

Not Wisconsin South

I respectfully disagree with your Aug. 9 editorial about some punitive damage rulings turning Wisconsin into an "Alabama North." The suggestion that Alabama is currently a haven for the big money plaintiffs' bar is mistaken.

During the early 1990s, unlimited punitive damages awards and nationwide class actions led your newspaper to label Alabama "tort hell." This helped jumpstart a three-stage reform.

First, the Alabama legislature capped punitive damages in 1999 to either \$500,000 or three times compensatory damages, whichever is greater, with a lower cap for small businesses. Second, the legislature severely restricted class-action certifications. Third, the people of Alabama elected justices to the Supreme Court who, instead of striking down the legislature's tort reform statutes, have rigorously enforced them.

The tangible benefits of this reform can be seen in multi-million dollar investments by Mercedes Benz, Toyota and Hyundai in manufacturing plants in Alabama. These plants and their suppliers have brought good jobs and increased tax revenues to our state.

While Alabama's legal system is not perfect, it has made so much progress in the last decade that it can no longer be fairly compared to a wide-open punitive damages venue like Wisconsin. Instead, Alabama is open for business.

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