

fend frivolous auto accident lawsuits (many of which *are* frivolous). Juries proved surprisingly unsympathetic to contrived lawsuits seeking excessive damages for “whiplash” and other subjective injuries, by returning a high percentage of defense verdicts, *i.e.*, ruling against the plaintiffs. The “whiplash mills” and their stable of quack doctors were flummoxed. What had been, under *Royal Globe*, a cornucopia of riches for personal injury lawyers became, instead, a well-deserved dead-end.

PERSONAL INJURY lawsuits, especially those relating to auto accidents, declined precipitously, as did insurance rates. Price wars erupted as insurers bid against each other to cut premiums. To the plaintiffs’ bar, this utopian situation was intolerable. Few contingent fee plaintiffs’ lawyers operate in the high-stakes realm of mega-millionaire pirate Bill Lerach. Many more are sole practitioners depending upon flaws in the system and a high volume of weak cases to extract undeserved windfalls. To parasites in need of a receptive host, *Royal Globe* was a godsend, and *Moradi-Shalal* was Armageddon.

The so-called Consumers Attorneys of California (formerly known as the California Trial Lawyers Association), ever willing to favor their own interests over those of California’s consumers, made reinstatement of *Royal Globe* their top legislative priority. The Democrat landslide of 1998 provided the opportunity. In 1999, the lopsidedly Democrat Legislature — elected with the benefit of plenty of trial lawyer money — passed two trial lawyer-sponsored bills: S.B. 1237, carried by Senator Martha Escutia, and A.B. 1309, carried by Assemblyman Jack Scott, signed as a package deal by Govern-

or Gray Davis over the vociferous but unavailing opposition of the insurance industry. Together, the bills would negate *Moradi-Shalal* and largely reinstate *Royal Globe*. To avert the horrors this would create, a coalition of consumer, taxpayer, business, and senior groups led by the insurance industry qualified two referenda for the March 2000 ballot. These ballot measures also had the effect of postponing the effective date of the Democrat legislation from the usual January 1 until after the primary. The referenda campaign gathered nearly 1.5 million signatures in less than three weeks. A “no” on Proposition 30 would repeal S.B. 1237; “no” on 31 would repeal A.B. 1309. Insurers reportedly plan to spend up to \$50 million to defeat Propositions 30 and 31, which, as referenda, cleverly capitalize on the undecided voters’ preference for a “no” vote. (In a referendum, unlike an initiative, the objective is to secure a majority of “no” votes.) The plaintiffs’ bar will spend whatever it takes to preserve their legislative victory.

The voters should be able to understand this: “yes” on Propositions 30 and 31 will increase the average driver’s auto insurance bill by \$300 a year, with commensurate increases for businesses, local governments, and homeowners — a total of \$1.5 billion a year in increased insurance premiums and higher prices for goods and services. A great deal is at stake, more than just money. Symbolically, the Proposition 30 and 31 campaign is a showdown over who controls the political process in California — the personal injury lawyers or the average citizen. The Democrats in Sacramento have sold their souls to the special interests and the voters have the opportunity to send a powerful message: 1986 was not a fluke.

CPA

THE WORKING PRESS

Picking Staples from the *Times*’ Hide

The Times habitually misses meaty stories in its huge and dynamic circulation area. Self-flagellation over an ad deal is not one of them.

T I M W . F E R G U S O N

THE STAPLES Center scandal that shivered the timbers of the *Los Angeles Times* was investigated in a report as anti-climactic as anything from a congressional committee. It was issued by Pulitzer-winner David Shaw of the

Times’ staff and shepherded into the paper by half a dozen untouchable editors in clean-room suits.

It was boring. Very, very boring and 14 pages long. The

Tim W. Ferguson is California Political Review’s press critic.

THE COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



Defend Freedom of Conscience

If you believe that no government may legitimately tell us what to think about religion, morality, and politics; if you share our support for freedom of conscience, religious freedom, and free speech, then please use the form below to join us by adding your name as a signer to The Committee for Religious Freedom's Statement of Support for the three-judge panel decision in *Thomas v. Anchorage Equal Rights Commission*.

This Committee, which needs everyone's support, includes nationally-known Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders: *First Things* Editor Rev. **Richard John Neuhaus**, nationally-known author Rabbi **Daniel Lapin**, Roman Catholic Bishop of Salt Lake City Most Rev. **George H. Niederauer**, *Life & Times* host **Hugh Hewitt**, Former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican **William A. Wilson**, and Pastor **Laurence White** of Houston's Our Savior Lutheran Church. Please read our full statement and list of signers at our web site (www.cppf.org) or in *CPR's* Nov./Dec. 1999 issue.

These Religious and Community leaders support the January ruling in *Thomas v. Anchorage Equal Rights Commission* which upholds First Amendment religious freedom guarantees against lawsuits that would force landlords to choose between sacrificing their livelihood or renting against their religious convictions to unmarried couples. That ruling is now under review by an 11-judge panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

"Landlords are accused of violating civil rights if they object on religious grounds to being forced to choose between renting to unmarried couples or going out of business," our statement reads. "But is it not *their* freedom of conscience and *our own* First Amendment Religious Freedom rights that are under attack?" If you agree that these rights should be defended, please sign and return this form today. Thank you.

I support the Statement of The Committee for Religious Freedom.		Optional: <input type="checkbox"/> Please keep me informed of the Committee's activities.
_____ Signature	_____ Date	_____ Daytime telephone
_____ Name and mailing address		_____ 24-hour FAX