



“Judicial Hellholes” Report Mocks Corporate Accountability

SACRAMENTO (Dec. 14, 2010) – The American Tort Reform Association’s annual list of so-called “Judicial Hellholes” that was released today is the latest in an ongoing series of attempts by huge drug, oil, tobacco and insurance companies to continue justifying their negligent behavior and misdeeds.

“This is a predictable list of venues where juries of twelve ordinary citizens have held corporate wrongdoers accountable,” said Consumer Attorneys of California President John Monteideo. “These corporations would rather be free to make their own rules than have to be held accountable under the rules that exist.”

California is No. 2 on the list of “Judicial Hellholes,” with this year’s verdict against corporate nursing home operator Skilled Healthcare in Humboldt County earning prominent mention. The verdict of \$677 million was later resolved in a post-trial negotiated settlement for less than one-tenth of that amount. The report blatantly mischaracterizes Skilled Healthcare as having “occasionally [fallen] below the staffing levels required by state legislators.” The jury returned its verdict because of a pattern of repeated, intentional understaffing.

“For decades we have heard from defense counsel that Humboldt County was ‘extremely conservative’ and a ‘low-verdict’ county” said Eureka attorney Tim Needham, one of the attorneys who uncovered Skilled Healthcare’s pattern of understaffing. “However, even the most conservative jurors were outraged by the defendant’s cavalier attitude towards California’s minimum staffing laws.”

Go to <http://tinyurl.com/NursingHomeUnderstaffing> for more on the Skilled Healthcare case.

The American Tort Reform Association has been funded by corporate giants such as Philip Morris, Dow Chemical, Exxon, General Electric, Aetna, Geico, State Farm, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson and Nationwide – a “who’s who” of corporations with the most to gain by shutting the courthouse doors on consumers.

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