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RUMSFELD BLINKS

At the eleventh hour and the fifty-ninth minute, it appears that DoD has averted a public relations nightmare by changing certain aspects of the deployment policy for soldiers. Someone must have gotten wind that [this ad by TomPaine.com](#) was going to run.

Environmentalists = Terrorists

The New Math

Karen Charman is an investigative journalist specializing in agriculture, health and the environment.

Have you ever signed a petition in support of an environmental or animal-rights issue? Do you belong to the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, or Greenpeace? Have you publicly protested some environmental or animal rights outrage? If legislation crafted and promoted by the ultra-conservative American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) becomes law, these fundamental rights of American citizenship could become illegal.

Exploiting the current political climate against terrorism, ALEC has teamed up with the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, a pro-hunting group, to create a model "Animal and Ecological Terrorism Act." The legislation is part of an intense backlash against increasingly effective and vocal citizen campaigns aimed at halting -- and holding corporations accountable for -- environmental, animal-rights and public health abuses.

Forging this kind of marriage to produce anti-progressive legislation is old hat to ALEC, now in its thirtieth year of policy bending. With an annual budget of nearly \$6 million, ALEC's funders read like a Who's Who of the right, and include organizations like the National Rifle Association, Family Research Council and Heritage Foundation. It counts conservative activists and politicians such as Jesse Helms, Jack Kemp and Henry Hyde among its alumni. Enron, Phillip Morris (now Altria) and several oil companies rank among ALEC's corporate sponsors. And to bring the loop full-circle, ALEC boasts 2,400 state lawmakers representing all 50 states among its current members.

In light of this, it's hardly shocking that ALEC is no


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friend to green groups. According to a 2002 report by Defenders of Wildlife and the Natural Resources Defense Council, corporations and trade associations "funnel cash through ALEC to curry favor with state lawmakers through junkets and other largesse in the hopes of enacting special interest legislation -- all the while keeping safely outside the public eye."

The strategy obviously works. ALEC spokesperson David Wargin estimates that out of about 1,000 ALEC model bills introduced in the last legislative session, 200 were enacted.

The Animal and Ecological Terrorism Act may be next. Intended for states, it criminalizes virtually all forms of environmental or animal-rights advocacy. Versions of the proposed law were introduced in Texas in February and in New York in March. New York Assembly member Richard Smith (D-Blasdell), who introduced that state's bill, says four or five other states have also expressed interest.

The Texas bill defines an "animal rights or terrorist organization" as "two or more persons organized for the purpose of supporting any politically motivated activity intended to obstruct or deter any person from participating in an activity involving animals or... natural resources." The bill adds that "'Political motivation' means an intent to influence a government entity or the public to take a specific political action." Language in the New York bill is similarly broad.

Michael Ratner, a human rights lawyer and vice-president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, has never seen such draconian legislation in the United States.

"This is unique. Even under the definition of domestic terrorism in the Patriot Act, you have to at least do something that arguably threatens people's lives," he says. "The definitional sections of this legislation are so broad that they sweep within them basically every environmental and animal-rights organization in the country."

Sandy Liddy Bourne, director of the ALEC task force that came up with the model bill, insists the legislation is narrowly targeted at environmental and animal-rights extremists who blow up buildings or destroy research facilities.

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"We're certainly not attempting to interfere with anybody's civil rights to protest or express their opinion on environmental or animal-rights issues," she says. However, "there are legitimate business operations across our country that are being targeted by environmental extremists, and it's time to bring this kind of activity to a halt."

Ratner points out that there are laws against trespassing, vandalism, destruction of property, disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace. The only reason for this legislation, he says, is to eliminate all forms of dissent, including the time-honored democratic traditions of nonviolent, peaceful protest and civil disobedience.

Civil rights advocates who thought the Patriot Act was bad should turn their attention to this legislation. Because if ALEC is successful, millions of people might just lose the only tool they have left: the right to loud and public dissent.

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