SASHA ABRAMSKY, “THE CHAMBER MAKES IT RAIN”

*THE NATION* (SEPTEMBER 17, 2012).

The business lobby spends millions attacking Democrats while playing fast and loose with the law.
--Dick

“The US Chamber of Commerce's Multimillion-Dollar Attack Plan” by Sasha Abramsky

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Florida seniors,” a grim voiceover announces. “Did Bill Nelson consider the consequences when he cast a deciding vote for Obamacare?”

“Tell Jon Tester: the Washington way isn’t the solution,” another intones. “We need less government and lower taxes.”

“Sherrod,” a third asks, referring to Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown, “what planet are you on?”

If you live in a state where a competitive race could help tip the balance in the Senate this fall, you’ve almost certainly seen ads like these, laden with menacing theme music, light on the facts and funded by the US Chamber of Commerce. The nation’s largest business lobby is showcasing bold ambitions this year in an effort to build on gains made in the 2010 midterms, when at least $33 million of Chamber advertising helped push the nation dramatically rightward. The group began placing ads in swing districts as early as November 2011. Since then, it has rolled out a campaign aimed at influencing at least fifty House and eight Senate races, and according to Politico it has set a goal of $100 million in spending for this electoral cycle.

Watchdog groups believe the strategy in 2012 is similar to that of 2010: the Chamber goes into a district, blitzes it with attack ads to soften up the opposition and then steps back to let other deep-pocket groups come in. The intent is to force Democrats to play defense across the board, thus spreading their resources thin. According to the liberal online publication ThinkProgress, twenty of the twenty-one ads the Chamber released in May were hostile to Democratic candidates.

“The Chamber has spent about $600,000 attacking me,” Tester, the farmer turned Democratic
Montana senator, told me in April. “I’ve got a great small-business record. I’ve carried bills the US Chamber has advocated for in the past. [But] they see Montana as a state that they can pick up. They’re dishonest, painting me as something I’m not. They’re trying to paint me as Wall Street, as somebody who’s ‘gone DC.’ It’s about as crazy as anybody can get.”

The organization is maintaining its longstanding policy of not officially taking sides in presidential elections. But even though it has not directly funded anti-Obama or pro-Romney ads, that doesn’t mean its leaders wouldn’t dearly love to oust Obama. Robert Weissman, president of the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen, says the Chamber hopes to influence the presidential election indirectly—by shaping the contours of the public debate in the months leading up to election day and by bringing conservative voters to the polls.

It is also reportedly coordinating with the top conservative Super PACs to craft a unified message and spending strategy. US Chamber Watch has documented a series of meetings between the Chamber’s counsel and GOP strategists dating back to 2009, when they conceived the notion of creating American Crossroads, the Super PAC headed by Karl Rove. Since then, the watchdog group believes, the Chamber has been holding regular meetings with Crossroads, which claims that it will be able to bring $300 million to the 2012 election fight, and with Koch brothers–backed organizations (including Americans for Prosperity), which have bandied about the figure of $400 million as their target. Further evidence of cross-pollination: Chamber strategist Scott Reed previously worked for the GOP, and former Chamber counsel Steven Law is president of Crossroads GPS, the Rove-affiliated 501(c)(4) “social welfare organization.”

According to the Washington Post, the key players in this alliance have been meeting every couple of weeks to strategize. In May, Mike Allen and Jim Vandehei reported in Politico that
the Chamber, Crossroads, Americans for Prosperity and the conservative Congressional Leadership Fund had joined together in a pledge to raise an unprecedented $1 billion to influence the upcoming elections.

Compared to these figures, the $100 million that the Chamber hopes to spend could seem almost paltry. But to view it as such would be a huge mistake—for if recent years have proven anything about the role of money in the country’s politics, it’s that a group with a sizable budget for carefully targeted advertising can exert outsize influence on election day.

All of this adds up to a ton of bad news for the country’s democratic system. Pay-to-play makes it that much harder for ordinary people to get a fair hearing. It wrecks the notion of good governance, and it undermines the idea that the public interest can be well represented by the state and its elected officials.

And yet there are signs that the Chamber has overplayed its hand. Historically, the organization has been careful to camouflage its right-wing economic agenda, claiming it simply champions a “common sense” approach to the country’s problems. But these days the Chamber is struggling to tame the Tea Party beast it helped to unleash, whose destabilizing extremism was on display during last year’s debt ceiling debate. And the Chamber is facing increased scrutiny into its questionable spending of charitable funds for political purposes as well as its alleged misuse of money ponied up by anonymous donors. The Citizens United ruling gave corporations a free pass to influence elections, but with the flood of money has come heightened attention to the organizations that are bundling and spending it, often playing fast and loose with established federal election requirements. That puts the Chamber in an unwelcome—and possibly damaging—spotlight.

About the Author
Sasha Abramsky
Sasha Abramsky is receiving support from the Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation of the Open Society Foundations to...

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U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Learn more about corporations VOTING to rewrite our laws.

This article is part of the Coal Issues portal on SourceWatch, a project of CoalSwarm and
U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a powerful business lobbying group in the United States that "has become a fully functional part of the partisan Republican machine" since CEO and president Thomas J. Donohue took office in 1997. Prior to Donohue's tenure, the Chamber "used to be a trade association that advocated in a bipartisan manner for narrowly tailored policies to benefit its members."[1] The Chamber's 2010 budget is approximately $200 million, but as a trade organization, its donors can remain anonymous. [2]

The Chamber claims on its website that its mission is to "advance human progress through an economic, political and social system based on individual freedom, incentive, initiative, opportunity, and responsibility."[3] It describes itself as "the world's largest business federation representing more than 3 million businesses and organizations of every size, sector, and region."[4]

Despite these claims, the New York Times reported in October 2010 that half of the Chamber's $140 million in contributions in 2008 came from just 45 big-money donors, many of whom enlisted the Chamber's help to fight political and public opinion battles on their behalf (such as opposing financial or healthcare reforms, or other regulations). [2] The Chamber is "dominated by oil companies, pharmaceutical giants, automakers and other polluting industries," according to James Carter, executive director of the Green Chamber of Commerce.[5]

Ties to the American Legislative Exchange Council

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is a member of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) as of 2011. It is a member of the Civil Justice Task Force,[6] the Education Task Force,[7] the International Relations Task Force[8] and the Telecommunications and Information Technology Task Force,[9] according to 2011 ALEC Annual Meeting materials.

Page Faulk, Vice President,[10] presented "The Promoting Merit in 'Merit Selection' Act" model legislation at Civil Justice Task Force Meeting at the 2011 meeting.[6] Stanton D. Anderson, Senior Counsel to the President and Chief Executive Officer,[11] issued remarks on the "Free Enterprise Education Act" model legislation, and Roberta Philips sponsored discussion and voting on the act, at the Education Task Force Meeting of the 2011 meeting.[7] Mark Elliot, Executive Vice President, and Andrew Kovalcin, Director of Stakeholder Advocacy, both of the Chamber's Global Intellectual Property Center, introduced the "Resolution in Support of Federal Efforts to Address Rogue Internet Sites that Sell Counterfeit Products and Facilitate
“Digital Theft” at the Telecommunications and Information Technology Task Force Meeting[9] and presented on the "Erosion of Intellectual Property" and introduced the "ALEC Resolution to Counter Rogue Internet Sites" model policy at the International Relations Task Force Meeting at the 2011 meeting.[8]

About ALEC

ALEC is a corporate bill mill. It is not just a lobby or a front group; it is much more powerful than that. Through ALEC, corporations hand state legislators their wishlists to benefit their bottom line. Corporations fund almost all of ALEC's operations. They pay for a seat on ALEC task forces where corporate lobbyists and special interest reps vote with elected officials to approve “model” bills. Learn more at the Center for Media and Democracy's ALECexposed.org, and check out breaking news on our PRWatch.org site.

Accusations of tax fraud and money laundering

2010 Complaint

In September, 2010, two national watchdog groups, U.S. Chamber Watch and StopTheChamber.com, filed complaints with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service asking the agency to investigate the U.S. Chamber of Commerce for criminal fraud and money laundering. The groups allege that the Chamber illegally funneled donations from a wealthy charitable foundation into its political battles. Chamber Watch said that $12 million of an $18 million donation that the wealthy Starr Foundation gave (pdf) gave to the National Chamber Foundation was in the form of loans that have never been repaid. Chamber Watch says the money was diverted to finance political causes, including tort reform, to shield companies like AIG from liability lawsuits. The Starr Foundation was founded by Cornelius Vander Starr, the insurance entrepreneur who also founded AIG. The Foundation's Chairman of the Board of Directors is Maurice R. Greenberg, former President and CEO of AIG. The Foundation's Director (and Treasurer) is Howard I. Smith, AIG's former Chief Financial Officer. StopTheChamber.com says it was contacted by a Chamber whistleblower who described (pdf) how Chamber CEO Tom Donohue is "scamming [business] clients to serve his own interests rather than the interests of the business community." The insider compared Donohue to Jack Abramoff and Bernie Madoff. He also alleged that Donohue does not fear the Federal Elections Commission or Congress, and has a plan set up to attack the U.S. Department of Justice if the agency ever tries to investigate him.[12]

The September charge echoed similar charges made earlier in the year, in January, 2010, that six of the largest health insurance companies in the U.S. had been secretly funneling millions of dollars to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to oppose health reform. The total
amount in this instance was estimated at between $10 million and $20 million. According to a report in the *National Journal* online, the money was used "to help underwrite tens of millions of dollars of television ads by two business coalitions set up and subsidized by the chamber."[13][14]

**2006 Public Citizen Complaint**

On October 31, 2006, *Public Citizen* filed a complaint[15] with the IRS asking it to investigate whether the Chamber and "its affiliated Institute for Legal Reform (ILR) failed to report millions in taxable spending from 2000 to 2004 intended to influence state-level attorney general and supreme court races and federal races around the country."[16]

It also asked the IRS to investigate whether Chamber and the ILR, "which are two separate legal entities, combined funds in a shared bank account to hide accurate reporting of investment or interest income for tax avoidance. ... Court records, internal corporate documents and media reports indicate that the Chamber and the ILR engaged in a massive campaign to affect the outcome of state and federal races through direct expenditures and grants made to organizations that carried out the Chamber's wishes."[16]

*Public Citizen* reported that[16]

"In 2000, the Chamber claimed it spent $6 million on judicial races and took credit for winning 15 out of 17 state supreme court contests. In 2002, the Chamber said it planned to spend $40 million on political campaigns, divided equally between congressional and state-level attorneys general and judicial races. None of these activities were reported on their tax returns from 2000 to 2003.  
"In 2004, the first year since at least 2000 that the Chamber and the ILR reported political expenditures, both organizations appear to have underreported their spending. They reported a combined $18 million, but in a 'President's Update' memo released the day after the November elections, Chamber President Thomas Donohue claimed the group had spent up to $30 million in races around the country.  
"The Chamber and ILR also failed to report grants and allocations to outside groups as required by Line 22 of IRS Form 990. Both organizations reported no grants to outside groups from 2000 to 2004. But in a 2005 deposition, a Chamber official acknowledged that the Chamber had partnered with at least six outside groups to advance its agenda to avoid garnering unwanted critical attention. At least two 501(c) organizations, the Washington-based *American Taxpayers Alliance* and the Columbus-based *Citizens for a Strong Ohio*, reported receipt of contributions from the U.S. Chamber."
2012 Presidential elections

As of November 2nd, 2012 the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has spent $35.3 million towards influencing the elections, $27 million has been used in attacking Democrats.[17] They have heavily backed a slate of Republicans, including Rep. Todd Akins (R-Mo), Rep. Marie Buerkle (R-NY), and many others.

2010 Midterm Elections

The U.S. Chamber played a major role in the Republican victories in the 2010 midterm Congressional elections, promising to spend $75 million (and reporting only $32 million), and helping to organize and coordinate spending by other "outside interest groups" like American Crossroads and American Action Network.[18] In a blog post the night before the election, the Chamber stated it "had been a game-changing political force in these midterms. We've engaged in tight, competitive races; and we've altered them."[19]

The Chamber claimed it offered support to all pro-business candidates, regardless of party affiliation. However, according to a report from the union-backed Chamber Watch, "[I]t worked almost exclusively to elect Republicans in the powerful Senate, giving one lone endorsement to a Democrat, West Virginia’s Joe Manchin, on whom it made no expenditures. On the House side, the Chamber created an appearance of bipartisanship by spending on behalf of eleven Democrats. But the Chamber’s support for Democratic members was razor-thin, and sometimes, the Chamber withheld support altogether, even where Democratic members worked hard to earn the Chamber’s approval." [20]

What’s more, while 93% of reported expenditures went to support Republicans, the 6% spent to support Democrats were spent on generic, non-candidate-specific ads, rather than more effective ads attacking opponents. The ads tended not to identify candidate-specific positive qualities, instead relying on a template with the same title for several different candidates, only changing the candidate’s name, picture and office number. The ads were also run later than ads supporting their Republican counterparts.[20]

Link to American Crossroads

American Crossroads and the Chamber are closely tied, and closely coordinated their efforts in the 2010 midterm elections.

In 2008, Chamber President Tom Donahue told the Los Angeles Times that he wanted to get very involved with elections. 'Alarmed at the increasingly populist tone of the 2008 political campaign, the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is set to issue a fiery promise to spend millions of dollars to defeat candidates deemed to be anti-business. "We plan to build a grass-roots business organization so strong that when it bites you in the butt, you bleed," chamber President Tom Donohue said.' [21]
According to the U.S. Chamber Watch report:

"The U.S. Chamber first began to coordinate massive Republican resources when its general counsel, Steven Law, met with Ed Gillespie, Republican political strategist and former Counselor to President George W. Bush. According to the Associated Press, Law met with Gillespie in October of 2009, "calculating how to exploit the voter anger they had seen erupt at Democratic town hall meetings that summer." [22]

It was at this meeting that they conceived of American Crossroads an organization, that according to its website, is dedicated to “renewing America’s commitment to individual liberty, limited government, free enterprise and a strong national defense.” Law left the U.S. Chamber to serve as the group’s CEO.

According to Think Progress:

“...At every turn, from the operatives running the two organizations to their targeted races to their media firms, American Crossroads and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce are bound to one another…the two groups have exhibited uncanny coordination in their election targeting. In a number of Senate races, the Chamber and American Crossroads coordinated their advertisements – one group put up ads in a race as the other group pulled its own down – in order to ensure attack ads were always running against the Democratic candidate.” [23]

Post-Election Backlash

The U.S. Chamber's partisan, corporate-funded (and often untrue) campaign attacks have compelled many local Chambers of Commerce to disassociate from the U.S. Chamber. [24] Despite the U.S. Chamber's attempts to portray itself as a community of small businesses and local Chambers of Commerce, the interests the U.S. Chamber served in the 2010 elections were those of its large corporate donors. More than 40 local chambers issued statements during the campaign distancing themselves from the U.S. Chamber, including chambers in the "battleground states" of Iowa and New Hampshire. Some chambers are considering what Politico calls the "extraordinary" step of ending their affiliation with the U.S. Chamber and quitting in protest. [25]

U.S. Politics

Climate Change Legislation

In 2009, the Chamber of Commerce lobbied against climate change legislation introduced by Congress. In describing its strategy, the Chamber says it will "resist ill-conceived legislation that is economically disruptive of business and industry activities, that creates regulatory and legislative obstacles to development and deployment of affordable, innovative energy technologies, and that could severely damage the security and economy of the United States." [26] The chamber said it supports "mainstream, common sense views" on climate change, but that it opposes the Waxman-Markey Climate Bill passed by the
The group's opposition to the legislation has caused a rift among its corporate members. A number of companies have announced they are leaving the organization as a result of its stance on climate change regulations. Energy companies *Exelon, PG&E*, and *PNM Resources* all announced in September 2009 that they were quitting the Chamber. [28] *Apple Inc* also resigned from the Chamber, saying in a statement, "We would prefer that the chamber take a more progressive stance on this critical issue and play a constructive role in addressing the climate crisis." [29] Sportswear company *Nike* also criticized the Chamber's challenge of the U.S. EPA's authority to regulate carbon dioxide emissions as air pollution. [27] Nike said it would resign from the Chamber's board of directors, but that it would retain its membership to the organization in order to work for climate change legislation from inside the organization. [30]

**The Yes Men's fake press conference**

**Citizen action against the Chamber of Commerce's stance on climate change**

**Yes Men stage fake Chamber of Commerce press conference**

On October 19, 2009, anti-corporate performance artists the Yes Men issued a fake press release on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, claiming that the Chamber had reversed its position on climate change would no longer lobby against the legislation. The activists managed to secure a room at the National Press Club to stage a press conference announcing the policy shift to reporters. The real Chamber of Commerce spokesperson Eric Wohlschlegel interrupted the event and declared the event a fraud. Afterwards, the Chamber threatened to push for a criminal investigation over the prank. [31]

**Grassroots campaigns against the Chamber**

**CREDO Action**, part of the Working Assets company, launched a campaign against the Chamber's stance on climate change legislation. The group is organizing an effort to urge members of the lobbying group to resign, calling on them to "denounce the Chamber's extremist position on global warming and revoke your membership effective immediately." [32]

**Velvet Revolution** has also organized a campaign against the Chamber of Commerce, citing its stance on climate change among other reasons to call for a reform of the corporate lobbying group. [33]
Employee Free Choice Act

In the 2009 debate over the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), a bill that would make it easier for workers to join a union, "both the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO are focusing on grassroots outreach," reported PR Week. Before the bill was introduced, "the Chamber launched the Workforce Freedom Airlift program, a series of events that fly in local small business owners to Washington," to lobby against the bill. The first "airlift," on March 10, 2009, "brought in small business owners from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Nebraska, and Louisiana." Since July 2008, the Chamber has worked with Adfero Group on an anti-EFCA "social media effort," expanding "a virtual march on Washington that was created the last time the bill went to Congress in 2007." It "allows users to register for the march as avatars and send an automatic letter to their elected officials through a Facebook application." [34]

In April 2009, the Chamber launched a "$1 million television advertising campaign that takes a new line of attack against the Employee Free Choice Act, highlighting a provision that would allow federal arbitrators to set the rules for unionization if management and employees fail to negotiate their own deal." The ads "will hit the airwaves in Nebraska, Virginia, Louisiana, North Dakota and Colorado -- states whose senators could be swing votes." Previous attacks on the bill, from the Chamber and corporate front groups like the Coalition for a Democratic Workplace and Employee Freedom Action Committee, claimed it would get rid of secret ballot elections. The bill would actually allow employees to form unions either by holding elections or signing cards. Although the "no secret ballot" claims are inaccurate, they've been effective, accoring to the Wall Street Journal. The "more than $30 million on TV ads [spent by business groups] in the past few years portraying the secret-ballot provision as antidemocratic ... pressured several key senators to reverse their prior support, leaving the bill several senators short of 60 votes." [35]

Political action committee

The Chamber sponsored The November Fund, a 527 committee that opposes what it describes as frivolous lawsuits and trial lawyers and ran negative campaign advertisements against trial lawyer John Edwards, John Kerry’s running mate during the 2004 presidential race.

VoteForBusiness

"Under Donohue's leadership, the Chamber has also emerged as a major player in election politics, helping elect congressional pro-business candidates through financial support and voter activism and turnout generated through the Chamber’s grassroots organization," VoteForBusiness, [36] billed as "Your One-Stop Political Action, Education,
and Involvement Tool”.

Websites: http://www.voteforbusiness.net/ and http://www.voteforbusiness.com

Opposition to Paid Sick Leave

In Wisconsin, a local representative of the US Chamber of Commerce called the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce lobbied together with the Wisconsin Restaurant Association for the adoption of Senate Bill 23, which overturned a local ordinance requiring paid sick leave for workers. The law "specified that paid sick leave could be used if a worker is ill, needs to care for a sick child, or obtain counseling if raped or battered, for example. The law also barred companies from penalizing workers for exercising their rights and from erecting unreasonable barriers to impede the fair use of sick leave." [37]

National Chamber Foundation

"The revitalized National Chamber Foundation, the Chamber’s public policy think tank, is shaping the policy debate on cutting-edge business issues, with major new initiatives on intellectual property theft and counterfeiting, capital markets and accounting rules, and travel and tourism." [36]

Law

Law firm

"The National Chamber Litigation Center, the Chamber’s law firm, has become more aggressive in challenging anti-business measures in court, setting a new record for cases entered in each of the last six years and securing 48 court victories in 2006." [36]

Legal reform

The Chamber has taken a lead role in the tort reform movement. It sponsors the Institute for Legal Reform (ILR), a 501(c)6 organization, and Legal Reform Now, a coalition of business associations, think tanks, and legal reform groups.
Website: http://www.instituteforlegalreform.com/

On its website, the ILR posted a "State Liability Systems Ranking" which it calls "Lawsuit Climate 2007". [38]

Opposing "activist judges"

In late May 2005, the Chamber's Institute for Legal Reform President Lisa Rickard announced it was going to "reign in activist attorneys general." [39] At a Chamber-
sponsored conference examining the "appropriate role" of a state attorney general, several speakers "complained that 'Spitzerism' has become a dangerous model for ambitious regulators," referring to New York AG Eliot Spitzer.[40]

**Madison County Record (Illinois)**

The *Madison County Record*, "an Illinois weekly newspaper launched in September [2004] that bills itself as the county's legal journal, reports on one subject: the state courts in southern Illinois," Jeffrey H. Birnbaum reported in the *Washington Post.*[41]

Birnbaum pointed to a "recent front page[that] carried an assortment of stories about lawsuits against businesses. In one, a woman sought $15,000 in damages for breaking her nose at a haunted house. In another, a woman sued a restaurant for $50,000 after she hurt her teeth on a chicken breast. ... Nowhere was it reported that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce created the *Record* as a weapon in its multimillion-dollar campaign against lawyers who file those kinds of suits," Birnbaum wrote.[41]

**Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act**

In October 2007, the Chamber filed a friend-of-the court filing in a class action lawsuit under consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court which originated with a California RICO lawsuit involving Microsoft and Best Buy. The Chamber stated that "RICO is getting out of control as a device against business. It has been used in more than 4,500 cases since 2001, with only 35 of those cases filed by the government."[42] The Supreme Court overturned the appeal and ruled that Microsoft and Best Buy are subject to RICO laws.[43]

**Trade**

**TradeRoots**

The Chamber's TradeRoots website is billed as "the nation's leading sustained grassroots education program dedicated to raising public awareness of international trade on a local level."[44]

The *Trade Toolbox*, a "resource to help in the trade export process, ... includes trade statistics, country and market reports, best market reports, frequently asked questions and trade contacts." The *Toolbox* was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce.[45]

Website: [http://www.traderoots.org/](http://www.traderoots.org/)

**TheTrueCosts.org**

TheTrueCosts.org is a website sponsored by the Chamber. In conjunction with the
Coalition Against Counterfeiting and Piracy (CACP), it has produced the *No Trade in Fakes Supply Chain Tool Kit*, which provides "proven strategies" for companies "to use to protect their supply chains from counterfeiting and modern-day pirates."[46]

Website: http://www.thetruecosts.org

**Coal and Energy**

**Chamber distributes books on energy to children**

In 2010, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce joined with Scholastic Books to distribute roughly 100,000 books about the potential perils of government fossil fuel regulation to classrooms across the country, as part of its “Shedding Light on Energy” campaign. The book asks, “What do you think could happen if one of our energy sources was suddenly unavailable (e.g., power plant maintenance, government curb on production, etc.)?” Chamber officials maintain that there is no “hidden agenda” behind the question or the educational outreach effort in general, although the book is notably being distributed at a time when the [Environmental Protection Agency](http://www.epa.gov) is set to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.[47]

The energy industry has a long history of working to get its perspective into classrooms. In the 1970s, for example, nuclear power officials distributed comic books in schools as it dealt with the PR fallout from the near meltdown at Three Mile Island. And BP helped develop environmental lesson plans in California, the Sacramento Bee reported last month. The posters and worksheets that the Chamber will be sending out to schools across the country is based on statistics from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, and the assignments are mostly aimed at teaching students how to use charts and graphs to convey where U.S. energy comes from and how it is used.[47]

**Chamber's Institute for Energy**

In March 2007, *O'Dwyer's PR Daily* reported that General James L. Jones, formerly the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO forces in Europe, had joined the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as a lobbyist.[48]

"Jones will head the Institute for Energy, which is to present itself as a grassroots organization. The Chamber went a similar path with the creation of the Institute for Legal Reform." Jones will focus on global warming and seek "to 'unify energy stakeholders behind a common strategy' to produce affordable and secure supplies while protecting the environment," reported *O'Dwyer's*, quoting Chamber president Tom Donohue.[48]
National gas tax

"After a Minneapolis bridge collapsed on Aug. 1, [2007,] killing 13 people, members of Congress have sought to increase the gas tax to fix 'structurally deficient' bridges and make other infrastructure repairs. ... The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers, groups that don’t normally agree with tax increases, support a national gas tax increase to pay for infrastructure improvements."[49]

Other issues

Opposing national health care reform

The U.S. Chamber sponsors the Campaign for Responsible Health Reform, a program created to convince people to preserve employer-sponsored health insurance and oppose a public insurance option in health care reform in the U.S. The Campaign aims to convince people that a government-sponsored plan is "fiscally reckless," will "lead us down the road to total government control of our health," and that it will make those with private insurance pay even more.[50]

The Campaign says that "a government-run plan that would have broad and unrivaled power to negotiate for low-cost services of doctors and other health care providers could put private insurers out of business."[51]

The group's Web site has a "Take Action" page that says "We can’t afford to let a government-run plan raise our taxes and create long waits for treatment." It urges people to write their Congress members to oppose "government-run health care."[52]

SCHIP veto

The Chamber is among a number of organizations which supported President George W. Bush's October 2007 veto of the SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2007) bill.[53] Republicans and "some business groups" such as the Chamber contended SCHIP "should focus on poor children and the expansion [would be] a move towards government-run health care. They also wor[r] identification rules in the DemocraticSCHIP bill might allow illegal immigrants to obtain government coverage."[54]

Immigration amnesty and reform

The Chamber, "among others, has pushed for immigration reforms that would allow a path to citizenship for undocumented workers."[55]

In January 2004, speaking in support of amnesty for illegal aliens, Randel Y. Johnson,
Chamber vice president for labor, immigration and employee benefits, said: "We need a system of 'earned targeted adjustment' for undocumented workers that fill vital roles in our economy, which would enable them to achieve legal status. We also need to expand permanent and temporary visas for workers to enter the United States legally to meet future workforce requirements."[56]

**Social Security**

The Chamber also has a role in promoting President George W. Bush's plan to privatize Social Security.

**Lobbying spending**

The Chamber ranks first in lobbying spending in the past decade, with General Electric ranking second at $161 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.[57]

*Political Money Line*[58] highlighted in February 2005 that the Chamber and its Institute for Legal Reform reported combined spending of $53.38 million for lobbying the Executive and Legislative branches during 2004. According to the watchdog website, "This is the largest twelve-month amount reported spent by any group."

The Chamber reported spending $20,060,000 in the first six months of 2004 and $8,780,000 in the last six months of 2004. They paid forty-five lobbyists in the last six months of 2004 to lobby on thirty-two issue areas, including "Trade, Small Business, Labor, Healthcare, Defense, Appropriations, Tort Reform and other areas."[59]

The Institute for Legal Reform reported spending $10,000,000 in the first six months of 2004 and $14,540,000 in the last six months. They had five lobbyists on the payroll for the last six months of 2004, working on the tort reform issue including "Class Action Fairness, Asbestos Injury Resolution, Legal Reform, and Lawsuit Abuse Reduction."[60]

**Election cycle spending**

Other spending reported by *Political Money Line* or Open Secrets:

- In 2007, $21.2 million total was spent by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and its subsidiary the Institute for Legal Reform (ILR); $11.78 million for the Chamber and $9.4 million by ILR.[61]
- In 2006, $72.7 million total was spent by the Chamber and ILR; $45.7 million for the Chamber and $27 million for the ILR.[62]
- In 2005, $39.8 million total was spent by the Chamber and ILR; $20 million for the Chamber and $19.8 million for ILR.[63]
- In 2004, $53.4 million total was spent by the Chamber and ILR; $28.8 million for the Chamber and $24.5 million for ILR.[64]
- In 2003, $34.6 million total was spent by the Chamber and ILR. For the period 7/1/03 to 6/30/04 they spent $47.8 million.
- In 2002, $41.56 million total was spent by the Chamber and ILR. For the period 7/1/02 to 6/30/03 they spent $45.6 million.
- In 2001, $20.6 million total was spent by the Chamber and ILR. For the period 7/1/01 to 6/30/02 they spent $25.9 million.

The Chamber and large corporations

The Chamber claims to represent 3 million businesses, 96 percent of which are small, defined as having fewer than 100 employees. But the Chamber arrives at this figure by counting all businesses that are members of state and local chambers, which are independent organizations that pay a few hundreds dollars a year to affiliate with the U.S. Chamber for discounts and other programs and have no say over the national group's political activities, its lobbying, or endorsements. The U.S. Chamber's membership is actually about 300,000 businesses, and the Chamber's boardroom is mostly representatives of large corporations. Its 125-member board includes representatives of just two local chambers and a handful of small businesses. The rest are primarily from large corporations, like Pfizer, Alcoa, and JP Morgan Chase. In 2008, one-third of the $147 million the group raised came from just 19 companies.[65] In 2010, the watchdog group U.S. ChamberWatch used a disclosure law to see the Chamber's IRS 990 form. It showed that 55 percent of its funding came from just 16 companies, each of which gave more than a million dollars.[66] (Exactly which companies is unknown. U. S. law requires the Chamber to list amounts given on its annual tax return, but it is not obligated to disclose names.)[65]

In 2010, chambers in San Antonio, New York, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut began publicly moving away from the U.S. Chamber, disavowing the 2010 political attack ads that the U.S. Chamber had been broadcasting in their communities. Newer chambers, like the South Carolina Small Business Chamber of Commerce, have declined to affiliate with the national group and have been among its most vocal critics: "They get the majority of their funding from big businesses. That's who drives their decisions," explains Executive Director Frank Knapp, noting that, unlike the U. S. Chamber, his group supported the health care bill and financial reform, and favors legislation to curb global warming.[65]

Alleged spying on critics

In 2010, Aaron Barr, CEO of the technology security company HBGary Federal, alleged
that he could exploit social media to gather information about hackers like those who supported WikiLeaks. In early 2011, Barr claimed to have used his techniques to infiltrate the WikiLeaks supporter Anonymous, partly by using IRC, Facebook, Twitter, and social networking sites. His e-mails depict his intention to release information on the identities of Anonymous members and to sell it to possible clients.[67] In early February of 2011, the activist group Anonymous hacked the firm's website, copied tens of thousands of documents from HBGary, posted tens of thousands of company emails online, and usurped Barr's Twitter account.[68]

According to some of HBGary's e-mails, the Chamber of Commerce hired the lobbying firm Hunton & Williams, and attorneys for the law firm then solicited a set of private security firms — HB Gary Federal, Palantir, and Berico Technologies (collectively called Team Themis) — to develop a sabotage campaign against progressive groups and labor unions, including the group ThinkProgress, the labor coalition Change to Win, the labor union SEIU, U.S. Chamber Watch, and StopTheChamber.com. Later emails revealed that the private spy company investigated the families and children of the Chamber’s political opponents. The apparent spearhead of this project was Aaron Barr, who circulated numerous emails and documents detailing information about political opponents’ children, spouses, and personal lives.[69]

On February 10, 2011, the Chamber of Commerce issued a statement denying they hired HBGary,[70] calling the allegation a "baseless smear", and blaming the Center for American Progress and its blog, ThinkProgress for "the illusion of a connection between HBGary, its CEO Aaron Barr and the Chamber."[71]

Chamber campaigns

In June, 2011 the Chamber enlisted former White House Chief of Staff under President Bush Andrew Card, and Democratic former Indiana Senator Evan Bayh to put on a national "road show" to rally businesses to oppose government regulations. The road show is being handled by Chamber employee Thomas Collamore, who formerly was a vice president of Philip Morris Corporate Affairs, the department at PM that was responsible for thwarting national efforts to reduce tobacco use. The Chamber planned to formally announce the Bayh and Card road show on June 22, 2011, and then start flying the two around the country in a push to gather support for reducing regulations designed to protect the environment, consumers and workers. The Chamber plans to fight the Environmental Protection Agency’s efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, push to minimize the power of the recently-created Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, block implementation of OSHA workplace safety and health programs, hamper employees' ability to join unions,
and make other pro-business reforms. The Chamber has spent months soliciting millions of dollars in funding for this anti-regulatory effort from Wall Street financial firms, insurance and energy companies. [72]

**Affiliated centers / organizations**

- Alliance for Energy and Economic Growth
- Business Civic Leadership Center (BCLC)
- Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC) member[73]
- Global Intellectual Property Center (GIPC), Caroline Joiner, executive director[^4]
- Global Regulatory Cooperation Project[^74]
- Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), Jan Magill, director of strategic partnerships[^75]
- Institute for Energy
- Institute for Organizational Management (IOM), Athens, Georgia
- The Energy Initiative
- Particulate Matter Coalition
- Yucca Energy Solutions

**Senior management**

The following are listed as members of the Chamber's senior management.[^76]

- Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO
- David C. Chavern, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
- R. Bruce Josten, Executive Vice President, Government Affairs
- LTG (Ret.) Daniel W. Christman, Senior Vice President, International Affairs
- Thomas Collamore, Senior Vice President Communications & Strategy and Counselor to the President
- Shannon DiBari, Senior Vice President, Human Resources
- Carl Grant, Chairman of the President's Advisory Group
- Stan Harrell, Senior Vice President, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Information Officer
- David Hirschmann, Senior Vice President and Executive Vice President, National Chamber Foundation (NCF)
General James L. Jones USMC (ret.), President and CEO, Institute for Energy

Steven J. Law, Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel

Rolf Lundberg, Senior Vice President, Congressional and Public Affairs

William C. Miller, Jr., Senior Vice President, Political Affairs & Federation Relations and National Political Director

Lisa Rickard, President, Institute for Legal Reform

James Robinson, Senior Vice President and Counselor to the President

Arthur J. Rothkopf, Senior Vice President and Counselor to the President

Agnes Warfield, Senior Vice President, Development

Board members

The following are listed as members of the Chamber's board of directors.[77]

Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO

Paul S. Speranza, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Directors

Donald J. Shepard, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors

Gerald L. Shaheen, Immediate Past Chair and Chair of the Executive Committee

Also see the lists of regional vice chairmen;[78] the senior council;[79] and all members of the board of directors.[80]

Contact information

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Fax: 202 463-5836
Website: http://www.uschamber.com/

Articles and resources

Related SourceWatch articles

Ayes McHenry & Associates (biased Chamber polling firm)

Alliance for Energy and Economic Growth
- Alliance to Save Main Street Jobs
- Bush administration U.S. attorney firings controversy
- Business Roundtable
- Campaign for Responsible Health Reform
- Coalition for Economic Growth and American Jobs
- Employee Free Choice Act
- International Chamber of Commerce
- Particulate Matter Coalition
- The November Fund
- Transatlantic Policy Network
- Jay Van Andel - former chair (1979)
- Yucca Energy Solutions
- Craig L. Fuller - board member

**External resources**

**External articles**

See U.S. Chamber of Commerce:External articles

**References**

4. ↑ 4.0 4.1 "USA : Chamber backs fight against internet piracy," U.S. Chamber of Commerce (Fibre2Fashion.com), October 19, 2007.
6. ↑ 6.0 6.1 American Legislative Exchange Council, Civil Justice Task Force Meeting Agenda, August 5, 2011, on file with CMD
7. ↑ 7.0 7.1 American Legislative Exchange Council, "Education Task Force Meeting," agenda and meeting materials, August 5, 2011, on file with CMD
8. ↑ 8.0 8.1 American Legislative Exchange Council, International and Federal Relations Task Force meeting and Federal Relations Working Group, meeting agenda and materials, August 4, 2011, on file with CMD
9. ↑ 9.0 9.1 American Legislative Exchange Council, "Telecommunications &
Information Technology Task Force Meeting, agenda and meeting materials, August 5, 2011, on file with CMD

10. ↑ LinkedIn, Page Faulk, online business profile, accessed August 31, 2011


12. ↑ National Desk Watchdog Groups Request Criminal Fraud and Money Laundering Investigations against The U.S. Chamber, American Chronicle, September 15, 2010

13. ↑ Staff reports U.S. Chamber of Commerce Charged with Money Laundering Tactics, Appomattox News, January 15, 2010


15. ↑ Complaint filed with the IRS, October 31, 2006, by Public Citizen.


20. ↑ 20.0 20.1 November 2010, US Chamber of Commerce: Leading the Charge in Electing a Republican Congress, a report by U.S. Chamber Watch.


40. Barrie McKenna, "Corporate America declares war on 'Spitzerism'," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Canada), May 27, 2005.


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52. ↑ Campaign for Responsible Health Reform Take Action, accessed August 18, 2009
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59. ↑ Lobbying Report for 2004: Chamber of Commerce of the USA, Senate ID#8817 and House ID#31886000.
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   Totals are as posted by October 22, 2007.
64. ↑ Lobbying database, 2004: U.S. Chamber of Commerce, OpenSecrets.org
65. ↑ 65.0 65.1 65.2 Stacy Mitchell, "Will the Real Voice of Small Business Please Stand Up?" Yes! Nov. 2, 2010.
67. ↑ How one man tracked down Anonymous - and paid a heavy price By Nate Anderson, updated 2-10-2011, Ars Technica, retr 2011-02-11
73. ↑ Membership list, EWIC.org.

Categories:

- ALEC Exposed
- Coal Issues
- Energy
- Elections (U.S.)
- Social Security privatization
- Business lobby group
- Tort reform
- Coal lobby
- ALEC Trade Groups
Stop The Chamber

The Chamber of Commerce, under the leadership of Tom Donohue, has gone from a well respected trade organization to an extremist political organization dedicated to corrupting American democracy by elevating the profits of big corporations over the well being of the citizens they serve. Recent examples of this corrupt behavior is the Chamber's spending of more than $100 million to defeat initiatives to protect the environment and provide affordable health care to everyone, and its massive attacks on democracy through the use of secret money in the 2010 election.

The Chamber is the biggest lobbying operation in the United States, spending billions of dollars on behalf of big business over the past decade to corrupt the political system. Polluters like Big Coal, Big Asbestos, and Big Oil only need call the Chamber to stop any accountability for their toxic destruction. Wall Street banks and CEOs need only make sure that they have paid their Chamber dues to ensure that they can continue to rip off the taxpayers. And killers like Big Tobacco need only form a partnership with the Chamber to ensure that they will be given immunity from lawsuits that seek accountability for the death and sickness of millions of Americans.
Tom Donohue has turned the once respected and even-handed Chamber into an extremist organization, bragging that the Chamber gutted the Clinton tobacco settlement, killed the Clinton health care plan, and scuttled previous oversight of Wall Street and the banking system. Now the Chamber is spending tens of millions on ads and lobbyists to repeal health care for all, protect polluters from accountability, and shield the financial industry from government regulation.

Sign on to Stop The Chamber

Sign On To This Campaign. Sign on to this campaign and your name will be added to the thousands who have complained about the conduct of the Chamber. We will send this letter letter to all the members of the Chamber board and others asking that they quit and condemn the Chamber.

Obey from Studiocanoe on Vimeo.

Inside The Hostess Bankery - The Movie

You've heard the Mainstream Media read you the Hostess PR sheet, now hear the truth from the mouths of the people who had their pension stolen. As the mainstream media distracted America with misinformation about Unions, the Hedge Funds got away with theft. They collected $4.25 an hour from each and every worker for the Baker's pension fund, then refused to send the money to the pension. In this 25 minute film you will hear about the causes and effects of this blatant, and apparently legal, theft. You will also learn the truth about the reason Hostess had to close. SPOILER ALERT: it's not what you've been told by your favorite news source. They have ALL blown the story.

Why We Can't Shop Our Way to a Better Economy: Stacy Mitchell at TEDxDirigo

Capuchin monkeys reject unequal pay

The Examiner: State Republicans propose bill that would abolish minimum wage

By: Robert Sobel

February 27, 2013—One of the most talked about aspects of President Obama's State of the Union Address was his call for an increase in the minimum wage. While the debate heated up between those for and against a possible federal increase in the minimum wage, Republicans in Mississippi are taking things even further.

According to Openstate.org, HB 141 passed the Mississippi state House earlier this month, and called for an end to the minimum wage. Supporters of the bill cite tough economic times and businesses struggling for their support. It is clearly outlined in Section 1 of the bill.
Economists are warning that the upcoming sequester could severely harm the economy as government agencies at the federal, state, and local level will see sharp spending cuts. The sequester’s cuts this year will amount to $85.3 billion. Around half of this spending will be cut from the waste–ridden defense budget, but much of the rest of it will come out of necessary investments in the country’s public infrastructure.

But there’s another area of the budget where almost as much money is spent — subsidies to Big Banks. In an editorial published last week, Bloomberg noted that the ten biggest banks get an effective annual subsidy of $83 billion from taxpayers, and that almost all their recent profits are subsidized by the federal government.

That’s only $2.3 billion short of the amount of money that the sequester cuts. It would therefore be logical if the government were to instead look at cutting these subsidies to Wall Street instead of investments in Main Street America.

Closing the income gap – Yes we have been here before.

Capitalism is an economic system that values the accumulation of wealth. In free–market economics, governmental regulation should be as little as possible. The combination of capitalism and the laissez faire, free–market economy has brought the United States to a major imbalance of wealth distribution.

Today, CEOs make more than 400 times the salaries of the average worker.
The bankers and corporate owners have worked hard to change laws and regulations that allow them to keep their wealth at levels not seen since the 1920s.

In the 1930s, the United States suffered a similar financial crisis. One percent of the population owned most of the nation's wealth. Laissez faire economic philosophy had reduced government regulation, allowed for risk-taking and created financial bubbles. In 1929, the markets dropped, which kicked off the Great Depression. That crisis was even worse than today's, mainly because unemployment was at 24 percent and there weren't any government programs in place that helped people get back on their feet.

Matthew Fillipowicz: Post Office Threatened By Manufactured Crisis - Dave Johnson Explains
Matthew Fillipowicz: Obama Golfs With Oil Executives While Tens Of Thousands Protest Keystone XL Pipeline
Matthew Fillipowicz: Tar Sands Blockade Plans Week Of Action To Protest Keystone XL Pipeline March 16-23
Think Progress: Montana Bill Would Give Corporations The Right To Vote

—By Ian Millhiser
February 22, 2013– A bill introduced by Montana state Rep. Steve Lavin would give corporations the right to vote in municipal elections:

Provision for vote by corporate property owner. (1) Subject to subsection (2), if a firm, partnership, company, or corporation owns real property within the municipality, the president, vice president, secretary, or other designee of the entity is eligible to vote in a municipal election as provided in [section 1].

(2) The individual who is designated to vote by the entity is subject to the provisions of [section 1] and shall also provide to the election administrator documentation of the entity’s registration with the secretary of state under 35-1-217 and proof of the individual’s designation to vote on behalf of the entity.

Truthout: Football Stadium Named After Private Prison Company Blurs Line Between Retribution and Recreation

—By Christopher Petrella
February 22, 2013– The GEO Group –the nation’s second largest for-profit, private prison firm –
recently announced its intention to gift $6 million over a 12-year period to Florida Atlantic University (FAU), a public institution situated less than 5 miles from GEO’s corporate headquarters in Boca Raton. In return, FAU has agreed to emblazon the words "GEO Group Stadium" on its 29,419-seat open-air football facility, a decision that blurs the boundaries between recreation and retribution and challenges the parameters of so-called "corporate citizenship," a popular practice that attempts to displace the systematic contradictions of modern capitalism with singular moments of charity. In the end, GEO's construct of "corporate citizenship" trips over itself by feeding the very conditions it claims to starve. The company's existence is nothing short of an exercise in contradiction.

• Read more

1. **Key Vote letter on S. 3369, the - U.S. Chamber of Commerce**
   www.uschamber.com › Issues Center › Letters to Congress

   Jul 13, 2012 – The **U.S. Chamber of Commerce**, the world's largest business ...Political speech by corporations is protected by the First Amendment. ... **Eu v. San Francisco County Democratic Central Comm.**, 489 U.S. 214, 223 (1989).

2. **Obama continues attack on Chamber of Commerce**
   www.washingtonpost.com › Politics

   Oct 11, 2010 – **U.S. Chamber's** Harris Backs Lowering Corporate Tax Rate ... support for outsourcing jobs by major **U.S. corporations** or through overseas money ...donations to the chamber and other groups pose "a threat to our democracy."

3. **The U.S. Chamber Doesn't Speak For Me**
   chamber.350.org/

   It's time to push back against the biggest money polluter of them all. ... 56 local chambers of commerce have made statements ... that Aspen is just a gnat to the **U.S. Chamber**, which is mostly funded by a few big corporations ... of climate change and what we've done to our democracy, our climate, and our humanity often ... 

4. **Democracy Power - (U.S. Chamber of Democracy).**
   www.uschamberofdemocracy.com/democracy-power.html

   Its biggest is the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce**, ... On those rare occasions when scofflaw corporations are taken to court this other chamber helps them win their case. The USCC doesn't like sunlight on the sources of it funding or its operating ... 

5. **Distorted Democracy: Post-Election Spending Analysis**
   | U.S. PIRG
   www.uspirg.org/.../distorted-democracy-post-election-spending-anal...
Nov 12, 2012 – Allowing a CEO or corporate board to direct funds aggregated from ...active trade associations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, so that ...

6. “Celebration” at the U.S. Chamber protests Dark Money « CitizenVox
   www.citizenvox.org/2012/10/25/celebration-us-cha/

Oct 25, 2012 – Held in mock celebration of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s 100th ...You’ve never seen a political ad that said, “Paid for by Chevron” or “I’m ... But that doesn't mean these corporations aren't spending millions to influence our votes. ... said Blair Bowie, democracy advocate at U.S. PIRG, during the rally.

7. The Lewis Powell Memo - Corporate Blueprint to Dominate ...

Aug 25, 2011 – Study Finds 80% of All Antibiotics in US Used for Big-Ag ... The Lewis Powell Memo - Corporate Blueprint to Dominate Democracy ... drafted a confidential memorandum for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that describes a .... who have been injured, assaulted, or harmed to sue the responsible corporations.

END CHAMBER OF COMMERCE NEWSLETTER #1

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Dick Bennett
My blog:
War Department/Peace Department
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http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

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