



THE HIDDEN HEIST **MISSOURI**

***The Corporate-Backed Legislature vs.
the People of Missouri***



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INTRODUCTION

State Bans and the Rise of Corporate Power

Communities across the US today face growing threats to our physical, environmental, and economic survival, along with increasingly brazen corporate and authoritarian power grabs. While the second Trump regime has pulled back the curtain on egregious levels of corporate and billionaire control over our democracy, decades of “business as usual” corporate interference (in both red and blue states) got us here. Long before Trump entered office for a second term, corporations have worked through industry groups to covertly buy, bully, and bamboozle lawmakers and the American public in order to rig the rules of our economy and democracy to line their pockets — while they hide in plain sight. And as scholars have noted, the deeply unequal economic conditions that corporations have shaped and continue to benefit from in our country are essential conditions enabling authoritarianism to take root.¹

An important but largely invisible piece of the corporate quest to control American homes, workplaces, and democracy has been the rise of state laws — pushed by corporations and their lobbyists — that prevent communities from passing local policies protecting us at work, at home, and in our neighborhoods in the face of corporate greed. Through the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and industry lobbying groups, corporations have pushed these sweeping state bans — also referred to as “preemption” in some spaces — in all 50 states.² These corporate-driven state bans have grown at a rapid scale in recent years,³ undermining democracy and blocking local leaders and residents from working together to pass policies addressing basic needs for working families. Under state bans, essential protections like reasonable caps on rent, paid sick leave protections, incentives for affordable housing, and higher minimum wages have been stolen from millions of people.⁴

Long before Trump entered office for a second term, corporations have worked through industry groups to covertly buy, bully, and bamboozle lawmakers and the American public in order to rig the rules of our economy and democracy to line their pockets — while they hide in plain sight.



State bans have their roots in a white supremacist history, in which Southern white elites used state laws to suppress the political power and freedoms of Black people and thwart local efforts to advance more participatory, multiracial democracy.⁵ And this legacy continues in the racialized impacts of state bans today. Corporate-driven state bans harm the health and wellbeing of working people — especially working class communities of color — in myriad ways.⁶ The case studies in this report focus on state bans blocking local affordable housing and workers rights policies, which have disproportionately impacted communities of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, and disabled people.⁷ And increasingly, ideologically-driven politicians, their corporate allies, and billionaire donors are pushing state bans that overtly target the safety and fundamental freedoms of all of these groups in ever-more oppressive ways.⁸

Corporations have also used state bans — and the arena of state government — to test tactics they are now unleashing at the federal level to assert dangerous levels of control over our democracy while demolishing checks on their power and profit. Understanding this stealth strategy of corporate power — including the corporate actors behind these bans, the tactics they use, and how these bans have blocked our freedoms and derailed our democracy — is critical to fighting back against the corporate-backed authoritarianism harming us all.

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Missouri and the Corporate Assault on Working People

In solidly red states, the corporate stranglehold on state legislatures can be brazen, with unabashedly ideological forces working openly with lobbyists to advance and solidify corporate interests. Through decades of unchecked buying, bullying, and bamboozling, corporations and their allies have been able to advance sweeping bans on local policymaking that restrict nearly every avenue working people have to stay safe and take care of their families.

State after state, corporations use a similar set of tactics in their efforts to strip working people of our rights. Industry groups representing our country's largest corporations drive bans on labor standards, while claiming to advocate for the interests of small, local businesses. Using the facade of "mom and pop shops" to justify bans on local policymaking, these groups obscure the mega-corporate money and influence directing an agenda that hurts communities and small businesses alike. And when communities successfully push back on these bans by establishing wins for working families at the local and state level, corporations and their allies have employed egregious tactics to snatch hard-won policy gains — stealing wages and essential workplace protections and manipulating the tools of democracy to quash the will of the people by any means available.

This corporate assault has been particularly aggressive in Missouri, where a string of state bans on minimum wage standards directly stole wages from nearly 40,000 St. Louisians in 2017 — just three months after workers had successfully organized to win a higher wage.¹⁰ And in 2025, the state's industry groups used their political influence over the legislature to overturn a voter-approved measure that would have secured sick leave benefits for 728,000 Missourians across the state.¹¹ Using a suite of tactics including state bans, lawsuits, and attacks on citizen-driven ballot measure efforts, corporations and industry groups in Missouri have shown they're willing to go to immense lengths to deny even a modicum of economic security and dignity to Missouri's working families.

STOLEN WAGES AND SICK DAYS

A string of state bans stole wages from over

38,000

St. Louisians

Industry groups used their political influence to overturn sick leave for

728,000

Missourians across the state

WHAT ARE STATE BANS?

State laws — often pushed by corporations, their industry groups, and lobbyists — that prevent local communities from passing policies that create essential protections for working people in one or more issue area. Referred to as "preemption" in some spaces, state bans have become a tried and true strategy of the corporate deregulation agenda by dismantling existing local policies that check their power and profit — like local minimum wage ordinances — and blocking future ones from taking effect. Bans may 1) block communities from setting local standards that go beyond state law on a specific issue; 2) put strict limitations on how communities can set standards on a specific issue, or which aspects of the issue they can regulate at the local level; or 3) block communities from setting local standards on a specific issue, even when no state standard exists — thus shutting communities out of protections entirely (beyond the bare minimum of what is required by federal law).

State bans now exist in all 50 states, including some form of affordable housing or workers' rights related ban. We define these bans as:⁹

- ⚡ **Affordable housing bans:** any state bans that constrain communities' ability to pass local policies that support access to affordable housing — like rent stabilization, just cause eviction protections, and incentives for affordable housing.
- ⚡ **Workers' rights bans:** any state bans that constrain local communities' ability to pass policies that set baseline standards for working people — like minimum wage ordinances, paid leave requirements, and fair scheduling policies.

A HISTORY OF MISSOURI'S BLOCKED WAGE GAINS

Missourians have seen 10 years of corporate-driven repression of laws to improve standards for the state's lowest paid people. Corporations and their industry front groups have used any and all means at their disposal to block wage gains and workplace protections again and again, and the corporate stranglehold over the Missouri legislature has reliably resulted in state lawmakers overturning the decisions of local governments and the will of their own voters.

In 2015, first-term Missouri State Representative Dan Shaul — at the same time serving as both the State Director of the Missouri Grocers Association¹³ and the Chair of the Missouri Retailers Association¹⁴ — grew alarmed that environmental activism had resulted in local measures to do away with single-use plastic bags,¹⁵ including a proposed plastic bag policy that was being considered by the Columbia City Council.¹⁶ He introduced HB 722,¹⁷ a bill to block municipal governments from prohibiting, charging a fee for, or taxing the use of plastic bags. As the act made its way through the legislature, State Senator Mike Kehoe — now Missouri's Governor — added a provision to the bill that would ban local ordinances from raising the minimum wage¹⁸ above the state minimum of \$7.65 per hour.¹⁹ The state's corporate-backed business associations, including the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry²⁰ and the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB),²¹ joined the grocers and retailers associations to champion the bill.²² The legislation passed in May 2015,²³ barring any local wage increases after August 28, 2015.²⁴

That summer, residents in St. Louis and Kansas City worked with their city councils to pass ordinances raising the local minimum wage before the August 28 deadline. In July, Kansas City increased the hourly minimum to \$13

by 2020, with the first increase to \$8.50 set to go into effect on August 24.²⁵ In St. Louis, the City Council passed an ordinance to raise the wage to \$8.25 in October 2015, then gradually up to \$11 in 2018²⁶.

Corporations and their industry associations took immediate action against these community-led efforts to improve labor standards. In Kansas City, a front group called Missourians for Fair Wages — funded exclusively by individuals, businesses and associations in the hotel and restaurant industries²⁷ — filed for a ballot initiative to put the Council-passed ordinance to a public vote. The National Restaurant Association acknowledged this action was designed to delay implementation of the increase until the state ban went into effect.²⁸ After Governor Nixon vetoed the state minimum wage ban in July, the legislature overturned this veto in September — ultimately upholding the minimum wage ban as law.²⁹ In October, in response to the now standing state law, the Kansas City City Council repealed its ordinance before it was ever implemented.³⁰ Meanwhile, in St. Louis, corporate-backed industry groups including the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Missouri Restaurant Association, the Missouri Retailers Association, the NFIB, and the Associated Industries of Missouri sued to block the wage increase.³¹ That October, a Circuit Court judge issued an injunction against the St. Louis ordinance, blocking it from taking effect just hours before the new minimum wage was to begin.³²

In February 2017, however, the state Supreme Court ruled in favor of St. Louis, upholding the city's minimum wage law.³³ The injunction against the ordinance was lifted in May, and the new wage, now at \$10, finally became official almost two years after it was passed.³⁴ Industry groups immediately scrambled to make the 2015 ban



ban retroactive. The Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry worked with Representatives Shaul and Chipman on new legislation,³⁵ which prohibited any political subdivision from enacting a minimum wage higher than state law³⁶ — which over the previous two years, had risen only a nickel to \$7.70.³⁷ The legislature passed HB 1194 in May, effective in August.³⁸ The new law overturned the St. Louis minimum wage — just three months after it had taken effect.³⁹

With industry lobbyists and their allies in the Republican-controlled legislature using every means at their disposal to block local efforts to raise standards, labor and community organizers turned to the statewide initiative process to improve wages. In 2018, they collected over 120,000 signatures in support of a ballot initiative to raise the wage across the state.⁴⁰ That November, over 60% of Missouri voters approved Proposition B,⁴¹ which increased the wage to \$12 by 2023.⁴² The Chamber of Commerce and state industry associations expressed strong opposition to Proposition B⁴³ but did not appear from public records to have actively fought the initiative,⁴⁴ which provided a much-needed but far more modest increase than those under the local ordinances.

A few years later, 1.7 million Missourians voted to build on these standards by approving Proposition A, a November 2024 ballot measure that increased the wage to \$15 by 2026, and guaranteed up to seven sick days per year.⁴⁵ This time, the state's industry associations were ready. Just as they had fought the city ordinances, they turned to court challenges and the state legislature to try to overturn the measure. In December, the Missouri Grocers Association along with the Missouri Restaurant Association, the Associated Industries of Missouri, the NFIB, and the Missouri Chamber sued to void the initiative.⁴⁶ Using spurious technical arguments to overturn the will of 1.7 million Missouri voters, the groups alleged procedural irregularities related to Proposition A's ballot description, and argued that it is improper to address both wages and sick leave in one

proposition.⁴⁷ In April 2025, the state Supreme Court rejected those arguments and upheld the Proposition A election results.⁴⁸

Industry groups had hedged their bets, however, lobbying the state house to weaken or reverse Proposition A even as their challenge made its way through the legal system — and those efforts intensified following their defeat in court. Industry representatives such as Buddy Lahl of the Missouri Restaurant Association reached out to legislators, offering guidance on shaping anti-Proposition A bills.⁴⁹ In the 2025 legislative session, state lawmakers filed no fewer than nine bills⁵⁰ to modify or nullify the measure before coalescing around HB 567,⁵¹ which repeals the law's sick leave provisions and weakens the minimum wage increase.⁵² Lobbyists for all the state's major trade groups testified in support of HB 567 in February and March.⁵³ In May 2025, Missouri Senate Republicans used an unusual procedural maneuver to break a Democratic filibuster and force a vote on the measure before the end of the legislative session. The General Assembly voted to repeal Proposition A's paid sick leave requirement and to weaken the minimum wage provision by eliminating cost-of-living increases after 2026. In July 2025, Governor Kehoe signed the bill into law, overturning a measure approved by almost 60% of the state's voters earlier that year.⁵⁴

To further entrench their power, corporate-aligned lawmakers passed a bill in 2025 making it exceedingly difficult to pass citizen-driven ballot initiatives like Proposition A in the future, with industry groups like NFIB explicitly endorsing the effort.⁵⁵ And later in the year, under pressure from Trump, the Missouri statehouse redrew the congressional district map to dilute the voting power of Kansas City, eroding a critical avenue for communities of color in Tennessee to exert their voice at both the local and state level.⁵⁶ Missouri remains a key battleground for democracy as hundreds of thousands of people organize to defend people power across the state.



10 YEARS OF CORPORATE WAGE THEFT

2015

MARCH

Columbia City Council considers a proposal to remove plastic bags from grocery stores, in response to local organizing across the country to regulate the use of plastic for community and environmental health.

JUNE - JULY

St. Louis & Kansas City Councils pass local minimum wage increase policies of \$13/hour by 2020 and \$11 by 2018, respectively, before August deadline.

MAY

HB 722 passes Missouri state legislature, authored by Rep Dan Shaul & Sen Mike Kehoe, backed by Missouri Chamber, NFIB, and the grocers and retailers associations. HB 722 bans plastic bag regulations and also bans local minimum wage increase policies above state minimum of \$7.65/hr after August 2015.

JULY

Hotel and restaurant industry-funded "Missourians for Fair Wages" files for ballot initiative to delay implementation of Kansas City wage increase.

MO Governor Nixon vetoes HB 722.

SEPTEMBER

Missouri legislature votes to overturn governor's veto — upholding HB 722.

Kansas City Council repeals its ordinance to avoid breaking new state law.

Missouri Chamber, NFIB, Associated Industries of Missouri, Missouri Restaurant Association and Missouri Retailers Association sue St. Louis to block local wage increase.

Circuit Court judge issues injunction against St. Louis wage increase ordinance.

10 YEARS OF CORPORATE WAGE THEFT

2017

FEBRUARY

Missouri Supreme Court rules in favor of St. Louis minimum wage law, upholding city's higher minimum wage.

MAY

Missouri Chamber works with Rep Dan Shaul to pass HB 1194, retroactively banning localities from establishing minimum wages higher than state law — nullifying St. Louis wage increase three months after it became law.

MAY

Injunction lifted on St. Louis minimum wage ordinance and new wage (\$10/hour) passed in 2015 finally becomes law.

2018

NOVEMBER

State ballot initiative Prop B passes with support from 60% of Missouri voters — increasing statewide minimum wage to \$12/hour by 2023.

2024

NOVEMBER

Prop A passes with support from 1.7 million Missouri voters — increasing minimum wage to \$15/hour by 2026, and guaranteeing up to 7 paid sick days per year.

DECEMBER

Missouri Grocers Association, Missouri Restaurant Association, Associated Industries of Missouri, NFIB and the Missouri Chamber sue state of Missouri in an attempt to overturn Prop A.

10 YEARS OF CORPORATE WAGE THEFT

2025**APRIL**

State supreme court rejects legislative veto, upholding Prop A.

FEBRUARY - MARCH

MO restaurant, retailers, and grocers' associations lobby legislators to weaken or delay elements of Prop A before landing on HB 567, which repeals Prop A's sick leave provisions and annual cost of living wage increases.

JULY

Gov Kehoe signs HB 567 into law, effectively weakening impact of Prop A.

SEPTEMBER

Industry-affiliated lawmakers pass bill, endorsed by NFIB, making it nearly impossible to pass citizen-driven ballot initiatives in the future.

Under pressure from Trump, Missouri state legislature redraws congressional district map, diluting the voting power of Kansas City.

STEALING FROM MISSOURI'S FAMILIES: A SNAPSHOT OF WHO'S AFFECTED

The impacts of the corporate power structure's shameless quest to deny Missourians the basic protections they need to take care of their families are exceedingly clear: the corporate-backed legislature has deliberately stolen the wages of hard-working Missourians numerous times.

BY THE NUMBERS

**AS A RESULT OF CORPORATE BANS ON WAGE AND
WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS NEARLY**

38,000 ST. LOUIS WORKERS

SAW THEIR RAISES RETRACTED

In 2017, the Missouri legislature's corporate-driven ban (HB 1194) nullified the 2015 St. Louis minimum wage ordinance that had already benefitted 31,000 of the city's lowest paid people and blocked further wage gains from taking effect for this group, according to analysis by the Economic Policy Institute. This includes the scheduled increase to \$11 by 2018 that these people — plus another 7,000 — were expecting to receive.⁵⁸ Under the new ban, people could only hope that their employers would not roll back their raises. And anyone just starting out in the St. Louis labor market, or considering changing jobs, likely found that most jobs paid less than they would have made under the banned ordinance.

Despite spurious industry arguments that minimum wage jobs are part-time or held by affluent teenagers,⁵⁹ over 90% of the workers affected were age 20 or older, and close to 60% worked full-time.⁶⁰ Over half were women (57%), over half were people of color (58%), and more than a quarter were working parents.⁶¹ Missouri lawmakers and corporate lobbyists who pushed this ban thus compromised the wellbeing of nearly 23,000 St. Louis area children, whose parents could have seen their pay increase to \$11/hour — a raise that might help cover essential rent, car, or childcare payments.⁶²

AS MUCH AS

\$580 MILLION

IN TOTAL ANNUAL INCOME STOLEN FROM MISSOURIANS

According to estimates by the National Employment Law Project, corporate-backed wage bans in Missouri cost St. Louis and Kansas City's lowest paid workers over \$580 million in total lost annual income between 2015-2017, due to delayed or blocked wage increases.⁶³ And 2018's Proposition B was a significant victory for low wage workers across Missouri — ensuring nearly a quarter of all Missourians (667,000 people) would receive a raise to \$12/hour by 2023.⁶⁴ However, the impacts of Proposition B trailed behind what previously banned local ordinances would have achieved. It took St. Louis workers, for example, until 2022 to regain the wage they would have earned four years earlier under the city's blocked wage increase policy.

1 IN 4 MISSOURI CHILDREN

LIVE IN HOUSEHOLDS THAT WOULD HAVE BENEFITTED FROM EXPANDED LEAVE

In 2024, the state legislature's corporate-backed efforts to weaken Proposition A significantly reduced the impacts of this groundbreaking initiative by eliminating the yearly cost of living increases, freezing wages at the 2026 level. Even more critically, corporations and their lobbyists repealed the sick leave provisions passed under Proposition A, denying a guarantee of paid sick leave to hundreds of thousands of Missourians who otherwise lacked this essential workplace protection.

The new paid sick leave protections were expected to reach 728,000 people — the vast majority of the estimated 938,000 working Missourians who did not already have access to paid leave, as well as those who had less than the seven days guaranteed under the initiative.⁶⁵ One in four Missouri children live in households that would have made use of expanded leave⁶⁶ — and were thus robbed of the myriad health benefits of living in households where caregivers have access to adequate paid sick leave. These benefits include increased access to health care when sick, greater job and financial security, and reduced spread of illness within families and communities.⁶⁷

Missourians earning the lowest wages are most affected by these bans, while being the least likely to have access to paid leave: 61% of those in the lowest decile of wage earners do not have sick leave, compared to only 4% of the highest wage earners.⁶⁸ Without paid leave protections, workers who earn low wages are least able to absorb the impacts of lost work when they or their family members are sick — forcing many to put off or go without care at potentially devastating costs to their own and their loved one's health. The latest chapter of Missouri's corporate backlash to Proposition A means that hundreds of thousands of Missourians will once again be forced to choose between their paycheck and their health. In an era of ongoing COVID-19 infection and potential future pandemics, lack of paid sick leave for any members of our community have profound consequences for us all.

THE MISSOURI VILLAINS

The national industry groups behind state bans in Missouri:

US CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The US Chamber of Commerce (parent organization to the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry) is the world's largest business organization,⁶⁹ governed by a board that includes representatives from some of our country's largest corporations — including Pfizer, Shell, ConocoPhillips, Hilton, Meta, Microsoft, and Comcast.⁷⁰ The Chamber has been a primary driver of the corporate deregulation agenda for decades and lobbies against nearly every kind of state and local policy protecting working people,⁷¹ while advancing corporate interests at all levels of government. While the Chamber regularly argues against a “patchwork of regulation” in its efforts to push state bans on local policies,⁷² its state affiliates have blocked community-driven efforts to create uniform statewide standards that improve wages and protections for working people.⁷³ The Chamber's state and local affiliates have also fought affordable housing and tenant protection policies in Colorado⁷⁴ and Tennessee.⁷⁵ The US Chamber alone spent \$76.3 million on lobbying in 2024, not including spending by its statewide and local chapters.⁷⁶

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS

The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) describes itself as the “voice of small business,”⁷⁷ while lobbying in support of major corporate interests and against government regulation in DC and all 50 state capitals. NFIB is notorious for its campaign to weaken workers' rights to compensation when injured on the job⁷⁸ and has actively driven state bans on wage and labor protections in states like Tennessee,⁷⁹ Missouri,⁸⁰ and Texas — where NFIB is a key organization behind the Alliance for Securing and Strengthening the Economy in Texas (ASSET),⁸¹ a coalition of industry groups formed specifically to push bans on labor regulations in the state.⁸² Despite claiming to advocate for the interests of small mom-and-pops, NFIB has been influenced and funded by major corporations and billionaire industrialists. In 2012, for example, the NFIB received \$1.5 million from Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce, a conservative advocacy group with close ties to the Koch brothers' empire.⁸³ And in 2010, the NFIB received \$3.7 million from Crossroads GPS,⁸⁴ a conservative advocacy group advised by Karl Rove⁸⁵ that has received millions in donations from fossil fuel corporations like Alliance Resource Partners, Clayton Williams Energy, and individuals from BP Capital and Petco Petroleum.⁸⁶

THE NATIONAL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION

The National Restaurant Association (parent organization to the Missouri Restaurant Association) is the leading business association for the US restaurant industry,⁸⁷ with affiliates in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of

Columbia.⁸⁸ The national association consistently advocates against federal and state minimum wage increases and fights to entrench the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers.⁸⁹ And its state affiliates have been active drivers of state bans on local wage increases, using buy and bully tactics to block the lowest paid workers from gaining more livable wages in cities and states across the country.⁹⁰ The National Restaurant Association has also worked with ALEC to push state bans on paid sick leave protections.⁹¹

THE NATIONAL RETAIL FEDERATION

The National Retail Federation and its state affiliates⁹² have taken a lead role in pushing bans on wage and workplace protections in states like Missouri⁹³ and Texas,⁹⁴ undermining working conditions for the millions employed by major US retail companies across the country.⁹⁵ The boards of these state affiliates include representatives from huge national chains like Amazon, CVS, Dollar General, Home Depot, PepsiCo, Target, Walgreens, and Walmart.⁹⁶ And the same lobbyists from Home Depot and Macy's serve on the boards of both the Missouri and Texas Retailers Associations.⁹⁷

THE CORPORATE PLAYBOOK: BUY, BULLY, BAMBOOZLE

THE TACTICS CORPORATIONS USE TO PUSH STATE BANS FALL INTO THREE PRIMARY BUCKETS. OFTEN, CORPORATIONS USE A COMBINATION OF ALL THREE:



BUY

Corporations pour funds into amassing political power over lawmakers and voters — like writing campaign checks and hiring pricey lobbyists — and leverage this influence to ban policies that protect community wellbeing.



BULLY

Corporations use legal, economic, and other threats — like lawsuits, raising prices, or leaving town — to pressure elected officials and community members into banning policies that hold them accountable.



BAMBOOZLE

Corporations push misleading information — like political ads and talking points about how tenant protections hurt working people — to sway lawmakers and community members against policies that check corporate power.

The Buy, Bully, Bamboozle Tactics Behind Corporations' Assault on Missouri Families

Over the past decade, Missouri corporate interests have weaponized the branches of state government: making aggressive use of the ballot, the courts, and the legislature to delay, blunt, or nullify improved labor standards. In their campaign to thwart wage increases for the state's lowest-paid people, industry leaders drew on classic buy, bully, bamboozle tactics: wielding power at the statehouse through lobbying and campaign spending; spouting disingenuous talking points in the press and before the legislature; pushing an agenda that benefits large corporations, while claiming to speak primarily for the interests of small businesses; and scaring cash-strapped communities with job and revenue loss, despite evidence to the contrary.



BUY: THE STATE LEGISLATURE AS CORPORATE STRONGHOLD

The industry associations that backed state bans and worked to overturn Proposition A are deeply entwined with the Missouri legislature. Indeed, sometimes not even a revolving door stands between an elected official and an industry lobby. While sponsoring the 2015 and 2017 minimum wage bans as a state representative, Representative Dan Shaul was simultaneously Chair of the Missouri Retailers Association. The association's board members included representatives from Home Depot, Lowe's, CVS, Walgreens, and Kmart, along with major regional chains such as QuikTrip Corp,⁹⁸ a private company that owns 1,000 convenience stores across 11 states. Other large Missouri employers that have since contributed financially to the state-level Retailers Association include Target⁹⁹ and Amazon.¹⁰⁰ In 2015, Shaul also served on the board of the National Grocers Association, chaired at the time by Richard Niemann Jr. of the Illinois-based Niemann Foods,¹⁰¹ with over 100 grocery, pet food, hardware, pharmacy and gas station corporations.¹⁰² Niemann and individuals associated with Niemann Foods were donors to Shaul's political campaigns while he pushed state bans through the legislature.¹⁰³

In 2016, Dan Shaul and Mike Kehoe — Shaul's collaborator on expanding bans from plastic bags to minimum wages¹⁰⁴ — both received huge contributions from David Humphreys, CEO of Tamko Building Products. Tamko is a Kansas-based roofing tile manufacturer under the transnational financial juggernaut Carlyle Group's massive private equity portfolio.¹⁰⁵ Humphreys used PAC loopholes in the state's laws to blow through campaign finance limits¹⁰⁶ and give \$80,000 to Shaul and \$100,000 to Kehoe, funding the latter's state senate career and ultimately his run for Governor.¹⁰⁷

All the industry groups fighting workplace improvements for Missourians have spent copiously to gain influence at the legislature and through the ballot box:¹⁰⁸

- ⚡ The National Restaurant Association and the Missouri Restaurant Association together gave \$45,000 in 2015 to "Missourians for Fair Wages," a PAC operational for one year only, formed specifically to oppose minimum wage increases.¹⁰⁹ The two groups donated an additional \$65,000 to candidates for Missouri office from 2015-2025.

- ⚡ The Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry spent \$670,226 on political campaigns from 2015-2025, and gave \$223,578 to “Missourians for Freedom to Work” in 2018, a PAC formed to push “right to work” legislation eroding public sector unions.
- ⚡ Associated Industries of Missouri spent \$101,295 on campaign contributions from 2015-2025 including from its chair, Steve Burger,¹¹⁰ and NFIB has spent \$84,000 on political campaigns in Missouri since 2015.

Recipients of these associations’ funds include not only Shaul, Kehoe, and the so-called “Freedom to Work” and “Fair Wages” PACs mentioned above, but also Sherri Gallick, sponsor of the lead anti-Proposition A bill; the Missouri Senate Campaign Committee Republican caucus; the Missouri House Republican Campaign Committee; and the Liberty Alliance, a conservative “anti-Socialism” PAC.



BULLY: LAWSUITS AS WEAPON

Misuse of the courts is a classic buy, bully, bamboozle tactic. Industry groups have turned to the courts numerous times to block wage increases, including in St. Louis in 2015¹¹¹ and later as part of the legal assault against Proposition A in 2024.¹¹² This landmark ballot initiative had passed handily, winning the popular vote and 27 counties throughout the state.¹¹³ As McDonald’s maintenance worker Richard Eiker said in the Kansas City Star, “the measure won overwhelmingly with bipartisan support because fast food workers like me... organized our strength in numbers for more than a decade to make this victory possible. We came together — Black, white and Brown; Republican, Independent and Democrat; urban and rural — to win what’s best for all Missourians.”¹¹⁴ Having lost at the ballot, the corporate interests fighting these popular wage and workplace reforms turned to the state’s highest court, disingenuously seeking to overturn Proposition A on technical grounds. (The Court did not buy these arguments, rejecting claims of election irregularity and upholding the will of Missouri voters.) This legal tactic sought not only to repress the fight for better labor standards but also to veto the voice of 1.7 million Missourians — an assault on democracy itself.



BAMBOOZLE: SCARE TACTICS, INCONSISTENT RHETORIC, AND SMALL BUSINESSES AS SHIELD

Corporate lobbyists made dire predictions about the employment impacts of the St. Louis minimum wage ordinance. In 2015, Dave Overfelt, president of the Missouri Retailers Association, said the raise would be a “devastating blow” resulting in “many layoffs.”¹¹⁵ With the increase only in effect for three months, it’s impossible to measure its employment effects. But Missourians voted to raise the statewide wage in 2018, and as of February 2026 (after spiking during the covid pandemic) the state’s unemployment rate has risen only slightly above where it was in January 1, 2019 when the new rate went into effect¹¹⁶ — and lower than unemployment rates in nearby states, like Kansas,¹¹⁷ that did not raise the minimum wage.¹¹⁸

Lobbyists have returned to these arguments in their assault on Proposition A. In 2024, Kara Corches, CEO of the Missouri Chamber of Commerce, testified before the House Commerce Committee: “I strongly believe this proposition is a job killer, and I don’t say that to be inflammatory.”¹¹⁹ Yet over 70 studies published since 2010 have found little or no job loss associated with minimum wage increases,¹²⁰ and research has found numerous benefits and minimal drawbacks to sick leave laws when it comes to employee health, productivity, job retention,

and wages.¹²¹

Supporters of state bans like the NFIB and the Chamber also parrot talking points that employers are harmed by the “patchwork of regulation” created by local lawmaking. “We think having a separate minimum wage in every little municipality would be an absolute nightmare for businesses,” the NFIB’s Brad Smith told members.¹²² But some of the same industry groups complaining about the confusing patchwork¹²³ went on to fight the statewide labor standard improvements that voters approved under Proposition A.¹²⁴ During the Missouri Chamber’s testimony in support of a proposed state ban on local paid sick and fair scheduling policies, for example, their Director of Legislative Affairs said, “whenever you have a uniform law across the state, we believe that’s better policy... That way you don’t have a patchwork of regulation and policy.”¹²⁵ But that same year, Missouri Chamber CEO Kara Corches said in reference to Proposition A that they will “always be against statewide mandates,” a hypocritical disavowal of their recurring push for statewide bans on local employment policy. “We shouldn’t have a one-size-fits-all approach to business,” Corches said. “And that’s what this does.”¹²⁶

Over and over, the associations pushing for state bans evoke the plight of small businesses,¹²⁷ cautioning that checks on corporate power will cost Main Street shops and the jobs and families they support. NFIB’s Brad Jones said in February 2025 that “the sick leave part” of Proposition A “is really causing some heartburn in the small business community.”¹²⁸ The six industry associations that petitioned the Missouri Supreme Court said Proposition A would “impose significant financial burdens” on restaurants, grocery stores and other small businesses in Missouri, which would “stifle job growth and economic development.”¹²⁹ Buddy Lahl, CEO of the Missouri Restaurant Association, said, “It affects the little people. We’re going to stand up for small business owners.”¹³⁰

Meanwhile, the leadership of these same industry groups suggest their agenda may be driven by the interests of major corporations, rather than small businesses. The Board of the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry, for example, includes representatives from major corporations including Ameren, Anheuser Busch, AT&T, H&R Block, Hallmark Cards, Inc, Coca-Cola/Dr. Pepper, and Pfizer.¹³¹ In 2013, the NFIB received \$1.5 million from Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce, a conservative advocacy group with close ties to the Koch brothers’ empire.¹³² NFIB’s leadership has also included individuals with close ties to both conservative and major corporate interests, including the National Rifle Association, The Heritage Foundation,¹³³ and former steel industry corporation Armco.¹³⁴

Despite these corporate claims that raising the minimum wage hurts small businesses, over 700 actual local businesses formed the coalition Missouri Business for a Fair Minimum Wage in 2018 to call for meaningful labor standards, because raising Missouri’s minimum wage is “good for business, customers and our local economy.” Noting that workers are also customers, the coalition connected employees’ buying power to job creation and argued that higher wages translate into less employee turnover and lower hiring and training costs, reduced error and accident rates, higher productivity, and better customer service. Their website also argued that raising the minimum wage would strengthen Missouri’s economy since unlivable wages strain the safety net.¹³⁵ (In fact, studies have also shown that sick leave would increase productivity to the tune of \$104 million in savings to Missouri’s employers.¹³⁶)

Small businesses are indeed at a competitive disadvantage — especially when they want to treat their workers fairly but larger corporate employers undercut their margins via a race to the bottom on wages and benefits. They are at a

disadvantage because many of the large corporations behind industry groups — groups that claim to represent small businesses as a way to avoid regulation — also constantly find ways to muscle out mom and pop shops and dominate the marketplace.¹³⁷ Fair labor standards don't hurt business, but they do put curbs on corporate power. That is the real reason for the concerted, top-down effort behind state bans.



CONCLUSION

Missourians' experience of corporate assault on their workplace safety, economic security, and political voice reflects the growing levels of corporate control over our economy and democracy more broadly. Across the country, people's basic needs are being pushed out of reach while our avenues for protecting ourselves and improving the conditions of our daily lives are increasingly restricted by corporate interference. And no matter where we live, the same set of corporations are very often working through state industry groups to buy, bully, and bamboozle our lawmakers into governing in ways that favor corporate profit over public good.¹³⁸

As our communities grapple with the transformative changes needed to truly push back on the corporate-authoritarian stranglehold on American life, exposing and disrupting the corporate playbook that got us here will be paramount. Indeed, state government has been — and continues to be — a pivotal testing ground for the current federal regime. Despite working for decades to push state bans on local policymaking — and proclaiming the superiority of state government — corporations are now recycling the same buy, bully, and bamboozle tactics they've honed at the state level to push for federal bans on state regulations. Major tech corporations have spent at least \$100 million to influence federal lawmakers and argued against a "patchwork of regulation" in their efforts to block state governments from creating regulations to protect people from the myriad potential harms of AI,¹³⁹ for example. And many of the same corporations and billionaire CEOs in industry groups behind state bans across the country have unapologetically aligned with Trump's authoritarian agenda through contracts enabling mass surveillance, kidnappings and detentions by ICE,¹⁴⁰ unquestioned rollbacks of DEI policies,¹⁴¹ and directly funding Trump's personal projects.¹⁴²

Collectively, we must expose the corporations that have plundered our lives and banned our freedom for too long. Familiarizing ourselves with their false claims, tired talking points, egregious buys, and dirty threats can equip us to better fight back. Corporations developed these tactics to curtail the power of everyday people. Yet we have seen that when communities organize across race, class, gender, and geography to defy corporate greed and authoritarian power grabs, we can push corporations to end their complicity in attacks on our communities and reverse the march towards autocracy. Together, we can make their playbook a losing game and build an economy and democracy that truly serves the people and our needs, not corporations and their greed.

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