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AMERICAN TORT REFORM ASSOCIATION (ATRA)

The American Tort Reform Association (ATRA) is a Washington-DC-based group that was formed in 1986 to represent hundreds of U.S. and foreign corporations in their bid to overhaul civil liability laws at the state and national levels.

* ATRA's members are largely Fortune 500 companies with a direct financial stake in restricting lawsuits. Members have included representatives of the tobacco, insurance, chemical, auto and pharmaceutical industries. Corporate giants like Philip Morris, Dow Chemical, Exxon, General Electric, Aetna, Geico and Nationwide have all supported ATRA. Gannon, *Tort Deform - Lethal Bedfellows, Essential Information*, 1995, pp. 23-25. Legal Times also reported that, "most of [ATRA's] funding comes from large corporate donors. Insurance firms ... are each good for \$50,000 or \$75,000, one unnamed lobbyist familiar with the Association told the publication." "Proponents of Reform," *Legal Times*, April 17, 1995, cited in Silverstein, *Smoke & Mirrors*, Public Citizen Congress Watch, 1996, p. 11.

* The tobacco industry has supported ATRA, directly through Philip Morris, and indirectly through Covington & Burling, the law firm for the now-defunct Tobacco Institute and other major tobacco companies. Documents from the Tobacco Archives show that in 1995, the tobacco industry allocated nearly \$5.5 million for ATRA, more than half of ATRA's \$10.2 million budget according to the *Associated Press*. The documents also show that Covington & Burling acted as a funnel for much of this tobacco industry money, which was then paid out to other organizations. "Report Says Tobacco Industry Quietly Backed Tort Reform," *Associated Press*, February 21, 1999; Tort Reform Project Budget, Covington & Burling, October 3, 1995, Document #2041201160 et seq. The budget indicates that by October 3, the project had already given about \$3 million to ATRA.

* Although sponsored by major industries, ATRA has worked hard to present a dramatically different public image of itself. While John Gannon reported in 1995 that not one of ATRA's 300 organizational members included an organization devoted to representing workers, homeowners or average citizens, ATRA called its members "the average citizen looking for an end to the threat of being sued." ATRA wrote in an early fundraising letter, "ATRA is not a wealthy special-interest group backed by vast cash resources." Its literature mentions its "large and very diverse membership, consisting of ... non-profits, public agencies, professional societies, trade associations, large corporations and small businesses."