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The Reformer

RAYMOND P. BOUCHER
52
KIESEL, BOUCHER & LARSON
BEVERLY HILLS
PLAINTIFFS' LAW



BY BRANDON ORTIZ

Before survivors of clergy sexual abuse could have their day in court, they had to beat the politically powerful Roman Catholic Church on decidedly uneven turf - the state Capitol.

Predicting a brutal fight over changing the statute of limitations for sexual abuse, state Sen. Joe Dunn sought the help of fiery trial lawyer Ray Boucher, a rising star who raised buckets of cash with the Consumer Attorneys of California for tort-friendly lawmakers.

Boucher helped craft the bill to mitigate concerns it would open the floodgates to frivolous lawsuits. Boucher and Dunn then scored a coup when the powerful Senate leader, John Burton, who agreed to be the bill's primary sponsor.

Still, "not a lot of people were running to get on the legislation," Boucher said.

After shepherding the bill into law, Boucher, 52, became the lead lawyer for 850 plaintiffs who say they were molested years and even decades prior by California priests. He deftly negotiated \$774 million in settlements from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and \$100 million from Diocese of Orange.

"Ray's humanity really was the engine that drove the L.A. cases," abuse survivor Carlos Perez-Carillo said. "They risked everything to represent us."

Before Boucher could take on the case that would make or break his legal career, he had to convince the Legislature to create a one-year waiver to the statute of limitations.

Dunn feared the influence that Cardinal Roger Mahony could wield on Latino lawmakers who were close to the church - both spiritually and politically.

"Part of the plan was to move it through as quickly as possible so that the Archdiocese or any other legal entity... wouldn't be able to mount an attack," Boucher said.

The timing for the bill's 2002 passage was fortuitous for victims. As it was being drafted that January, explosive internal documents of the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston were published showing that high-ranking church officials had known about hundreds of cases of sexual abuse and covered them up.

Expected opposition from the Boy Scouts, YMCA and other youth-oriented groups never materialized. And the Church stayed on the sidelines.

"They were frozen by the very intense coverage of the cover up," said Dunn, who left the Senate in 2006 due to term limits.

The bill passed both houses unanimously, leading to lawsuits against the Roman Catholic Church, Boy Scouts, Seventh Day Adventist Church and others.

What happened in California stands in stark contrast to other states, such as Michigan and New York, where the church fought similar legislation - and won.

Boucher, a short, fit man with greying hair, never lost the accent he had from growing up in the small northern Massachusetts town of Tyngsborough.

In 1967, his father moved the large family of eight children to Colorado Springs, Colo. Out west, Boucher developed a passion for kayaking, mountain climbing and hiking as the family trekked all over the country, camping at every national park. Boucher's father died 21 years ago while on a mission to climb all 54 of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks; Boucher hopes to finish the 16 his father was not able to climb.

Politics led Boucher to the law. He dreamed of becoming a lawyer after seeing a newspaper diagram of the blockade of Cuba during the missile crisis when he was 6-years-old.

"Something about that whole thing made me want to get into the law," Boucher said.

The outdoorsman originally wanted to practice environmental law. But shortly after law school at Pepperdine University he changed course after representing striking members of Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers union accused of violence on the picket line.

At the apex of the clergy abuse lawsuits, Boucher's practice in Beverly Hills, Kiesel, Boucher & Larson, swelled from 20 employees to 50, and all the firm's assets - and the partners' personal finances - were invested in a case that had a good chance of being thrown out by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The fates of the cases and the firm were intertwined.

"If we were playing a game of Texas Hold 'Em, we were all in," said partner Paul Kiesel, who frequently woke up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. "It was the scariest moment of my professional life."

But Boucher, Kiesel said, remained "as cool as a cucumber."

Boucher was most concerned with settling the cases quickly for clients struggling to cope with the wounds the litigation reopened.

"I never felt stress associated with the case and its effect on the firm," he said.

Attorney Michael Hennigan, who represented the church, said Boucher masterfully balanced the needs of competing constituencies, particularly "the billion or so" plaintiff lawyers. He called Boucher a tough but trustworthy negotiator.

"He is straight ahead," Hennigan said. "If he tells you something you can count on it."

Perez-Carillo credits Boucher with meeting regularly with survivors and keeping them informed in every step of the legal process that brought some accountability for years of hidden abuse.

"I think Ray and the other attorneys were appalled at the lack of justice coming to us," he said. "They were appalled by the stonewalling of this supposedly Christian organization."

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