

# Getting to be in *The Room Where It Happens*

By Greg Bentley, 2017 CAOC President



A year has passed and my tenure as CAOC president is coming to an end. I've spent that time thrilled – and humbled – to be in *The Room Where It Happens*, experiencing a life-changing and rewarding year working with some of our finest consumer champions.

My biggest takeaway: Consumers, and those of us who fight on their behalf, are well served in Sacramento by the greatness in the “room where it happens” that is CAOC!

Thank you Nancy Drabble, Nancy Peverini, Lea-Ann Tratten, Saveena Takhar, Jacqueline Serna, Samantha Helton, and Paul Woods – your connections run deep, your commitment is limitless, and your effectiveness is unparalleled. Thank you Eric Bailey and J.G. Preston for artfully communicating the message to shine a light on civil injustices and celebrate legislation producing change for the better. Thank you Laurie Klimchock, Lori Sarracino, Darlene Golladay, and Wendy Murphy for holding the fort and keeping our members informed, connected, and educated. My years on the board clued me in to the well-oiled machine that is CAOC, but to actually experience its greatness firsthand will go down as the most rewarding experience of my career. Thank you all.

And what a year it was. It started just before last year's convention with one heck of a bump – or Trump – in the road. But it was great rallying for consumer attorneys, and underscored the need for all of us to keep fighting for our just causes. Down, but not out. NEVER OUT!

With Trump in Washington, CAOC knew it was crucial for California to be a national leader for consumers. CAOC effectively killed EVERY measure pushed by tort reformers, including MICRA limits for Caltrans claims, contingency fee limits, and efforts to weaken wage and hour laws, just to name a few. So many of us take for granted the Herculean defense CAOC plays in protecting our practices.

CAOC plays great offense as well, with a banner legislative year. In 2017, five CAOC-sponsored bills were signed by the governor, including a nationally recognized bill fighting the injustice of forced arbitration. SB 33, the Wells Fargo bill, will hold financial institutions accountable when they commit fraud. Thank you Sen. Bill Dodd for championing this cause. And thank you Brian Kabateck for your tireless efforts in pushing this along.

Perhaps our toughest fight was winning legislative passage of AB 859, our sponsored measure to help fight elder abuse. It overcame massive opposition from the nursing home and health care industry thanks to the inexhaustible efforts of its author, Assembly Member Susan Eggman. In the end, Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed the bill, but this is not an issue that we will let die.

SB 658 will better allow us all to select a fair and impartial jury without unreasonable and arbitrary time restrictions. Thank you Lee Harris, Craig Peters, and Tony Stuart for your efforts in working with the Judicial Council and California Defense Council on this very important

CAOC-sponsored and spear-headed joint effort.

Other achievements include AB 1690, which made a person's immigration status irrelevant in consumer protection cases. And in protecting the most vulnerable, SB 755 puts restrictions on abusive defense psychological exams of sexually abused children. AB 644 will extend the meet and confer process to the filing of motions to strike and motions for judgment on the pleadings. Thank you CAOC for paving the way, and fighting so hard for consumers.

Finally, I want to thank all our members of the CAOC Executive Committee and Board for your friendship, support, and tireless dedication to the cause. The team is already poised to wage a fight next year against confidential settlements in sexual harassment cases – truly an example of leading the way. Thank you Keith More and the great team at Bentley & More for covering for me and for staying strong. And, of course, thank you to my wife, Donni, for being there every step of the way and allowing me to engage in this worthy cause. What an awesome ride.

In the words of *Hamilton*, my final piece of advice is for you to “get in the room” – join the board, seek leadership positions, support your legislators – do something for the cause of justice! It will be worth your while. Because if you have “skin in the game, you stay in the game – Click-Boom!” ■

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