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## Kamala and CAALA

### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VP AND THE ASSOCIATION

In a few days, Joe Biden will be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States and Kamala Harris will be sworn in as Vice President.

I will go out on a limb and predict that most of CAALA's 3,000 members will be watching on January 20. They will all feel good as Biden and Harris take the oath of office. A small group of CAALA members, however, will have a unique claim to fame watching our new Vice President. Those 71 members and CAALA staff can brag that they were present the night that Kamala Harris spoke in-person at a meeting of the CAALA Board of Governors.

That meeting was much smaller than a Presidential inauguration, but it is equally historic for CAALA. Prominent attorneys, judges and politicians regularly appear at our events, including at Board meetings. But guess how many times a future United States Senator or future Vice President has spoken at a Board meeting? The answer is one of each, and both happened on April 21, 2016.

The meeting was held in the CAALA office on Flower Street. Harris was California Attorney General, and she was running for the U.S. Senate seat previously held by Barbara Boxer. It was not the first time that Harris had connected with CAALA. She previously had established relationships with several CAALA members including 2008 CAALA President Amy Solomon. Solomon was the first one to educate me on the proper pronunciation of Harris's first name. It's *Comma-La*.

Harris had attended several CAALA events including the Installation dinner and the annual convention, but she had never spoken to a small group in the CAALA office. So how did it happen that Kamala Harris ended up in the CAALA conference room talking to the CAALA Board? Read on.

CAALA's president in 2016 was Dave Ring of Taylor and Ring. Dave was a terrific CAALA President who had big ideas and never took no for an answer.

In early March of 2016 Dave called me up and excitedly told me he wanted to invite Kamala Harris to speak at the next CAALA board meeting. I gently rejected the idea, saying there was no chance that she would take the time to speak to a small group on short notice in the middle of an election campaign. Dave disagreed, and told me that he had a "connection" to Kamala.

He told me that he attended USC Law School with Douglas Emhoff, who married Kamala in 2014. Ring said that he and Emhoff had remained friends as both pursued their legal careers, Ring as a plaintiff attorney and Emhoff as an entertainment lawyer. "We are really close friends," Ring told me. "Doug will make this happen."

Ring was right. Exactly nine minutes after he emailed Emhoff asking if Kamala would speak to the CAALA Board, Emhoff responded "yes" and a few days later her appearance was



confirmed. Ring also invited a larger group of CAALA members to attend a reception for Harris after the Board meeting. In his comments that night, Ring said that "Harris will be a major player nationally for many years to come and might even end up President of the United States."

Harris arrived at the CAALA office on time and spoke for thirty minutes about civil rights, access to the courts, consumer rights and corporate misconduct. She did not need notes and she knew to whom she was speaking and the issues that were important to those present.

After her comments, Harris took questions from the members in the room and answered every single one, including one from Aimee Kirby's young son who was invited to attend.

Following the Board meeting the group adjourned to attend the reception and after speaking again she slowly traversed the room, talking personally with everyone in attendance. This is not unusual for her. Ring recently told me that four years after that 2016 Board meeting Harris still stays in touch with him. He says she is "incredibly down to earth and nice, exactly as she comes across in public." Ring added that "A few weeks after the Presidential election she called me to again thank me for my support."

Kamala Harris will not be the first President or Vice President to have connections to the trial bar, but she will certainly be the first to have a direct connection to CAALA.

As Vice President, Harris presides over the Senate and she may be asked to cast a tie-breaking vote. If that hypothetical vote is for or against protecting consumers, you can safely assume that her vote will be on the side of consumers and the attorneys who represent them. In part, her knowledge of you and your issues has come from those years spent associating with CAALA members.

CAALA's Board meetings are now Zoom Videoconferences, so all members can register and attend if they choose. You can do so by going to the CAALA web site. I strongly urge you to take advantage of this technology and attend those virtual meetings. I can't promise that you will hear a future Vice President speak, but if it happened once, it could happen again. Just ask Dave Ring and the 71 others who were there on April 21, 2016 – the night Kamala came to CAALA.