



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

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Contact: Joanne Doroshow, Laurie Beacham
212/267-2801

Consumer Group Condemns Votes in Congress Today Taking Away Consumer Rights

The Center for Justice & Democracy strongly condemned votes in the U.S. House of Representatives today passing three bills that restrict the legal rights of consumers.

“With the country facing such looming matters as a debacle in Iraq, record job losses, and a supersonic deficit, the U.S. House of Representatives decided to spend today attacking injured consumers and the lawyers who represent them, although luckily not all of their efforts succeeded,” said Joanne Doroshow, Executive Director of the Center for Justice & Democracy, noting that one of four bills under consideration failed.

Continued Doroshow, “These efforts say something about our representatives in Congress, who should be spending their time trying to make life better for their citizens, rather than creating legal roadblocks for the sick and injured. There was absolutely no need for Congress to interfere with states law on these matters. This is all about politics.”

The bills that Congress voted on today were:

- The Nonprofit Athletic Organization Protection Act, which FAILED. This bill claimed to protect such athletic organizations from claims related to their rules concerning competition and practices. But what it would really have done is prevent parents, who put their trust in these organizations when they send their kids off to play sports, from suing when an organization’s negligence results in a child’s injuries.
- The Good Samaritan Volunteer Firefighter Assistance Act PASSED. This proposed law, which would immunize entities that donate unsafe fire equipment to volunteer fire departments, is a complete misnomer. While claiming to “assist” firefighters, it actually strips them of their ability to hold donors of faulty equipment accountable when they are injured while using such equipment. Proponents imply that an onslaught of lawsuits against equipment donors have a

chilling effect on their willingness to donate. However, our research reveals no such past cases. In addition, companies that desire immunity can simply request the recipient fire departments to sign a waiver.

- The Volunteer Pilot Organization Protection Act PASSED. This proposed law immunizes pilots who fly people for medical treatment and other reasons, as well as their companies and other company employees. It revises a carefully balanced law already in existence called the Volunteer Protection Act that provides immunity to individual volunteers, but not volunteer organizations, which at least had the wisdom to exempt motor vehicle operators, including pilots, from its reach. Such a law would leave victims of an air disaster due to negligence – and surviving families – without means of redress.
- The Lawsuit Abuse Reduction Act PASSED. This proposed law *forces* federal and some state judges to impose serious sanctions on attorneys who file “frivolous” suits. However, research shows that the incidence of frivolous suits is extremely low, and for those rare times it does occur, judges are already empowered, in their discretion, to impose sanctions. The real purpose of the bill is to discourage lawyers from bringing suits on behalf of legitimately injured clients, thereby protecting the corporations they sue.

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