



CAALA President

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 **Consumer Attorneys**
ASSOCIATION OF LOS ANGELES

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Become a complete trial lawyer: Get politically engaged

“WE ARE ONLY ONE ELECTION AWAY FROM BEING PUT OUT OF BUSINESS”

Last summer, when I began planning for my term as CAALA's President, there were many things I wanted to accomplish, but there were two goals that were foremost on my list. The first was to make sure that CAALA was doing everything we could to provide programs and resources to improve the trial skills of our members – both young lawyers and veteran attorneys – to make them better and more successful trial attorneys. The second was for CAALA to do as much as possible to educate our members about the critical importance of engaging in the political process by working within our own association, and with our sister organizations, the Consumer Attorneys of California (CAOC) and the American Association for Justice (AAJ), who work day and night to preserve and protect the civil justice system by securing legislation that is positive for trial lawyers and the consumers we represent – and in defeating legislation brought to limit our clients' rights and deny them the justice they deserve.

At the beginning of the year, when the committees and task forces I created began to work on the plans and tasks needed to achieve those goals, I came to the realization that the two goals are deeply connected. In fact, I believe that for someone to become a complete and successful trial lawyer you *must* engage in the political process; you can't have one without the other. You cannot become a successful trial attorney if there is negative legislation either in Sacramento or Washington, D.C., that will potentially damage or even destroy your practice and affect or take away your livelihood.

I thought about this last month when CAALA inducted three new members into the CAALA Hall of Fame – Bruce Brusavich, Jack Denove and Chris Spagnoli. Bruce, Jack and Chris are each great trial lawyers, with multiple groundbreaking verdicts to their credit; but they also have something else in common – they each have fought long and hard political battles to protect consumers and the attorneys who represent them.

When my friend Jack Denove addressed the audience at the induction ceremony, Jack spoke some words that I want to share with all CAALA members, especially the younger ones.

Jack said that although things are going pretty well today for many trial lawyers, we need to educate CAALA members about how fragile their success really is. “Please don't forget,” Jack told the audience, “That we all are only one election away from being put out of business.” He then reminded the audience of the whisker-thin victory in 1996 that trial lawyer leaders like Bruce Brusavich, Chris Spagnoli and Jack himself, worked so hard to achieve in the fight against a ballot measure that would have capped contingency fees at 10 percent, essentially crippling the consumer trial bar and taking away the public's access to justice in civil matters.

As I'm writing this column, we have just completed the June primary elections in California and in several states nationally, leaving us only a few months away from the much more important general elections in November. CAOC and AAJ worked hard on numerous campaigns in June and will be doubling-down on their efforts as we gear up for the battles in November. CAALA members need to support these efforts – any way that we can.

One of the most important CAALA committees that I created this year is the Political Affairs Committee chaired by Christa Ramey with Stuart Fraenkel and Chris Aumais serving as Vice-Chairs. Members of the Committee are working to build lasting relationships with local legislators to provide them with insight and advice about legislation that's important to consumers. Prior to the June primary, the Committee focused on the important special elections to fill vacant Assembly and Senate seats.

In my January Advocate column, I said that trial lawyers have had a direct and distinct effect on not only the election of many of our legislators, but also on the political process thereafter. This was proven beyond a shadow of a doubt this year when members of the Political Affairs Committee proved me right by working to help Sydney Kamlager, Autumn Burke, Luz Rivas, Jesse Gabriel and Mike Eng in their Assembly and Senate campaigns. All were victorious in the primary and will be on the ballot in the November general election.

For many years CAALA members have focused primarily on the local

Assembly and Senate elections, but this year, as you know, is very different; this year we must also give attention to the national races in several California congressional districts.

The Political Affairs committee will be working with the CAOC PAC, AAJ leadership and past AAJ and CAALA President Gary Paul – Chair of AAJ's powerful National Finance Counsel (NFC) – to determine how CAALA members can contribute to the efforts to elect candidates in November that will allow Democrats to take back the House of Representatives. As a member of the NFC and the California Chair of the AAJ PAC, I will also lend my support to show CAALA members how they can help and become engaged in this essential and vital effort. The first step is to be there for AAJ and CAOC by joining both organizations. Helping with contributions to the AAJ and CAOC PACs is also crucial, since the money raised by these PACs will directly support candidates who are committed to consumer rights and the civil justice system.

There will also be ways to help individual campaigns, such as the campaign for Katie Porter who is running against Conservative Republican Mimi Walters in the 45th Congressional District in nearby Irvine. I have personally met with Katie and she is a great candidate who understands and supports our issues. She is a mother of three, a tenured law professor at UC Irvine, has worked for years as a consumer protection attorney and she is endorsed by Senators Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren along with the AAJ PAC. Electing Katie and other Democrats running in California Congressional races will be a great step toward taking back the House and protecting against federal legislation that harms employees, consumers and the trial bar.

Jack Denove is right, our livelihood can be threatened in every election unless CAALA members realize that being engaged in the political process is not just for a few but is crucial for any member who wants to become a complete and successful trial attorney.

