President’s Message

Carpe diem

By Greg Bentley, CAOC President

The fragile and precious and transitory nature of life came into perfect focus for me the other day.

First I learned that our friend and colleague, CAOC Political Director Lea-Ann Tratten, had rushed to San Diego to be at the bedside of her fiancé, Jim Donatell. Jimmy, as he is known to any of us lucky enough to have enjoyed his gregarious company, had in the prime of life suffered a massive heart attack – a left-coronary artery blockage known as the “widow maker.” He had been placed in a medically induced coma, was on a ventilator and his other organs were beginning to fail. It looked dicey.

I’m not much of a miracle guy. But in the days that followed, the CAOC family rallied around Lea-Ann and Jimmy. And Jim, who is athletic and super in-shape and about the last guy you’d ever figure for a heart attack, slowly but surely began to rebound. By the end of the first week he was awake and joshing with nurses like Clint Eastwood. By the end of the second week he was out of the hospital and on the road to a full recovery. Wow, such great news!

Not long after, another life-affirming event took place: I met my first grandson. Griffin Gregory Bleeker was born to my daughter on June 5 weighing a perfect 7 lbs. 8 oz. and measuring 20 inches. As I held that swaddled little guy for the first time, I was left to marvel at how the fragility of our existence plays out over the years we enjoy on this good earth. What triumphs and travails will Griff see? What will he be like? I can’t wait to watch his new life unfurl.

We all have good days and bad, days where we attack life with fervor and others when we feel like we’ve been steamrolled by fate. We often enjoy or endure such days as we practice law. We balance busy schedules with our desire to give clients the best representation possible, fighting for the little gal or guy in the hope we prevail and earn our contingency fee. As members of CAOC, we also see good days and a few bad in government and politics, as we Consumer Attorneys take on righteous battles to protect civil justice and the rights of everyday citizens.

Outcomes matter in court and in the statehouse and in the court of public opinion. But our only chance at securing good outcomes is when we give our all, individually and collectively. In this competitive world, we don’t have much of a chance to succeed at much of anything unless we follow that old credo to always do our best, to seize the day.

As president of the nation’s best and biggest state trial lawyer organization, that means seeing through to the end our agenda of good civil justice legislation and preparing to elect the best civil justice candidates as we head toward the 2018 legislative races and the choice of a new governor and other statewide officers.

On the legislative front, we are doing quite splendidly at the halfway point of the 2017 session. Each of our seven sponsored bills has rolled out of its house of origin. These are bills that will protect underdog consumers and your practice of law.

Senate Bill 33 will ensure that bad corporate actors like Wells Fargo can’t hide behind forced arbitration when they’re systemically defrauding their own customers. AB 859 will boost protections against elder abuse in nursing homes by lowering the evidentiary threshold when evidence is destroyed. AB 1690 will help cement the legal rights of immigrants in PI cases. A bill I love is SB 658, which will make voir dire in civil cases far more fair by addressing the problem of judges putting strict time limits on jury selection. You can read more about these bills and our others at www.caoc.org/Legislation.

Heading into the 2018 campaign season, our political team is plowing the fields to find the best civil justice candidates to support. But they can’t do it without the help of us all. Giving to our political program helps CAOC support the best candidates and elect the best lawmakers, women and men who have in mind the interests of the courts, your clients and the practice of law. Donating is easy to do at www.caoc.org/AdvClub-Contribute.

If we do our best, collectively and individually, we can succeed in life and in the law, in the statehouse and on the campaign trail. Please join with me on this worthy mission. Let’s seize the day, together.

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