



Update from Sacramento Lea-Ann Tratten

CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA POLITICAL DIRECTOR

Our character was tested

...AND WE PASSED

I read an opinion essay suggesting that the battle between Uber and CAOC was solved in one day. The truth is far more complex.

In March 2025, a new corporate front group called PACT launched a seven-figure attack against “billboard lawyers.” Within one week, CAOC’s PAC Board, under the leadership of Roger Dreyer, launched its own campaign, “Who is PACT?” Our research showed it was Uber and Waffle House. More than \$1 million was raised, and our campaign ran through the summer of 2025.

On August 6, 2025, the *New York Times* published an expose on Uber: “Every Eight Minutes: Uber’s Alarming Sexual Violence Problem.” Our incredible political consultants at TMC, led by Dan Newman, began working on story lines for ads drawn from the NYT piece. Those ads were in development when Uber filed its initiative on October 3, 2025.

When The Big One hit, CAOC was prepared. We knew that Uber, with its billions, thought that it could steamroll us. Our first goal was to punch back and punch back hard. Uber had shown it was willing to spend \$200 million on Prop 22 – they are truly Goliath.

Uber underestimated CAOC. Within a matter of weeks, our “Almost Every Eight Minutes” campaign was launched. Its goal was to show Uber they picked a fight with the wrong team. Any fight with us would be bloody. And we not only sent a message to Uber about what was to come, but we also sent a message to any other corporate bully that decides to take us on: We will fight.

Under the leadership of CAOC’s then-President Geoff Wells and incoming President Doug Saeltzter, an ambitious fundraising goal was set: \$50 million to be raised in three months. At the same time, CAOC began polling and drafting

counter measures. We learned quickly that Goliath made a mistake in filing its measure, because voters did not want to see their access to healthcare jeopardized. We also saw that Uber, while generally rated a favorable company, indeed had a huge sexual assault problem.

CAOC went on to raise nearly \$80 million under the tremendous leadership of Doug Saeltzter, Brian Panish, Nick Rowley, Roger Dreyer and Samantha Helton. It is unprecedented to engage in fierce battle before a measure hits the ballot. CAOC did so to not only preview to Uber the ugly fight ahead, but to send a political message. Corporations cannot use the ballot threat of attorney fee caps to leverage unpopular policy positions that they cannot pass in the legislature.

In early March, the governor’s office reached out to CAOC and convened discussions with Uber to see whether a compromise could be reached. Doug Saeltzter, Nick Rowley, Niall McCarthy and I had a series of meetings with Uber where Uber outlined its demands: elimination of joint and several liability, caps on damages, elimination of vicarious liability, elimination of common carrier liability, control of “phantom damages”...essentially a tort reformer’s dream. Uber ultimately walked away from those discussions in late April. We were nowhere close to an agreement.

CAOC stood firm and girded for battle. For months, CAOC heard rumors that Uber wanted a deal. However, CAOC also knew that any compromise would send a message to other corporations about our strength, and a bad deal would mean open season on lawyers for fee initiatives.

The month of May was a test of CAOC’s courage, rightness of purpose, and strength. A true test of character. The leadership of this organization, and that of CAALA, led by Liz Hernandez, met that test.

The governor’s office reconvened discussions with Uber in June. Those discussions immediately focused on medical liens, all the other garbage sought by Uber was off the table. CAOC was firm that no compromise would impact access to health care and access to justice. The meetings were a race against the clock.

The measures, having qualified for the ballot, could be pulled, but the absolute deadline was June 25. If a legislative compromise was reached, it would need to be agreed upon by June 17 to have time to be put into legislation, voted upon and signed. A meeting was convened in the governor’s office with Uber, CMA, SEIU and representatives from CAOC: Doug Saeltzter, Niall McCarthy, Greg Bentley, Rahul Ravipudi, Nick Rowley and me.

What emerged was a compromise that we announced in a joint statement, “Both sides agree: Californians deserve a system that is safe, fair, and accountable. This agreement protects patients from unnecessary treatment or getting overcharged, ensures access to medical care and legal representation, and strengthens safety measures. We look forward to working with the California Legislature to pass this legislation.” By the time this article goes to press, we will know whether the legislation, SB 623, co-authored by Senator Tom Umberg and Assemblymember Diane Papan, was signed.

CAOC CEO Nancy Drabble held the ship strong and steady through tumultuous times, and the CAOC legislative and political teams, especially Saveena Takhar, were critical in keeping the ship afloat and ready for the next battle ahead. The next test of our character is what comes next. Will we go quietly into the night or will we stand together, firm in our commitment to protect and defend the civil justice system when we are not in the heat of battle? That will be our test. 🍀