

# Public Citizen Celebrates 30 Years



In the classic 1946 Christmas movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, an angel grants the despondent George Bailey (played by Jimmy Stewart) the opportunity to see what the world would be like if he had never been born. He discovers that his many small and large good deeds added up to a sum of achievement that altered the history of his small town and enriched the lives of his neighbors. He discovered that, despite the hard challenges and occasional broken heart, it had indeed been a wonderful life.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of Public Citizen with this special edition of *Public Citizen News*, I can't help but wonder how the world would be different if Public Citizen had not been founded in 1971.

Are there people alive today who would have died because Public Citizen was not there to force dangerous prescription drugs or carcinogenic products such as Red Dye #2 off the market? How many people would have been sickened or killed if Public Citizen had not sued the government to regulate workplace contaminants such as ethylene oxide? How many children would have become ill or died from Reye's Syndrome if Public Citizen had not insisted that aspirin bottles be labeled to warn against giving them to children with chicken pox? How many more families would be devastated from auto and truck crashes without Public Citizen's success in getting many safety protections adopted?

Had we not stood in the way of corporate attacks on the twin pillars of consumer protection — our civil justice system and health and safety regulatory framework — would these institutions still be as strong and vibrant as they are? Would the nuclear industry have built dozens more reactors had we not led the grassroots opposition beginning in the 1970s? Would the fair trade movement in the U.S. have the muscle and vitality it has today without the leadership of Public Citizen?

I could ask a hundred such questions. Just thinking about our work over the past three decades makes me incredibly proud to have been right in the thick of the battles for all but the four years I spent regulating auto safety in the Carter administration. I am filled with pride for the thousands of remarkable people who have worked at Public Citizen through the years. I am awed by the power of citizens to shape government policy by being active participants in democracy. And I am humbled by the loyalty and

generosity of our members — our lifeblood.

We have come a long way in 30 years. While political issues come and go, our values remain the same. We stand for an open, ethical government that represents the people, not the monied special interests. We stand for a marketplace in which health, safety and environmental safeguards are paramount. We stand for a strong civil justice system that allows citizens to seek justice and hold wrongdoers accountable for their actions.

As we look back, we are also thinking ahead to the new millennium. In many ways, the challenges are greater than ever. The progressive era of the 1960s and early 1970s unleashed a well-funded corporate backlash against consumer protection. We have seen retrenchment by our health and safety regulatory agencies. We have seen the increasingly corrosive effect of big money on our government. We have seen a protracted corporate PR war waged against government safety standards and the civil justice system. We have seen the onset of a model of globalization in which the profits of multinational corporations hold sway over the welfare of people. And now we see a new president intent on tilting the government toward business interests who funded his campaign. We have many different hurdles facing us.

But yes, it's been a wonderful life for Public Citizen. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you for helping us achieve victories for citizens. Without you we wouldn't be here, because we take no funding from government or business. Now, as we look forward to the next 30 years and beyond, we promise to rise to new heights in making our democracy work better for you and your family.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan Claybrook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.