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Journal of Consumer Attorneys Associations for Southern California
ADVOCATE

February 2023

A look at the new California Legislature

GET TO KNOW THOSE LEGISLATORS WHO MAY BE SERVING CALIFORNIA FOR THE NEXT 12 YEARS; A LOT OF ATTORNEYS

The new year is bringing dozens of new faces to the California Legislature – 33, to be exact. Among those new faces, we may be seeing future leaders of those bodies, future congresspeople and U.S. Senators, Attorneys General and the like. Now is the best time to get to know those legislators who may be serving in California for the next 12 years, or beyond in other important roles.

The issues we work on at CAOC can seem daunting to the many non-lawyers in the Legislature, and many look to the elected attorney legislators for guidance. While each one of the new legislators is critically important – each has a vote – the attorney members will have an outsized influence on policy. Lawyers were elected throughout the state, in San Mateo, Santa Monica, Downey, Sacramento, Riverside and San Diego. We need to be sure to build relationships with these attorneys, and to work to elect more attorneys in the 2024 election cycle.

Assemblymember Damon Connolly (D-San Rafael) is a former deputy attorney general, former city councilmember and former member of the Marin County Board of Supervisors. An impressive resume. Importantly, he is also a trial lawyer; he is currently co-counsel in *De La Torre vs. Cash Call*, a class action filed against a lender preying upon low-income consumers, charging usurious interest rates. His experience and expertise will have a direct impact on how California laws are shaped that affect you and your clients.

Assemblymember Diane Papan (D-San Mateo) comes from a political dynasty. She is an attorney in private practice and most recently served on the Millbrae City Council. Papan is not a trial lawyer; however, CAOC past president Niall McCarthy and the attorneys at Cotchett, Pitre and McCarthy have spent years working with and supporting Papan, a long-term relationship that will help inform how she views issues

impacting you and your clients over the next 12 years.

Assemblymember Rick Zbur (D-Santa Monica) has served as the executive director of Equality California and the California League of Conservation Voters, our political partners. Building on the political relationship, Chris Spagnoli, Geoff Wells and many other attorneys in the district met early with Zbur, sharing stories about their clients and how the work they do helps fight discrimination and harassment and holds corporations accountable who harm people. Although his background as a lawyer has been focused on CEQA and land-use issues, he was captured by the passion and commitment of CAOC lawyers.

Assemblymember Blanca Pacheco (D-Downey) served as mayor of Downey, and in her law practice she focused on municipal law and estate planning. While her legal background does not touch CAOC issues, she has friends in the plaintiff bar. Oscar Gutierrez is working to educate her on the issues you face daily in your practice.

Assemblymember Bill Essayli (R-Riverside) is a former federal prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's Office who founded his own firm, Essayli and Brown. Essayli was appointed vice chair of the Assembly Judiciary Committee. Our Inland Empire attorneys, including CAOC President Greg Rizio, are working to build relationships with Essayli where we hope to find common ground.

Senator Catherine Blakespear (D-San Diego) comes from the Encinitas City Council. Her legal practice focused on estate planning. She is also CAOC member Val McGinty's cousin! Gerry Singleton and Tim Blood have built strong relationships with Blakespear that will go a long way to educating her during her 12-year term. Blakespear is a fighter who beat back more than \$1 million in oil industry money to turn this former Republican district blue.

Senator Angelique Ashby (D-Sacramento) is a nonpracticing attorney who served on the Sacramento City Council. She prevailed over former California Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones in a bruising election; CAOC backed Jones. Ashby has some relationships in the plaintiff bar that will be explored; however, we will have our work cut out for us, as she serves on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Looking ahead to 2024, at least 20 legislative seats will be open. And more seats will be vacated as legislators decide to run for different elected posts. Katie Porter, Barbara Lee, and Adam Schiff each hold coveted Congressional seats that will be open when they run for U.S. Senate. Others are sure to follow. Congressional seats are the holy grail for many legislators, and they will in turn give up their legislative seats to run for Congress.

To make matters even more interesting (and challenging!), 2024 is a presidential year, which means the California primary moves from June to March. With vote by mail, California voters will start voting in February – just one year from now.

Between the 2022 class and the anticipated open seats in 2024, nearly half of the Legislature will be new in 2025. The time we spend now getting to know each of these legislators and educating them on our issues will pay dividends far into the future. Each one of us needs to get in the game to ensure that a vibrant and fair civil justice system continues through the coming decades. CAOC is a team – and you are part of it. Since we are a team, closing with a quote from Vince Lombardi feels appropriate: "Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." Please commit to doing your part to make CAOC work and to protect the civil justice system for years to come.