

Only AAJ!

By Gibson Vance

President, American Association for Justice

We all know the biblical story of David vs. Goliath. That story comes to mind whenever I think about what AAJ, through the efforts of its committed members and tireless staff, accomplishes day after day, year after year.

Only at AAJ could a staff of about 100 go toe to toe against some of the most powerful, well-funded opponents in the world and prevent them, time and time again, from dismantling the civil justice system. Only through AAJ can trial lawyers from all over the world band together to fight those who would take away Americans' basic constitutional rights. Only with AAJ can those who have been the victims of medical negligence and defective drugs and devices help shape public opinion against the efforts of corporate hospitals and multinational pharmaceutical companies to cap damages in these cases.

I recently spent two days on Capitol Hill, watching a committee markup of H.R.5, the far-reaching tort "reform" bill that would severely limit the rights of injured patients and their families to hold negligent health care providers, medical product manufacturers, and nursing homes accountable in court. Sitting through the process was both enlightening and maddening.

I was proud of several representatives who stood up for the civil justice system, admonishing the bill's proponents for placing corporate profits over individual rights. But I was struck by the harshness of the rhetoric used by the bill's supporters. It seemed I heard the term "greedy trial lawyers" in every other sentence. And one representative actually said that "pharmaceutical companies are struggling"—a statement clearly divorced from reality.

I've witnessed the legislative process many times over the last few years, and the level of acrimony I observed at that hearing was unsurpassed. The reason for this is simple. Some of our country's most powerful constituents—like the drug industry, wealthy insurance companies, and large corporations--cannot stand the civil justice system. They cannot stand it because they cannot control it, and they are used to getting their way.

This means, of course, that they cannot stand us, because we are the only impediment to their goal of abolishing the civil justice system. Like a band of brothers and sisters locked down in a foxhole together, we refuse to surrender or retreat. The fight is too important. We can never give up, and we can never give in.

The Fight Goes On

It has been a great privilege to be a part of AAJ's ongoing struggle to preserve the civil justice system over the last year, and I have many people to thank. First, our amazing CEO, Linda Lipsen. She and the entire AAJ staff do more with less every day--and get the job done.

I'm also grateful to my fellow officers and the many members who stepped up this year to give of their time and resources. It is heartwarming to see fellow trial lawyers give back to the organization.

I am deeply thankful for the support that my law firm, Beasley Allen, gave me throughout the year. Without the help and encouragement of Jere Beasley and my other partners, I could not have done this job.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife and my two sons, Carter and Andrew. I am fortunate to have such a wonderful family, who stood by my side throughout this wonderful experience.

And I could not leave without thanking you, my fellow trial lawyers. Your loyalty, honesty, compassion, hard work, and humor inspire me and remind me every day why I am proud to be a trial lawyer--and always will be.

I look forward to fighting many more battles shoulder to shoulder with you in the "foxhole." Our cause is a righteous one, and the people we are fighting for need us now more than ever!