



For Immediate Release
October 2, 2002

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Consumer Coalition Calls on State Officials to Investigate Corporate Efforts to Intimidate and Oust Judges

With new evidence surfacing of corporate front-group attacks on judges whose decisions challenge corporate malfeasance, and the proximity of such attacks to Election Day, Americans for Insurance Reform (AIR) is calling on state attorneys general to “immediately investigate whether corporate efforts to attack certain judges in such close proximity to upcoming elections may violate state election laws.”

Today, a Washington DC corporate-backed group called the American Tort Reform Association (ATRA), released a so-called “survey” of its members identifying certain trial courts as “judicial hellholes” because judges and/or juries supposedly rule in favor of individuals against corporate wrongdoers. ATRA’s members are primarily corporations or corporate trade associations. According to John Gannon in his 1995 publication *Tort Deform - Lethal Bedfellows*, published by Essential Information, at ATRA’s founding, nearly 40 of its members were insurance companies or insurance-related organizations and six ATRA directors worked for insurance companies or law firms that frequently represented insurers.

Said Joanne Doroshow, AIR spokesperson and executive director of the Center for Justice & Democracy, “These corporations, particularly insurance companies, are so fanatical about their crusade for corporate immunity that they are now undermining one of the most sacred precepts of our democracy, judicial independence. The idea that any judge should be looking over his or her shoulder to calculate how their decisions might play with the insurance industry or other corporations is repulsive to most Americans and to our system of government.”

It was disclosed this week that in Ohio, a state into which corporate money has heavily flowed to influence judicial elections, the main front group running these campaigns received over half its money from the insurance industry. Donors to Citizens for a Strong Ohio, an issue advocacy group that is targeting Ohio Supreme Court races, include the American Insurance Institute (\$75,000); State Farm (\$60,000); Ohio Casualty Insurance (\$20,000); State Auto Insurance (\$25,000); Grange Insurance (\$20,000); Met Life (\$10,000); and Ohio National Insurance (\$5,000).

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“The insurance industry’s covert efforts to attack judges is nothing new,” said Doroshow. “In the 1980s, a vicious campaign was waged against members of the California State Supreme Court over their death penalty rulings. Only later was it revealed that the insurance industry had actually financed the campaign, using the death penalty issue in order to take out these Supreme Court members because their rulings had angered the state’s business interests.

“The objectives of outside groups funding these kinds of attacks on judges and juries are broad and dangerous. With money and politics already dominating the executive and legislative branches, our court system is one of the only places left in America where individual citizens can successfully confront powerful industries and institutions, force changes in their dangerous behavior and seek justice. When groups like ATRA or the insurance industry orchestrate campaigns against judges and juries because of decisions they have rendered, the very foundations of our judicial system are threatened,” said Doroshow.

Americans for Insurance Reform is a coalition of nearly 100 consumer groups from around the country that is attempting to strengthen state oversight of insurance industry practices. <http://insurance-reform.org>

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