



Center for Justice & Democracy
80 Broad St., 17th Floor
New York, NY 10004
Tel: 212.267.2801
Fax: 212.764.4298
centerjd@centerjd.org
<http://centerjd.org>

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
January 15, 2003

Joanne Doroshow
212/267-2801

Consumer Groups Denounce Bush Decision to Keep Media from Appearance at Hospital with Malpractice Record

Consumer groups are denouncing President Bush's last-minute decision to close to the press his visit to Mercy Hospital in Scranton Pennsylvania on January 16, 2003. The Mercy Hospital System has recently been the subject of a notorious malpractice case at its Wilkes Barre facility, for which the CEO has publicly apologized. Following the Mercy Hospital appearance, Bush is expected to call for severe limits on the legal rights of children, seniors and others injured by medical malpractice.

The Mercy case was brought by Dorothy Thornton, the widow of senior citizen Frank Thornton who was intubated incorrectly (a breathing tube was placed down his esophagus instead of his windpipe), placed in coma and died. The hospital not only failed to tell Thornton's family about the error, but also failed to list information about it in its records. The hospital's chief executive officer, James May, publicly apologized to Thornton, admitting responsibility for the malpractice and admitting that records were altered.

Said Joanne Doroshow, Executive Director of the Center for Justice & Democracy, a national consumer group, "The White House is closing this event to the press just like he wants to close the legal system to average Americans. This decision demonstrates astounding insensitivity to the problems created by concealment of medical errors by hospitals and HMOs, and the need for patients to have the ability to bring legal actions in order to uncover wrongdoing."

Lauren Townsend of Citizens for Consumer Justice, which is organizing a major protest action against Bush' speech at the University of Scranton, denounced the appearance at Mercy. "It bad enough that the White House is advocating cruel measures that will severely limit the rights of injured patients. But to appear at this hospital and not allow the news media to cover it is a slap in the face of patients who have been killed or injured due to medical malpractice."

Said Doroshow, "President Bush should stop playing politics with rising medical insurance costs and focus on the real reasons why consumers are paying more and more every day for insurance -- the

weak economy and the insurance industry's questionable business and accounting practices. Insurance companies are wreaking havoc on the American economy. President Bush should be calling for measures to stop this price-gouging and to reign in this corporate irresponsibility."

A major protest against Bush is planned in Scranton at 11:00 am, Thursday, January 16, 2003 at St. Thomas Hall, University of Scranton. Other protests are being planned in California, Texas and elsewhere.

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The Center for Justice & Democracy is a non-profit, non-partisan public interest organization that works to educate the public about the importance of the civil justice system, and fights to protect the right to trial by jury and an independent judiciary for all Americans.