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PERSONAL INJURY ATTORNEYS

## **Just a Bunch of Ambulance Chasers**

By: Chris Russell

The term "ambulance chaser" gives rise to the image of an ambulance speeding down the street with 10-12 lawyers in pin stripe suits following right behind, eager to get someone just injured in some type of accident to sign their contract for legal representation. This is also the pejorative term my Trial Attorney colleagues and I are called when someone wants to get a rise out of us. That rise is usually as a result of name calling by some "grass roots" group disguised as friends of consumers; when in reality the group is almost always backed by all of the big money interests (such as the Tobacco Industry, the Insurance Industry or the Chamber of Commerce).

The names they come up with for their groups are straight from George Orwell's "1984": the 'Civil Justice Reform Group' (comprised of the General Counsels of the most profitable and well financed companies in the world, including Aetna, British Petroleum and State Farm) or the group 'Legal Reform Now' (funded solely by the Chamber of Commerce). These names portray an image of the groups looking out for the consumer, when in reality they are doing the exact opposite. Does anyone really think that State Farm or Aetna or British Petroleum need legal reform in order to eke out another billion or two dollars in profits from the current billions they are making?

These groups exist with the sole purpose of going after the Trial Attorneys who do nothing but, according to them, "create economic havoc and raise everyone's insurance rates". Of course the truth is that if Trial Attorneys did not hold these companies accountable, no one would. Just think of the other Golden Rule: "he who has the gold makes the rules". Have you ever heard of true consumer groups having any money?

On the other hand, Chevron made 15 billion dollars in profits just last quarter. British Petroleum paid a 1 billion dollar fine for killing 12 men on their oil platform and fouling the entire Caribbean; yet the stock price is back to the levels where it was before the worst oil spill in our history. State Farm (here in California) recently announced a 20% reduction in rates because they were making too much in profits per Proposition 103 (passed in 1988). Does it sound like these companies need the legal system's help to limit consumers' access to the courts, restrict the types of claims that can be made, and to cap the damages consumers can recover in court? I am not the smartest guy in the world but it appears to me all those companies seem to be doing just fine.

Does that mean all Trial Attorneys are saints? Of course not. Trial Attorneys shoot themselves in the foot often enough to where the bad press can be used to further the economic interests of the aforementioned Orwellian groups, and added to that is the fact that Trial Attorneys can make money from the work they do -- so they must be inherently evil.

However, it is not really a fair fight though when pitting Trial Attorney money versus the real money of Corporate America. Corporate America easily outspends Trial Attorneys by 10 to 1.

They get to frame the issues and make us all look like the scum suckers they say we are. The only thing Trial Attorneys can continue to do is to speak the truth and have a place at the table to make sure there is some semblance of balance when our lawmakers make laws impacting consumer rights (like yours). If Trial Attorneys go away, the America we know today will go with us, as absolute power corrupts absolutely. How long do you think it would take the richest of the rich to remove all ability for the average Joe to seek financial damages in court? The obvious answer: not long at all since, as we have seen throughout history, politicians can easily be bought and sold.

So the next time you hear an ambulance blaring down the street, think of me and my Trial Attorney cohorts -- and more importantly let the loud noise remind you that as irritating as we Trial Attorneys may be to some (especially those with more money than could not be spent in a million lifetimes) -- without the accountability that we provide to our free enterprise system, we would become a mere shell of the great nation we have always been.

Christopher E. Russell is a non-ambulance chasing, personal injury lawyer with a practice in Newport Beach, California. His firm, Russell & Lazarus, APC, represents victims throughout Orange County, Los Angeles County, Riverside County, and San Bernadino County. If you or a loved one has been injured in an accident, contact Russell & Lazarus for a free consultation.