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The joy of jury service

THE TRIAL BY CIVIL JURY, GUARANTEED BY THE SEVENTH AMENDMENT, IS WHAT KEEPS US ALL GOING

I had the honor of representing the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association at a Jury Appreciation Luncheon organized by the Honorable Marc Kelly at Harbor Justice Center on May 11. The week of May 8th is recognized across the State of California as Jury Appreciation Week. Judge Kelly spearheaded a wonderful lunch and ceremony to recognize Orange County jurors who have served in his courtroom over the past few years. This was my first time attending such an event, and I hope it will not be my last.

Seventy former jurors attended, all of whom served at some point during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bench officers included Presiding Judge Maria Hernandez and Harbor Court Supervising Judge Megan Wagner. Representatives of the Orange County Bar Association, American Board of Trial Advocates, the District Attorney's Office and the Public Defender's office also spoke at the event.

The mere fact that these jurors answered the call and showed up in court during the pandemic, and did so safely, was inspiring. But even more impressive was the testimony from three former jurors about their experience as jurors. These former jurors reminded me of why I do what I do, reinvigorated me to my practice and gave me a boost of energy that I think we can all understand is needed from time to time. I wish I could play a video of their testimonies and attach it to this article because every trial lawyer in Southern California needs to hear it.



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TAKE NO CHALLENGE ALONE

These jurors spoke from their heart regarding their apprehension to serve and their desire to find any excuse to be released from their duty. But once they walked into Judge Kelly's courtroom, their attitude changed. They spoke of accepting their duty to serve as American citizens. They spoke of their appreciation for the American jury system and the fact that many countries do not have a system that affords a jury trial by your peers.

One juror in particular spoke of her immigration to the United States from Taiwan and her path to U.S. citizenship. She was apprehensive to serve because English is her second language. She spoke of feeling like an American Citizen for the first time because she answered the call and served as a juror. She was part of the system of justice. She was so eloquent and thoughtful. She did not complain about the time off work or the time away from her family. She was proud to be a juror. Another juror was so influenced by his experience that he is applying to law school.

The powerful testimonies from these jurors provide the inspiration we all need to keep fighting the fight for our clients.

The trial by jury, guaranteed in civil matters by the Seventh Amendment, is what keeps us all going. We are trial lawyers because we believe in the Constitution, and we believe that everyone has a right to have their dispute decided in a court of law.

Trial lawyer organizations, like OCTLA, CAALA and CAOC, bring us all together and allow us all to share experiences, knowledge, and information so that we are not in this fight alone. I urge you all to participate in your local trial lawyer organization. Attend education seminars, reply to list serve emails, and attend social events that bring us together and provide an avenue for collaboration. As we say at OCTLA – Take No Challenge Alone. You are not alone, your local TLA is right there for you; you just have to participate.

