

Detroit Free Press

Too 'tort-reformed' already

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June 25, 2010

"Tort-reform" is a PR phrase describing policy that allows corporations and other special interests to escape accountability. Typical tort reforms include legal loopholes, immunities, favors for multinational corporations and powerful special interests, and limits on the constitutional rights of ordinary people to trial by jury.

The Pacific Research Institute's corporate-spin demand for more special tort reform privileges and immunities for companies like BP and Goldman Sachs and Merck is exactly the opposite of what Michigan needs.

Tort reform has given us repealed regulations, gutted safety precautions, special immunities and privileges for unaccountable multinational corporations and get-out-of-jail-free legal loopholes for big corporate CEOs.

Tort reform has failed spectacularly.

Our crippled economy, record unemployment and foreclosures, and the environmental catastrophe in the gulf have revealed the lies of tort reform, and PRI asking for more brings to mind the classic definition of insanity: "Doing the same thing over and over again and hoping for different results."

Michigan needs to return to old-fashioned policies of accountability and responsibility, and to requiring that under-regulated corporations – not taxpayers – foot the bill for the disasters these corporations cause. Here are some examples:

- Thanks to "tort reform," Michigan has the nation's only absolute drug industry immunity law. If a drug kills or injures you or a family member, you have no recourse. Even if the manufacturer knew the drug was likely to kill or injure, your constitutional right to take that drug maker to trial has been taken away. So who pays for the costs of these injuries and deaths? Taxpayers.
- Michigan was ranked by auto insurance corporations as having the safest drivers in the nation, yet we pay some of the nation's highest premiums. Why? "Tort reform" laws that protect the insurance industry and cost you hundreds and thousands of extra dollars each year.

- Thanks to tort reform, if a blind person using a handicapped public bathroom is injured due to a dangerous condition, there is nothing the blind person can do to hold the negligent property owner accountable. A tort reform law says that the blind person “should have seen” the dangerous condition.

- In Michigan, the authorities we created to provide us with safe roads have “no duty” to make sure that traffic lights do not shine green in all four directions, or to replace missing stop signs. If such a defective traffic light causes a fatal accident and is not fixed, thus causing another such fatal accident, tort reform says there is still no accountability. And again taxpayers foot the bill.

Michigan is the most “tort reformed” state in America. It is time to stop this insanity. It is time to admit that we have been fooled. Tort reform is as phony as PRI’s “research” and their studies.

Tort reform is not the solution to our current crises – it is one of the primary causes.