

CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN ALEC, WAL-MART, THE NRA, AND THE FLORIDA LAW CITED BY SOME TO IMMUNIZE TRAYVON MARTIN'S KILLER

(Prepared 3-23-12 by Lisa Graves, Center for Media and Democracy, and Nick Surgey, Common Cause)

- Early on the evening of February 26, 2012, **George Zimmerman** shot and killed **Trayvon Martin, 17**, an African-American, in a gated community in Sanford, Fla. Trayvon, whose body was not identified until days later, was walking home after buying Skittles and tea. Zimmerman claimed the shooting was in self-defense. Citing a recent Florida statute known as the “shoot first” law or “Castle Doctrine,” police did not charge Zimmerman and did not seize the gun used to kill Trayvon.
- That Florida law became the template for “model” legislation endorsed and promoted nationally by the **American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)**, a non-profit entity funded by major corporations and interest groups including **Koch Industries** and the **National Rifle Association (NRA)**. The bill expanded the long-standing right of self-defense by extending criminal and civil immunity to shooters who feel threatened by another, creating a statutory “right to stand his or her ground and meet force with force, including deadly force. . .”
- **ALEC** has an annual budget of approximately \$7 million and claims that hundreds of its model bills become law each year. It hides its inner workings, including the fact that its model bills often are drafted and always are pre-approved by corporations and lobbyists. **ALEC** calls itself the nation’s largest group of state legislators, but 98% of its funding comes from corporations and sources other than dues from elected officials.
- In August 2005, in Grapevine, Tex., **NRA** lobbyist **Marion Hammer** asked legislators and lobbyists at a closed-door meeting of ALEC’s “Criminal Justice Task Force” to adopt the Florida “Castle Doctrine” bill as an ALEC model bill. The NRA said her pitch “was well received,” and the bill was approved “unanimously.”¹
- At that time, ALEC’s public-private Criminal Justice Task Force was co-chaired by **Wal-Mart**²--the nation’s largest seller of guns and ammunition.³ ALEC’s staffer for the task force was **Chris Oswald** a former “State Liaison” for the **NRA**.
- Corporate representatives and state legislators on **ALEC** Task Forces have equal votes on proposed model legislation,⁴ so the Florida law was ratified by **Wal-Mart** and its 2005 public sector co-chair, **Texas Rep. Ray Allen**, along with other state legislators and corporate lobbyists. It was endorsed by a representative of the Koch-funded **Heritage Foundation**, according to minutes of the meeting issued by ALEC.⁵
- In September 2005, that bill was adopted by ALEC's National Board of Directors, which has a procedure to allow model bills to be approved if there is no objection. The public sector portion of the board was chaired by Georgia state Rep. Earl Ehrhart; the corporate board included Koch Industries, Altria (parent of Philip Morris), Coors, Bell South, and Verizon. (ALEC says its

¹ http://www.prwatch.org/files/NRA_2005.png; see also, http://bit.ly/PRW_Trayvon

² http://www.prwatch.org/files/Wal-Mart_Co-Chair.png

³ http://www.prwatch.org/files/ALEC_minutes_05.png

⁴ http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/Decoding_ALEC_PR

⁵ http://www.prwatch.org/files/ALEC_minutes_05.png

corporate board does not vote. Corporations and elected officials have an equal vote in the task forces, where model bills are adopted, however.)

- At the next **ALEC** Criminal Justice Task Force meeting, in Coeur D’Alene, Idaho, in 2006, **the NRA’s representative to ALEC, Tara Mica**, reported on the “continued success” in securing passage of ALEC’s “Castle Doctrine” bill in other states.⁶
- In 2007, an **ALEC “Legislative Report Card,”** boasted that the **ALEC/NRA Castle Doctrine** bill had been introduced or passed in numerous states.⁷ ALEC also highlighted ALEC legislators who had introduced versions of the model bill, including **Texas state Sen. Jeff Wentworth** and **Rep. Joe Driver**.⁸
- To date, more than two dozen states have adopted Castle Doctrine bills with **ALEC/ NRA DNA**.⁹ Wisconsin Gov. **Scott Walker**, an ALEC alum, signed into law an **NRA-backed** bill with some provisions similar to the **ALEC** bill in 2011. Similar bills are pending in other states.
- The Florida bill that became the ALEC model was signed on April 26, 2005 by Gov. **Jeb Bush**, with the **NRA’s** lobbyist, **Marion Hammer**, standing alongside.¹⁰
- **NRA** President **Wayne LaPierre** said **NRA** lobbyist and former president **Hammer** “conceived” of the Florida bill and lobbied it into law.¹¹ She ridiculed opponents of the bill, calling them hysterical, and helped the bill’s co-sponsors, **Florida state Sen. Durell Peaden** (R-Crestview) and **Rep. Dennis Baxley** (R-Ocala), get it passed.
- In 2005, **Peaden** was an **ALEC** leader, serving on the Executive Committee of the “Health and Human Services Task Force.”¹²
- **Baxley**, a former head of the **Christian Coalition** in Florida, is also a member of **ALEC**. His legislative resume includes sponsorship of bills creating license plates honoring the Confederacy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.,¹³ Opponents of the “Castle Doctrine” bill predicted it would immunize racially motivated killers. Baxley recently said the law should not protect **Trayvon Martin’s** shooter.
- As noted by **ALECexposed.org**, ALEC’s current crime task force, which continues to endorse the ALEC/NRA Castle Doctrine, includes Florida **Rep. Ray Pilon**.¹⁴
- The **NRA** has pushed several other ALEC “model” bills to change state laws on firearms: [http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/Guns, Prisons, Crime, and Immigration](http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/Guns,_Prisons,_Crime,_and_Immigration).

⁶ http://www.prwatch.org/files/ALEC_minutes_05.png

⁷ http://web.archive.org/web/20081106040540/http://www.alec.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Legislative_Scorecard

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ <http://web.archive.org/web/20110111055017/http://www.nraaila.org/Issues/FactSheets/Read.aspx?id=204>

¹⁰ http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/File:NRA_lobbyist_watches_Jeb_sign.png, available via <http://bit.ly/GH2zwp>

¹¹ http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2005/05/01/nra_plans_to_push_expanded_gun_law_beyond_florida/

¹² http://www2a.cdc.gov/phlp/conferencecd2005/docs/bio_peaden.pdf

¹³ http://bit.ly/TP_Baxley

¹⁴ http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Public_Safety_and_Elections_Task_Force