# THE BEST

# STATE POLITICIAN\$

# MONEY CAN BUY

We have the receipts. We demand a refund.

TASBESTASA



# INTRODUCTION

No matter what we look like or where we come from, Floridians believe in caring for our families and leaving things better for those to come. But for too long, a handful of politicians have let greedy corporations rig the rules to favor their campaign contributions over our contributions to each other. Then they have tried to divide us, fueling fears based on our skin color, accent, and faith—hoping we blame each other for our challenges, and not realize that poverty is a policy choice made by policymakers.

Case in point; Gov. Ron DeSantis and leaders in the Florida Legislature have enabled corporate monopolies and extremist billionaires, handed out billions of our public dollars in tax breaks to the wealthy, and delivered no-bid contracts and multimillion-dollar infrastructure projects to their personal donors, all while gutting public programs designed to protect workers and consumers alike.

The goal of this report is to unmask the corporate drivers of this political strategy and shed light on the anti-democratic tactics being employed, so that everyday people can see them clearly and respond with positive action. This report exposes the corporations and billionaires who drive this strategy forward, and showcases how the often coined "culture wars" are intrinsically linked to the collective fight for our freedoms—for fair access to education, healthcare, wealth, and indeed, the very foundations of our democracy.

The fact is that for decades, major corporations and their elected allies in the Florida Legislature have moved forward a strategy to eliminate oversight and checks on corporate power, widening racial and economic disparities in our state. The appalling injustice of the economic systems profiled in this report disproportionately denies people of color, women, immigrants, LGBTQ+ Floridians, and all working families a fair shot to success in this state.

It is time for a government that works for us,who cares for all of us, and who ensures our economy works for us all, not a select elite few. From Pensacola to Key West, we believe all Floridians deserve a government that puts people first, not greedy corporations.

### We have the receipts.

Corporate donors like Big Sugar producers Florida Crystals and U.S. Sugar; monopoly electric utility Florida Power & Light; forprofit hospital chain HCA Healthcare; themepark owners Universal Studios and Walt Disney World; health insurer Florida Blue, private-prison operator Geo Group, bigbox retailers and low-wage employers like Walmart, and big real-estate interests like corporate members of the Florida Realtors and the Florida Apartment Association all benefit, while Florida consumers lose.

## A NOTE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FINANCE TOTALS USED IN THIS REPORT

To determine how much money corporations have contributed to legislative leaders in Tallahassee, we compiled all campaign contributions of \$5,000 or more over the past year (since March 15, 2022), to political committees controlled by Gov. Ron DeSantis (Friends of Ron DeSantis) and six key legislative leaders: Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (Working Together for Florida), Senate Budget Chairman Doug Broxson (Floridians for Limited Government), Senate President-designate Ben Albritton (Friends of Ben Albritton, Advancing Florida Agriculture), House Speaker Paul Renner (Conservatives for Principled Leadership, Florida Foundation for Liberty), House Budget Chairman Tom Leek (Living Life with Purpose) and House Speaker-designate Daniel Perez (Conservatives for Better Government, Miami United). All figures cited in this report come from that dataset.

# **DEMOCRACY**

A multiracial people-centered democracy is critical to our economic security. Our state government should reflect the people who live in this state and it is the inherent right of all Floridians have Florida state legislators who represent us, pass local laws and constitutional amendments, decide how our tax dollars are spent, and know whose money, and how much of it, is in our politics.

But major corporations and their elected allies in the Florida Legislature have moved forward a strategy to eliminate public oversight and democratic checks on corporate power. It is often corporate associations (groups of corporations coming together to hide under a single name like "Florida Chamber of Commerce" or "Florida Apartment Association") who do the dirty work, leading the efforts to lobby policymakers on behalf of a small group of large corporations. Multinational corporations are powerful players in these associations, despite claims that the associations represent small businesses. National corporations like Walmart, Publix, State Farm, Camden Property Trust, Blackstone, and NextEra Energy are just a few key actors in Florida and across all states. They write the rules that govern them, while the voices of Floridians are silenced in the State Capitol.

We witnessed this in countless committee hearings where hundreds of Floridians took off work and drove hours to Tallahassee to testify in opposition to these corporate-backed proposals, only to be shut down less than thirty seconds into their remarks. And we witnessed this in the legislation that passed, backed by shadowy national groups and associations that was designed to make it harder for Floridians to vote, nearly impossible to pass local laws, and easier for corporations and billionaires to influence our elections.

"I have dedicated my life's work to being a champion for issues of civil rights and voting access in the State of Florida. Voting is the bedrock of our democracy, yet we continue to put up barriers that make it harder for eligible citizens to cast their ballots. If we think back to Jim Crow-era legislation and analyze the strategies that the government was using to disenfranchise the Black vote. We can see those same strategies used today."

## Dr. LaVon Bracy

Director of Democracy Faith in Florida



### Legislation

Freedom To Vote
SB 7050 Makes it harder for grassroots
groups to help Floridians register to vote

Local Freedoms

SB 170 Allows corporations to block local laws from taking effect

HB 1417 Bans dozens of local renter protections across Florida

SB 1718 Bans local funding for nonprofits providing community ID cards

<u>HB 1069</u> Attacks LGBTQ+ kids, threatens teachers, and overrides local communities' decision making

SB 102 Bans current and all future local rent stabilization measures in the state

<u>HB 1281</u> Gas stove state mandate in support of the natural gas industry over other competitors

<u>SB 2502</u> Bans <u>local clean water fertilizer</u> <u>regulations</u> benefiting corporate polluters

Direct Democracy

HJR 129/SJR 1410 Defeated, but expect it again—backed by corporate special interests, this aims make it even more expensive for Floridians to pass amendments via the ballot

Transparency

SB 7050 Weakens campaign-finance transparency laws

SB 1616 Allows Ron DeSantis to hide travel and visitor records from the public

- S Republican Governors Association \$10,600,000
- S Republican State Leadership Committee \$1,075,000
- S Pharmaceutical Researchers & Manufacturers of America\* \$187,500
- § Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association \$126,228.71
- S Koch Industries \$50,000
- S Americans for Prosperity \$50,000

<sup>\*</sup>Major donor to the Heritage Action for America, which lobbied for SB 7050

# TAX BREAKS & PORK BARREL SPENDING

Taxing and spending are a government's most powerful tools. They are how our state leaders choose who to take money from and who to invest it in. They have clear choices: They can pass policies like "combined reporting," which would close tax loopholes exploited by the world's largest global corporations, and invest our tax dollars in community needs like housing, healthcare, education, public safety, and environmental protection. Or they can let corporations and billionaires skip out on paying what they owe in taxes, carve even more special-interest giveaways into the tax code, and underinvest in the policies and programs that would ensure economic stability and prosperity for all Floridians. Unfortunately, our state leaders continue to choose the latter option. This session alone, Florida lawmakers considered corporate tax giveaways costing Floridians approximately \$17.8 billion in resources for investment over the next five years, while refusing to close corporate tax loopholes.

## Legislation

<u>HB 1</u> Millionaire tax break privatizing public schools and costing Floridians <u>potentially \$4</u> <u>billion</u> in the first year alone.

HB 5 Preserves multimillion-dollar tax break that primarily benefits Universal Studios

<u>HB 5001</u> Includes a special interest contract carveout for a warehouse vendor

HB 5003 \$30 million increase in Lottery payments to stores that sell tickets

HB 7063 \$50 million in subsidies for Gulfstream Park, Tampa Bay Downs, and the thoroughbred racing industry

HB 7063 \$260 million business rent tax cut

HB 7063 \$7 million tax break for homebuilders, restaurants, and others that buy gas stoves

HB 7063 \$1 million annual tax break on fossil fuel production

HB 7063 \$1.8 million tax break on natural gas vehicle fuel

- S Publix Super Markets \$1,240,000
- S Comcast Corp./NBC Universal \$1,096,236.72
- S Dream Finders Homes \$160,000
- S LifeScience Logistics \$150,000
- Sulfstream Park\* \$85,000
- § Tampa Bay Downs\*\* \$100,000
- Sunshine Gasoline Distributors \$97,500
- § J.J. Taylor Companies \$60,000
- § Florida Public Utilities Co. \$15,000
- \$ Jeff Yass\*\*\* \$2,500,000

- \$ Charter School USA \$380,000
- Academia/School Development HC Finance\$250,000
- S John Kirtley \$118,500

Our Florida state legislators decide how to spend our tax dollars. Billions of dollars that can fund community needs like housing, healthcare, education, and childcare. Our state legislators can also decide to spend our taxes towards things that only benefit the elite few. Things like new corporate tax breaks and favors for campaign donors. But this is the people's money. Find out the cost of corporate giveaways with our People's Budget Calculator.

<sup>\*</sup>Includes an affiliated political committee

<sup>\*\*</sup>Includes Tampa Bay Downs & its owners

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>Major school-choice funder

# HOUSING

We believe every Floridian should be able to find and keep safe and afford housing. Consumer protections like rent stabilization, right to working air-conditioning, fair warning of rent increases and evictions, and the right to legal representation in eviction proceedings allows landlords to earn fair profits without forcing working Floridians out of their homes. Basic protections for tenants means tenants have stability, and can save towards buying a home of their own, too. All homeowners should have safe, secure, and stable housing without having to worry about skyrocketing property insurance rates and energy rate hikes. Every Floridian should have choice in housing and energy, not corporate monopolies for the politically connected. But this session, a small yet deep pocketed group of corporations and multinational investors put forward an aggressive profiteering agenda. Corporate landlords were confident Florida lawmakers would be their "lapdogs rather than watchdogs." That assessment appears to be correct.

Legislation

HB 1417 Protects predatory landlords by eliminating local renters' rights laws

<u>SB 102</u> Subsidizes landlords while banning local rent stabilization laws

<u>HB 133</u>Allows landlords to charge a new perpetual junk fees

SB 360 Shields homebuilders from lawsuits over shoddy construction

SB 264 Mandates discrimination towards immigrants trying to buy a home

Greedy corporations, multinational investors, and the ultra-wealthy are raking in record profits while Floridians are being priced out of the state. Developers, property insurers, and big real estate interests donate millions of dollars to electoral campaigns. Florida For All's Priced Out of Paradise Report released last year digs deeper into unchecked corporate greed, political ambition, and Florida's housing affordability crisis.



- James B. Whitley\* \$1,500,000
- § Florida REALTORS \$1,475,000
- Sestcor\*\* \$375,000
- § Florida Apartment Association \$202,500
- Metro Development Group \$200,000
- Stennar Corp. \$170,000

<sup>\*</sup>Co-founder and COO of apartment developer Landmark Properties
\*\*Includes a Vestcor-led political committee (Keeping

Florida Affordable)

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>Includes Lennar-linked companies (Tread Standard, Greyter Water Systems USA)

# ENERGY, CONSERVATION, AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Floridians all have a right to clean air and clean water, regardless of our race, class, or if we live in an urban community or rural community. Floridians also need the power to hold corporations polluting our communities accountable. We want to treat climate change like the existential threat to our planet that it is, and do far more to promote renewable energy and support a just energy transition for all Floridians, not just the wealthy few. We want every Floridian to have energy freedom; the choice of where their energy comes rather than being trapped by monopolies, and the opportunity to switch to solar and be independent from utility companies. We want all public buildings in Florida to be equipped with solar panels too. We want to respect the will of voters who want to clean up our waterways, protect our springs, and save our coral reefs. We want local communities to be able to address the climate crisis with innovative local solutions, and we want the state to correct the systematic racism that leads to communities of color disproportionately being impacted by corporate polluters and high energy costs. Unfortunately, these goals were not met this session. Instead, a barrage of bills harming our environment to the benefit of corporate polluters were passed.

## Legislation

HB 125 Incentivizes the privatization of publicly-owned water systems

SB 250 Protects irresponsible power companies who cause power outages

<u>HB 1645</u> Paves the road for possible privatization of Gainesville Regional Utilities

HB 799 Props up a multibillion-dollar chemical company

SB 540 Helps real-estate developers to muzzle local opposition

SB 718 Makes it harder for local residents to block urban sprawl subdivisions

HB 1191 Enables the use of radioactive phosphate in road construction

<u>HB 1281</u> Forces local communities to continue using fossil fuels

HB 5003 Forbids local communities from blocking the use of polluting lawn fertilizers

<u>HB 3</u> Protects corporate polluters by preventing investments in clean-energy

- \$3,910,813.00
- Florida Power & Light/NextEra Energy \$1,970,370.77
- \$720,000
- § Florida Natural Gas Association \$40,000
- \$ Adam Sinn (energy trader)\* \$1,250,000
- **⑤** U.S. Sugar Corp. \$675,000
- \$545,000
- \$ Florida Crystals \$280,000

- Seading Builders of America \$130,000
- § Florida Home Builders Association \$100,000
- TruGreen \$45,000
- § Huntsman Corp. \$27,000
- \*Donations through Rural Route 3 Holdings \*\*Includes donations from a Mosaic-led political committee (Florida Phosphate PC)



# HEALTHCARE

Every Floridian deserves access to quality and affordable healthcare. We can do this by expanding Medicaid, just like 40 other states around the country, both red states and blue states, have done. We want to protect bodily autonomy for all Floridians, including for people who are pregnant and for LGBTQ+ Floridians. We want to ensure every single Floridian with a disability has the support and care they need to thrive. We want to ensure our Seniors can thrive, and that our caretakers are paid a living wage and have the support needed to do their job and care for our loved ones. We want to solve the critical staffing and patient care crisis in Florida hospitals and nursing homes by making sure caregivers are properly respected, protected, paid, and staffed. And we want state legislators who put patients' rights before the profits of the health insurance industry. Unfortunately, this legislative session corporate and out-of-state interests pushed an extremist agenda that leaves more adults and children uninsured and losing access to essential healthcare.

## Legislation

SB 300 Bans abortion after six weeks

SB 252Allows medical providers to discriminate against patients

SB 254 Prevents access to gender affirming care for kids and adults

SB 1718 Hospital data requirements threatening immigrant healthcare access

HB 721 Lets insurance companies profit off of Florida's lack of a paid family leave law

Fifty-two organizations sent a letter to Gov. Ron DeSantis and agency heads at the Department of Children and Families and Agency for Health Care Administration calling for a pause in the state's Medicaid redetermination process, which — in the first month following the end of federal "continuous coverage" provisions — has resulted in 250,000 Floridians having their coverage terminated. Eighty-two percent of those had their cases closed for procedural or "red tape" reasons, not necessarily because they were no longer eligible.

- § Centene Corp. \$1,110,000
- 3 UnitedHealth Group \$310,000
- \$ HCA Healthcare \$270,000
- \$ CVS \$90,000
- Pfizer\$40,000

# **EDUCATION**

All Floridians deserve a strong and healthy system of public schools that gives every child in our state, regardless of where they are from, what they look like, or how much money their family has, the opportunity to receive a worldclass education that sets them up for future success. We want to increase salaries for all public school teachers, college professors, and education support staff, in order to recruit and retain our best educators. And we want the freedom to teach accurately and truthfully, without interference from politicians. We want quality pre-kindergarten for all, wraparound services in public schools to support all children and to restore the full value of Bright Futures college scholarships so that more Floridians can afford college. This was not the agenda of the Florida Legislature. This session we witnessed a hostile takeover of every level of our public education system by extremists and profit-driven interests. Their goal is to ensure that the most dynamic and diverse generation of Floridians is denied a high-quality education and a chance to succeed in this state, while profiteering from our education system by undercutting workers rights, privatizing our public schools, and giving millionaires and billionaires our tax dollars for youchers to send their kids to private schools.

Legislation

<u>HB 1</u> Millionaire tax break privatizing public schools and potentially costing Floridians <u>\$4</u> <u>billion</u> in the first year alone.

<u>HB 1069</u> Attacks LGBTQ+ kids, threatens teachers, and overrides local communities decision making

<u>HB 1521</u> Undermines LGBTQ+ students access to educational opportunities by criminalizing students for using the bathroom in their schools

HB 1259 Strips more funding from our public schools and gives it to private charter schools

HB 657 Allows for-profit vendors to operate school-zone speeding cameras

<u>HB 5001</u> Gives \$213.4 million for charter school construction

SB 266 Dismantles academic freedom and professional opportunities for students who cannot afford private higher education options

#### **Corporate Money**

- \$ Jeff Yass\* \$2,500,000
- S Charter School USA \$380,000
- S Academia/School Development HC Finance \$250,000
- 5 John Kirtley \$118,500

\*Major school-choice funder



# **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The current system of mass incarceration targets communities of color and working people, denying these communities equal opportunity to succeed in our state while using their arrests to generate huge profits for the prison industry-with our tax dollars. Those industries are large contributors to political campaigns and hire influential corporate lobbyists, too. Floridians deserve better- our tax dollars should be spent on data-driven policies that keep us safe. This means ending over-incarceration and racial disparities in Florida's criminal justice system and repealing outdated mandatory minimum sentences that are proven not to work. To instead prioritize public safety and maintain human dignity through rehabilitation and mental health and substance abuse treatment. Proven approaches like these save taxpayer money, ensure survivors of crime are made whole, and make our communities safer by reducing recidivism. We also need to ensure every Floridian, regardless of income, can afford to access the justice system. Running our courts on criminal fees and fines only keeps people in poverty. Our state government needs to fund the courts and pay our State Attorneys and Public Defenders fair salaries to ensure access to the courts for all Floridians. We also need to separate federal immigration enforcement from local law enforcement, so that all communities feel safe to report crimes, and our state tax dollars are spent to keep everyone safe, not make more profits for the immigrant detention industry. And we need to invest in education, housing, and healthcare in this state, so that every Floridian has the opportunity to succeed. Unfortunately, the Legislature did none of these things this session. Instead, they criminalized immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, and abortion providers while helping private prisons,

immigrant detention centers, and gun manufacturers make more profits from our tax dollars.

### Legislation

SB 1718 Anti-immigrant legislation criminalizing working families, hospitals, and businesses

HB 365 Criminalizes substance abuse even further instead of treating as public health issue

SB 450 Makes it easier for the state to sentence people to death

HB 543 Permitless carry of firearms, increasing profits for gun manufacturers and shops

HB 3 Punishes banks that won't lend to private prisons and prohibits socially conscious investing with public funds

<u>HB 1521</u> Criminalizes Floridians and tourists for using the appropriate public restroom

SB 300 6 week abortion ban designed to criminalize people for seeking and providing abortions

<u>HB 1359</u> Expands ineffective mandatory minimum sentencing that further incarcerates substance abuse and addiction

SB 7050 Jim-Crow-era policies to confuse, intimidate, and ultimately criminalize voters

- \$1,002,500
- S CoreCivic \$10,000
- § American Traffic Solutions \$295,000
- § RedSpeed Florida \$15,000



# **WORKER POWER**

All workers should be paid a living wage, have affordable and quality healthcare, and have the right to collectively bargain for better pay and benefits. We want a stronger safety net that doesn't force laid-off workers to try and survive on some of the worst unemployment benefits in the country. We want a state that investigates and punishes employers who steal their workers' wages. We want guaranteed sick time and paid family medical leave for all workers so they can afford to take a day off from work if they are sick or must care for a loved one who is sick. We want basic protections of water, rest, and shade for our farmworkers, roofers, and outdoor workers who labor outside in the brutal Florida heat. The Legislature did not act on these things. They instead undercut the health, safety, and prosperity of working Floridians. No one is safe from the corporate agenda; not public workers, farmworkers, baseball players, or even astronauts.

## Legislation

<u>SB 256</u> Weakens unions representing teachers, 911 dispatchers, nurses and more

SB 892 Allows billionaire Major League Baseball owners to pay subminimum wages to minor leaguers

SB 1318 Protects billionaire-owned Blue Origin, SpaceX and Boeing from employee lawsuits after explosions or crashes

SB 1718 Targets and terrorizes undocumented immigrant workers across the state

## **Corporate Money**

§ Florida Chamber of Commerce \$2,880,192.37 "Florida workers are the backbone of our state's economy. SB 256 is a direct attack on people like me that serve kids and families in our public schools. Our communities are struggling with housing and healthcare costs; I wish our legislators would focus on this instead of attacking my union."

#### Zaundra Goner

Bus Driver Pinellas County School District

- S Associated Industries of Florida \$2,140,000
- S Club for Growth \$2,000,000
- § Joe Ricketts\* \$1,000,000
- § John Childs\*\* \$1,000,000
- (5) Charles B. Johnson\*\*\* \$211,835
- 5 The Boeing Co. \$110,000

<sup>\*</sup>Ricketts' children own the Chicago Cubs

<sup>\*\*</sup>Major Club for Growth donor

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>Principal owner of the San Francisco Giants

# **CONSUMERS**

The state of Florida has a responsibility to protect consumers from price gouging, malpractice, and monopolies. Unfortunately, we see the Legislature protecting corporations more often; making it more difficult for consumers to sue corporations for damages, allowing corporations to charge consumers higher interest rates and even more junk fees, and approving utility rake hikes, to name just a few. Consumers and workers alike deserve a watchdog; but what we have is a lapdog to corporate greed.

### **Corporate Legislation**

HB 637 Limits consumers' choices when buying new electric cars

<u>HB 837</u> Protects irresponsible corporations and insurance companies who stonewall legitimate claims from civil lawsuits

<u>HB 1071</u> Allows Walmart to ignore local opposition when building drone-delivery ports in store parking lots

<u>HB 1267</u> Lets predatory installment loan lenders nearly double their interest rates\*\*

<u>HB 721</u> Lets insurance companies profit off of Florida's lack of a paid family leave law\*

SB 7052 Lets insurance companies hide profits from regulators

<u>HB 133</u>Allows landlords to charge perpetual junk fees

## **Corporate Money**

(5) Heritage Insurance \$580,000

- Slide Insurance \$555,000
- S American Integrity Insurance \$337,000
- S American Council of Life Insurers\* \$115,000
- State Farm \$86,000
- \$ Allstate \$57,500
- § Florida Automobile Dealers Association \$652,500
- S Charter Communications \$595,000
- \$ FCCI Insurance\$452,500
- S Norman Braman/Braman Motors \$400,000
- \$355,500
- § Anheuser-Busch \$245,589.76
- Walmart\$260,000
- § Florida Financial Services Association \$130,000

\*HB 721 was based on model legislation written by the The American Council of Life Insurers (ACLI) \*\*Floridians forced Governor Ron DeSantis to veto this legislation in June, we should assume it will be back

# WE CAN WIN TOGETHER

Ron DeSantis and top lawmakers are Protectors of the Corporate Class, using their government powers to undercut workers and consumers, further enriching the deep-pocketed donors who bankroll their campaigns— with our tax dollars.

These same state politicians have worked to deny healthcare to millions, to privatize and profiteer off of our public education system, and to allow corporate influence to run rampant in our elections. They have attacked the local freedom of cities and counties that try to hold corporations accountable, and left everyday Floridians at the mercy of insurance companies, monopoly power companies, and corporate landlords. They have seized control of formerly independent institutions, from local prosecutors' offices to public colleges and universities, using the power of the state to not only punish opponents – but to appoint the Governor's political allies into high-paying, taxpayer funded jobs.

Politically-connected appointees, corporate consolidation, privatization, deregulation, tax giveaways, and abusive preemption are just a few of the policy tools leveraged by the deep-pocketed corporate lobby and allied state politicians to leverage an outsized influence in our state politics.

Part of the diabolical success of this strategy lies with its phantom nature. It both harms Floridians and robs us of political power while remaining opaque and difficult to understand. The results are profoundly anti-democratic. Leveraging lax campaign finance laws, corporations set the laws that govern them, while the voices of everyday Floridians are silenced.

Our goal with this report was to unmask the corporate drivers of this political strategy and bring their tactics into the light so that everyday people can see them clearly and respond. We know that when we expose corporate greed and center everyday Floridians in policy, we can win.

#### Join Us!

From Pensacola to Key West, all Floridians deserve a government that puts people first, not greedy special interests. Join us. TEXT PBF to 787753.





Paid for by Florida Rising Together, Inc.