page 11

gave hundreds of thousands of dollars to Trump’s 2024 presidential campaign, has previously threatened to cut its investments in Alaska if the state raises its taxes.

While this tax fight played out in public, Glenfarne has quietly been asking Alaska utilities to buy all of their gas from the project, starting

at rates 64% higher than current base rates. Public Citizen’s analysis shows that the 30-year contracts Glenfarne is pitching could leave ratepayers paying rates 410% higher by their conclusion, assuming costs rise in line with the national average inflation rate. That does not include additional utility or delivery charges, which would further raise household energy bills.

In July, Dunleavy acknowledged for the first time that the project’s expected cost had risen substantially, saying it could now cost \$65 billion to \$70 billion, in line with Public Citizen’s estimates for standard contingencies. That admission came as the term-limited governor increasingly focused on his next job, spending much of the year cultivating Trump administration

officials who could determine the project’s future – and potentially his own.

The pipeline has emerged as a contender for the largest loan guarantee in Department of Energy history, with up to \$30.25 billion in federally backed debt. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum has also raised the possibility of direct federal equity in the project. ■

# 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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The following are highlights from our recent media coverage.

**Robert Weissman, co-president of Public Citizen**

**On Big Oil’s capture of the U.S. government:** *Inside Climate News*. **On the deep corruption that pervades Washington and undermines good policy-making and enforcement:** *Truthdig*. **On the unconstitutional nearly \$1.8 billion slush fund:** *Common Dreams*. **On the waste-and-fraud-ridden Pentagon:** *Common Dreams*.

**Lisa Gilbert, co-president of Public Citizen**

**On the number of ultra-rich people in Trump’s second White House:** *Associated Press*. **On a luncheon gala in Mar-a-Lago in Florida:** *The Atlantic*. **On Trump firing Democrats on Election Commission:** *Bloomberg*. **On Trump’s ballroom project:** *Bloomberg Government*. **On the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) being run as a personal law firm for Donald Trump:** *Axios*. **On evidence that Alibaba knowingly let dangerous drugs be sold to U.S. consumers:** *CBS News*.

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**On Trump’s proposed arch in Washington, D.C.:** *Associated Press*. **On rising bids to block the DOJ from ignoring rulings:** *Bloomberg*. **On Job Corps centers staying open as part of a settlement:** *Spectrum News 9, KSL*.

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

**On calls for a power company to be investigated:** *The New York Times*. **On a super PAC supporting the son-in-law of Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy:** *Politico*. **On oil industry rallies aiming to keep Trump from stopping exports:** *Politico*. **On the coal industry:** *Canary Media*. **On the surge in gas prices in the D.C. area:** *Fox 5*. **On the DOE’s new power export rule:** *Utility Dive*. **On data centers being pitched as a way to cut electric costs:** *Straight Arrow News*.

**Adrian Shelley, director of Public Citizen’s Texas Office**

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# 250th Anniversary Celebrations Corrupted by Corporate Influence, Grift

BY ALAN ZIBEL

Only Donald Trump could turn the nation’s 250th anniversary celebrations into a shameful scandal.

Over the summer, Public Citizen has been aggressively watchdogging the Trump administration’s opportunistic seizing of the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence to court corporate influence and feed his own ego.

“The 250th anniversary of the country should be a moment to reflect on the values of the nation and learn about our shared history,” said Public Citizen Co-president Lisa Gilbert. “Instead, the Trump administration has replaced American values with grift, self-dealing, and lionizing the president himself.”

First, there was “Rededicate 250,” a Christian prayer event on the National Mall attended almost exclusively by Christian faith leaders, where speakers stood before a massive cross. One speaker asserted, “If being a Christian nationalist means loving Jesus Christ and loving America, count me in!”

Then there was the Ultimate Fighting Championship cage match on the White House lawn, followed by the Great American State Fair, a widely derided, sparsely attended gathering on the Mall where states promoted their tourism, and tourists sweated in the summer heat.

Then Trump commandeered and politicized the annual Fourth of July fireworks, claiming in a late-night speech that he “wasn’t treated that well” by the legal

**“It should surprise no one that Donald Trump has turned the nation’s 250th anniversary into a scam on America.”**

— Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman

system and warning of the supposed danger of communism. This exhausting series of events finally concluded with an Aug. 23 IndyCar race through the streets of Washington, D.C.

Public Citizen and allies have dug deep into the administration’s abuse of taxpayer funds to stage these events, as well as into the corporations seeking to curry favor with Trump. Freedom 250 received financial support from a host of large corporations, including ExxonMobil, Chevron, Oracle, and others. Some corporations disclosed their donations to Freedom 250, including Chevron (\$5 million), United Airlines (\$2.5 million), and defense contractor RTX Corp. (\$1.5 million).

How did this mess come about? After an unsuccessful attempt to take over the bipartisan, congressionally authorized America 250 nonprofit, the Trump administration bypassed the entity and created a new, opaque organization known as Freedom 250.

The existence of dueling organizing bodies — Freedom 250 and America 250 — led to a feverish competition for private donations and corporate sponsors. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the competition between the two highly similar organizations “confused corporate executives, many of whom were unaware of the parallel organization raising money for Trump’s own celebration.”

Top Trump officials — including Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, Trump’s former campaign manager Chris LaCivita, and Meredith O’Rourke, Trump’s former presidential campaign finance director — have been closely involved in the 250th anniversary festivities. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Trump has been personally involved in the fundraising operation, regularly asking O’Rourke which companies and individual donors have made contributions and pushing for larger donations.

In a report titled “MAGA 250,” Public Citizen and the Revolving Door Project documented more than \$100 million in taxpayer-funded contracts and grants directed to the Freedom 250 network and other politically connected entities. The report found that of the \$126 million in grants awarded to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, over 80% went to build out a politicized series of events at the public’s expense.

If Democrats take control of the House of Representatives next year, lawmakers are likely to scrutinize these events.

Over the summer, Democrats

on the House Natural Resources Committee issued a report with potentially explosive findings. Their report alleged that donors seeking to support the original, bipartisan America 250 celebration were instead steered to the Trump-backed Freedom 250 initiative through misleading fundraising tactics — a potential violation of the law. The report also found extensive involvement by former Trump campaign operatives in organizing the 250th-anniversary celebrations.

“It should surprise no one that Donald Trump has turned the nation’s 250th anniversary into a scam on America,” Public Citizen Co-president Robert Weissman said. “Now come allegations that private donors who intended to support America 250 were tricked into contributing instead to the partisan Freedom 250. Americans deserve a thorough investigation of whether this alleged deceit rises to the level of unlawful or criminal wrongdoing.” ■

**IN THE NEXT ISSUE...**

Public Citizen reports on State Insurance Commissioners and the fight for homeowners insurance data transparency.

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|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 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                    |

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