

Against the System *For Esquire*

Alabama politics are still done the old-fashioned, Southern way with enough gentility to cover the cold steel.

So, when Jere Beasley gets involved in the political arena nowadays, it is on behalf of the victims of wrongdoing. In most every instance, the victims are made up of working men and women, the elderly, young folks, and the disadvantaged. Jere Beasley is one of the most successful lawyers in his state, but his success was built on helping folks harmed, hoodwinked, or otherwise hurt by the big business groups that fund politics in America. These groups are led by the powerful tobacco and insurance industries who for years have run roughshod over their adversaries.

These past three years have seen a steady increase in the political invective and vitriol in Alabama. Powerful business lobbies have bankrolled political campaigns in an attempt to put persons in offices who favor the tobacco and insurance industries as well as other giants of big business. These same lobby groups have also attacked the Alabama trial bar, even going after Beasley by name. They have attempted to make him the “poster boy” for tort reform in Alabama.

Beasley is a leader in the fight against these forces and their drive to change Alabama tort laws, which, if enacted, would make it virtually impossible for victims to punish the giant industries that harm them. Beasley says if tort reform, according to how the tobacco and insurance lobbyists want it, passes, the victims won't be the lawyers - it will be those consumers and other victims who look to the courthouse as their only defense against corporate greed and arrogance.

The latest attack on Alabama consumers came when The Alabama Insurance Department made Alabama the only state in the south in which mandatory, binding arbitration replaces the courthouse as the battleground when policyholders have to take on the insurance companies. This clandestine move by The Insurance Department came in spite of an Alabama statute that specifically prohibits the enforcement of arbitration clauses in insurance policies in Alabama.

What goes on in Alabama this election year will mirror the ideological battle that will build nationwide as November approaches. But, Alabama being Alabama, the words will be sharper and the lines more finely drawn. You are invited to watch Beasley in action and to write about this struggle. You will find that the people of Alabama, like citizens of every state, will be pulled and prodded by titanic forces. Who will win this battle? It is the never-ending battle of the little folks against the big folks. It should be an interesting story.