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Manitoba PCs plagiarizing legislation from an American corporate lobby group

Every university student learns the importance of honest attribution of sources of information. Failure to do so is plagiarism and constitutes academic misconduct resulting in a failing grade or worse. Legislators should be held to the same stringent standards as students. Unfortunately, Premier Brian Pallister and his cabinet have not been entirely forthcoming about the origins of their legislative agenda. Both the language and intent of bills submitted by his government borrow heavily from American open source legislation prepared by a corporate lobby group: the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC works behind the scenes to provide fill-in-the-blanks legislation to Republican legislators to promote their corporate, right-wing agenda: making government as small and taxes as low as possible, bringing in anti-union right-to-work acts, voter suppression laws and even stand your-ground NRA pro-gun legislation.

Manitoba is now subject to this legislative manipulation. Bill 57, the Protection of Critical Infrastructure finds its original source in Oklahoma House Bills 1123 and 2128. These were aimed at curbing mass protest by Indigenous communities in the wake of the Standing Rock pipeline protest in North Dakota. The Pallister government has introduced this legislation as their own without attributing the real source: the ALEC model bill crafted out of the Oklahoma legislation.

Further examples of such plagiarism can be found in the Education Modernization Act (Bill 64). The Pallister government proposes to appoint between 6 and 11 people to serve on a provincial advisory board for a new provincial education authority. From [ALEC's model bill for the K-12 Efficiency Commission](#), we see a proposed educational authority comprised of nine voting members, who are similarly appointed by the government of the day.

Academics are trained to spot plagiarism, and here the spotting was easy. MOFA sees this legislative plagiarism as another step toward remodeling Manitoba after Tennessee, Alabama, Oklahoma and Mississippi. All are deep red Republican states, with among the worst public services in the nation. All rank at or near the bottom of the nation for both health care and education outcomes. Mr. Pallister has openly stated his goal to model Manitoba's post-secondary

education system after the state of Tennessee: again, a state near the bottom of the country in performance in higher education.

What is ALEC and who funds it?

ALEC is a corporate lobby group that networks with Republican legislators to promote their mutual corporate agenda: downsizing government and cutting taxes. The legislators benefit by not having to write their own legislation; and they obtain corporate funding from ALEC donors. ALEC pretends to be non-partisan but in reality it is a Republican / Conservative lobby group that according to Newt Gingrich, is their “[most effective organization](#).”

ALEC holds conferences where corporate sponsors and legislators rub shoulders with one another: there you will find people like former U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos; publishing executive Steve Forbes; and former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich. The corporate sponsors of ALEC include a rogue’s gallery of Big Tobacco, Big Pharma, the fossil fuel industry, and the Koch Brothers. They advance their agenda by providing model bills to Republican legislators and then provide public support when the legislation is introduced.

ALEC provides fill-in-the-blank bills for legislators who lack the skill to write original legislation on their own. These have been introduced in all 50 states, and now their sinister reach extends north of the border. Mr. Pallister’s Bill 57, The Protection of Critical Infrastructure Act, and a similar bill in Alberta, Bill 1: The Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, passed into law in June 2020, were both plagiarized, without credit, from the [ALEC Critical Infrastructure Protection Act](#).

Time is running out for Mr. Pallister: he and his policies are deeply unpopular with Manitobans as every recent poll shows. Manitobans do not want to model their province, its government and public services, on backward American states. The Pallister policies have already done enormous damage. His inept handling of the COVID19 crisis is directly attributable to his deep cuts to our health care system. Now he wants to go further by slashing public education and restricting personal freedom. And to do so, he is sneaking in American legislation without owning up to its original source: an American corporate lobby group. Premier Pallister in mandate letters to his ministers states that “Manitobans deserve a government that reflects their values: honesty, integrity and a commitment to hard work.” We agree, and while we have no doubt that the Premier and his ministers work hard, they could certainly improve on honesty and integrity. The Premier could start by being honest about where he is sourcing his legislation.

If Mr. Pallister genuinely believes that Manitobans want an American-style Republican government, then he should call an election and run on that bold proposal: he failed to mention it in either of the last two elections.