In 2003, hundreds of well-funded, highly organized activist groups and plaintiffs' lawyers continued their efforts to create a better world. But their idea of improvement would be a disaster for everyone else. Here’s what “progress” means to them:

* Launching wave after wave of restrictive environmental regulations and novel lawsuits against domestic energy production, thus assuring that America will remain heavily dependent on foreign energy sources.

* Regulating, attacking, and suing over new biotech food production technologies that could feed starving citizens of the Third World.

* Driving doctors out of communities because they can’t find affordable malpractice insurance.

* Filing frivolous class actions and regulatory claims against food and alcohol companies based on the assumption that Joe Consumer can’t be trusted with personal responsibility.

* Fighting medical innovation with scare tactics and lawsuits against safe and effective medicines.

* Forcing companies into bankruptcy with lawsuits where the only financial winners are personal injury lawyers, while at the same time fighting all reasonable proposals to fix our broken tort system.

* Finding ways to criminalize ordinary business activities with stronger penalties than those imposed on convicted violent offenders.

* Launching litigation campaigns to pressure the U.S. military to cease conducting new weapons testing and training exercises based on bogus environmental grounds.

* Disregarding economic rights and business civil liberties of law-abiding Americans while suing to give the broadest possible legal protections to suspected terrorists and foreign enemies.

In defiance of logic and the rule of law, activist lawyers and organizations paradoxically proclaim these as highlights in a year of achievement. The real world, though, has a tragic way of making some ideologies irrelevant and obsolete.

As America looks to a new year, we should all be asking: how much more of this “progress” can we really afford? And before making their holiday donations, charitable givers – many of whom reap the benefits of a thriving American economy – should seriously evaluate how these self-anointed crusaders for the public interest operate.

Decades of lawyers gaming our courts and government agencies have produced a bitter harvest of consequences for America. Their successes degrade our free enterprise system and shackle our national security efforts.

Whatever one’s philosophical stripe, our hopes for a better future can only be realized when our national interest is put ahead of the narrow agendas of a public interest elite.