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Joan Claybrook, President

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TOBACCO COMPANIES FUND ASTROTURF "REFORM" CAMPAIGN

New Report Documents Industry's Influence on Phony "Grassroots" Campaign to Limit Corporate Liability

Public Citizen released a report today documenting the tobacco industry's attempts to manufacture public support for the campaign to limit the liability of corporations that manufacture dangerous or defective products. "With pungent detail, this report demonstrates that the campaign for so-called 'tort reform' is nothing but a concoction of corporate public relations and lobbying firms," said Joan Claybrook, President of Public Citizen. "As Senators prepare to vote on liability limits legislation, the report will help them figure out whether they're on the side of the public interest or tobacco interests seeking impunity for producing a deadly, addictive product."

The report, *Smoke and Mirrors: The Tobacco Industry's Influence on the Phony "Grassroots" Campaign for Liability Limits*, is authored by journalist Ken Silverstein. It details the links between the tobacco industry and a network of institutions pushing limits on civil liability, especially the American Tort Reform Association and the Washington consulting firm APCO Associates. ATRA and APCO have been instrumental in establishing, funding and running state coalitions to push for limits on liability, while concealing the identity of the big corporate funders behind the movement. The report describes a speech to the Public Affairs Council by Neal Cohen, who doubles as APCO's Executive Vice President, and ATRA's "Grassroots Consultant." Cohen warns the audience that having big corporations publicly associated with a coalition will make it difficult to pass legislation, but makes clear who is really running the movement behind the scenes:

"If you contribute big money to a coalition you better be at the table when the decisions are made and...it ought to be a card table and not a corporate [board room] table. Broad-based membership is: What does the public see? What do the legislators see? Decision-making is: a core group of

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three or so people who have similar interests and who are going to get the job done."

The Senate is expected to vote this week on the conference report on legislation that would federalize state civil justice rules and limit the ability of judges and citizen jurors to punish corporate wrongdoers. "This is a bill of, by and for corporations trying to avoid responsibility for their actions," said Joseph Belluck, staff attorney for Public Citizen's Congress Watch. "By pouring money into deceptive advertising and lavish lobbying campaigns, tobacco companies, insurance companies and other major corporations have convinced some state legislators that there is strong public support for these anti-consumer measures. The U.S. Senate should not be fooled," concluded Belluck.