

The most conservative United States Supreme Court in nearly a century recently continued its assault on the constitutional rights of ordinary citizens harmed by corporate wrongdoing. In the case of *AT&T v. Concepcion*, the Supreme Court told corporations that they could write into the fine print of most any contract, language that takes away a person's constitutional right to trial by jury. The decision further precludes judicial efficiency and cost saving that class actions provide for egregious wrongful conduct where the cost and expense of an individual lawsuit is prohibitive.

Most Americans probably haven't heard about the decision; others may not think it matters to them. One day, however, when your credit card company, phone company or cable company sneaks a \$50 "late fee" onto your account, that they shouldn't have charged you, and the corporation refuses to remove the charge, what do you do?

Who would sue over \$50? No one. What attorney would take a \$50 case? None. But what if the corporation unfairly charged 2 million customers that same \$50 fee, and fraudulently made \$100 million? Who could hold them accountable? No one, according to this Supreme Court's ruling. Get ready for a lot more corporate fine print that leads to you giving up your rights.

Taking away people's right to access the courts is not new for corporations. It has been going on for more than 25 years. It has been done through laws that take away rights, "conservative" judges who seem to almost always side with big business, and supported by a massive, misleading, corporate-funded public relations campaign to make ordinary people turn against their neighbors harmed by corporate wrongdoing.

Most Americans don't know, and don't seem to care – until something bad happens to them. Then, people understand, usually for the first time, how their constitutional right to a jury trial – expressly provided for in the 7th Amendment to the Constitution – has been taken away.

We have all been unwittingly giving away our constitutional rights for years; by voting for politicians who cap damages, by electing judges biased toward corporate interests, and by signing contracts with fine print forcing us into "mandatory arbitration" when a company harms us.

This systematic erosion of our right to jury trials has been done in the guise of "tort reform." A "tort" is simply a harm caused by someone else's wrongdoing. Whether you are hurt in a car wreck caused by an inattentive driver, by a careless medical provider or a defective product, the harm a person suffers is called a tort. "Tort reform" laws are invariably created to keep people with legitimate claims from having their dispute resolved by people from their community applying community standards. In many states, it takes a unanimous jury verdict to decide a case in favor of a tort victim. Some people think there are runaway juries. Let me ask you, when is the last time you were able to get twelve strangers to unanimously agree on anything? Winning a civil case is extremely difficult. Juries see through 'frivolous' cases. That is why our founding fathers wanted trial by jurors who are members of the community where the harm occurred. Tort reforming politicians and certain judges seem to want to keep citizens in the community from holding wrongdoers accountable and responsible.

If you wouldn't give up your second amendment right to "keep and bear arms," why would you allow politicians to take away your seventh amendment right to "trial by jury?" I'm going to start reading the fine print a little more closely. I wish all citizens would agree with me that corporations can take away our right to a jury when they pry it from our clenched hands.