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For Release:
April 23, 2008

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Consumer Group Condemns U.S. Chamber of Commerce For Again Attacking Struggling Gulf Coast Region

Survey Also Discriminates Based on Race

New York – The Center for Justice & Democracy today condemned the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the nation’s richest corporate lobby group, for its seventh annual state liability rankings report, which inexplicably targets for criticism every state in the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast region, suggesting that these states are bad for businesses.

The report, which is based on nothing more than the views of corporate lawyers - people hired to defend companies accused of wrongdoing like insurance companies who have unfairly denied hurricane claims - ranks three Gulf Region states among the bottom 5 states: Louisiana (49), Mississippi (48), and Alabama (47). This low ranking of Gulf Coast states began in 2006, just months after Hurricane Katrina hit.

“First, and most obviously, expecting corporate lawyers to render a fair and unbiased view of jurisdictions where they have had to defend misconduct or lost cases is patently absurd,” said Joanne Doroshow, Executive Director of the Center for Justice & Democracy. “But also, for three years now, the U.S. Chamber has inexplicably decided to target the struggling Gulf Coast region for criticism as it tries to recover from one of the worst disasters in our nation’s history, which killed thousands, displaced millions, and left hundreds of thousands without jobs or income. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce should be helping this battered area instead of launching attacks on it. These states are working hard to recover and bring businesses back, with some significant success according to recent employment figures.”

The Chamber also tags Los Angeles, CA and Cook County, IL as the so-called “least fair” communities. Unlike the general population, approximately 95 out of 100 (or more) of top corporate lawyers – the type of individuals selected by the Chamber to rank jurisdictions - are white.¹ According to the U.S. Census, Los Angeles County, Calif., had the largest minority population in the country in 2006; Cook County had the largest black population, followed by Los Angeles County. Said Doroshow, “It is one thing to refuse to attempt to survey a representative cross section of the legal community for this survey. But it is another thing to rely exclusively on the opinions of a group that has been specifically recognized as excluding minorities from its pool. And when those polled then find disproportionate fault with jurisdictions in minority communities, the results of such a survey should be highly suspect.”

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¹ Alea Jasmin Mitchell, “Report on General Counsel of Color Leading Fortune 500 Companies,” *Diversity & the Bar*, Minority Corporate Counsel Assoc., May/June 2004.