

August 27, 2018

Altria Group, Inc.
6601 W. Broad Street.
Richmond, VA 23230

To:

Howard A. Willard, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Murray R. Garnick, Executive Vice President and General Counsel
William F. Gifford, Vice Chairman and Chief Financial Officer
Jennifer Hunter, Senior Vice President, Communications and Corporate Citizenship

We write to urge that you cease your association with and stop funding the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which recently provided a platform for white supremacist, sexist, and racist rhetoric at their annual meeting.

At its August 2018 convention in New Orleans, ALEC had David Horowitz – a right-wing extremist – as one of its featured speakers at two parts of the conference. Horowitz’s Freedom Center has been identified by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) as a group “giving anti-Muslim voices and radical ideologies a platform to project hate and misinformation.”

During his time in front of a cheering crowd, Horowitz painted an apocalyptic version of America where the white race and what he calls traditional Christian values are under attack by a “socialist” Democratic Party and their non-white allies. He claimed that public schools are “indoctrination and recruitment centers for the Democratic party and its socialist left.” He claimed that “school curricula had been turned over to racist organizations like Black Lives Matter and terrorist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood.”

These extreme assertions are already vitriolic enough on their own to justify denouncing Horowitz’s role at ALEC. However, Horowitz also attacked the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which guarantees marriage equality for all Americans, and suggested that states should be able to overturn the decision, even going as far as claiming that the Supreme Court is “the greatest institutional threat to constitutional order.” His remarks at ALEC made additional hateful references to the LGBTQ community, people of color, public education, feminism and gender equality, and women’s access to reproductive healthcare.

According to a legislator and a reporter at the conference, Horowitz also spoke on a panel where he defended Trump calling a woman a “pig,” claimed the Constitution’s 3/5 compromise was not about blacks, denounced its critics as “communists,” and argued that the United States could only have been founded by Protestant Christians. Although ALEC was in control of these two presentations, not once did an ALEC representative interject to correct Horowitz or distance itself from his extremist claims.

This isn’t just rhetoric – Horowitz’s goal at the ALEC conference was to build support among the audience for a new constitutional convention via Article V of the U.S. Constitution to embed his racist and reactionary agenda in our Constitution. By featuring Horowitz not just once but

twice at the meeting, ALEC has shown it is more interested in redefining “the American way of life” in an undemocratic, authoritarian, and white supremacist fashion. ALEC’s lobbying for a dangerous Article V convention to fundamentally rewrite our Constitution, as well as its lobbying for legislation that restricts and criminalizes the First Amendment in state legislatures, are just two examples of how out of step ALEC is with your company’s stated values.

Make no mistake, your continued financial support of ALEC is an endorsement of this dangerous vision for our country. Your company’s funding of ALEC helped underwrite its conference where Horowitz was given two platforms to spread his hate and attacks.

Although ALEC claims to merely support “free-market values” and “the American way of life,” its agenda points to creating a regressive, exclusionary, and divisive version of society that it pushes behind closed doors, skirting state gift and lobbying laws at lavish resorts where legislators and lobbyists vote as equals on bills at ALEC task forces without the public or press present. ALEC has pushed numerous reactionary measures to become law—including draconian proof of citizenship to vote requirements, repealing environmental safeguards while denying climate change science, expanding detention of immigrants, preempting states and localities from setting their own laws when it comes to gun safety and public health, and enacting “Stand Your Ground” bills. ALEC even has a legacy of standing with South Africa against the anti-apartheid divestment movement. It now appears ALEC is providing an open platform for spreading new extremist and white supremacist claims by the far-right.

In recent years, we as a nation have seen white supremacists and racists feel emboldened to come out of the shadows, but we have also seen the power of organizing against oppression in all corners of our society. We’ve seen everyday Americans from both political parties and corporate leaders stand up for equality and against hate, harassment, and discrimination. We must continue to speak out against the kind of hate and disinformation like Horowitz’s presentations at ALEC.

The undersigned organizations ask you to stand up for equality and American democracy at a time when we need to do everything in our power to protect and defend longstanding democratic norms against further erosion.

Democracy, freedom of speech, assembly, and expression, and the stability that those foundational ideals, have served as the bedrock for the success of our nation, and the success of your business. Your support of ALEC is incompatible with those ideals.

We ask Altria to make clear that it will not stand for the sort of toxic, inflammatory claims ALEC has embraced.

We urge you to stop funding and leave ALEC.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women

AFL-CIO
African American Ministers In Action
Alliance for Retired Americans
American Family Voices
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (APALA)
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Blue Future
Campaign for America's Future
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for Media and Democracy
ChangeLab Solutions
Coalition for Peace with Justice
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Color of Change
Common Cause
Communications Workers of America (CWA)
Courage Campaign
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress
Democracy 21
Democracy Initiative
Democracy Matters
End Citizens United
Equal Justice Society
Food & Water Watch
Foundation for a Smokefree America
Franciscan Action Network
Free Press
Greenpeace USA
Harrington Investments
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement
Jobs With Justice
Main Street Alliance
Make the Road New York
Money Out Voters In
Move to Amend
Movement to End Racism and Islamophobia
Muslim Public Affairs Council
NAACP
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Lawyers Guild
National Partnership for Women & Families
Network of Spiritual Progressives
New Progressive Alliance
Newground Social Investment
NorthStar Asset Management
OneAmerica
People Demanding Action
People For The American Way
Presente.org
Pride at Work
Progress Iowa
Progress Michigan
Progressive Caucus Action Fund
ProgressNow Arizona
Public Citizen
Public Justice Center
RootsAction Education Fund
SC Progressive Network
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sierra Club
Stand Up To ALEC
The Laura Flanders Show
Union of Concerned Scientists
Unitarian Universalist Association
United We Dream
UnKoch My Campus
Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press
Working America
Workplace Fairness
Zevin Asset Management
#VOTEPROCHOICE