



From the President
Clare Lucich
 BENTLEY AND MORE, LLP



Greg Bentley
 BENTLEY AND MORE, LLP

The Uber fight: OCTLA's collective voice

AND A WORD FROM WAR COUNCIL MEMBER GREG BENTLEY

Throughout our history, there have been threats to our justice system – efforts by insurance companies and powerful corporations to limit access to justice and prevent injured Californians from having their day in court before a jury of their peers. Whether the defendant is a major product manufacturer, a rideshare company, or a hotel chain, our ability to bring a case before the people and let them decide remains paramount.

As you all know, on October 3, 2025, Uber filed a deceptive ballot initiative – a last-minute maneuver designed to catch California's plaintiff attorneys off guard, without time to organize a response. Had it passed, the initiative would have imposed caps on medical recoveries and made it nearly impossible for accident victims to hire an attorney by severely limiting attorneys' fees, all while rideshare companies would have continued to enjoy an essentially unlimited litigation budget. The impact on access to justice for all automobile accident victims would have been catastrophic.

Once the UBER initiative was filed, CAOC immediately went to work, assembling a dream team of lawyers to serve as the War Council, backed by CAOC's incredible staff and campaign managers. With this article, we get to go inside the war room with War Council member Greg Bentley. But before we do that, I would be remiss if I did not thank CAOC's brilliant staff – Nancy Drabble, Le-Ann Tratten, Laurie Klimchock, Nancy Peverini, and Samantha Helton – and the entire War Council: Doug Saeltzer, Christine Spagnoli, Roger Dreyer, Greg Bentley, Liz Hernandez, Niall McCarthy, Steve Mehr, Brian Panish, Rahul Ravipudi, Nick Rowley, Elise Sanguinetti, Jerry Singleton, and Geoff Wells.

Guided by CAOC, OCTLA mobilized its members – organizing phone banks, fundraising events, and gathering signatures – all in an effort to defeat the Uber initiative and get a counter-initiative on the ballot that would put addi-

tional safeguards in place for rideshare patrons. I'm also happy to report that many of our members stepped up with large contributions to the campaign – thank you to those who did; your voice made a difference.

As part of that effort, CAOC launched the "Every 8 Minutes" campaign, drawing on a New York Times investigation by journalist Emily Steel that documented the growing problem of sexual assaults during Uber rideshares. According to her reporting, Uber received a report of sexual assault or misconduct in the U.S. about once every eight minutes between 2017 and 2022. CAOC's campaign team also worked to finalize the counter-initiative language and gather the signatures needed to get it on the ballot.

Through the months-long efforts of CAOC and the War Council, negotiators ultimately reached a deal: Senate Bill 623, a compromise that pulled Uber's initiative from the November ballot. The legislation mandates stronger background-check requirements aimed at keeping drivers with histories of DUIs, child abuse, sexual battery, or violent felonies off the road. The deal preserves injured riders' ability to recover medical costs and preserves access to attorneys for injured parties, but it limits how much lien providers can charge patients injured in a crash, and it applies only to Rideshare-related cases, not to all motor vehicle cases.

I'm thankful to this team, and we are all grateful for the impact your work will have on millions of injured people throughout the state. With other states watching, we stood strong and fought for what matters. Now let's hear from the war council!

A conversation with War Council and OCTLA Member Greg Bentley

CAOC formed the "dream team" war council – tell us about it.

CAOC jumped into action immediately. Geoff, CAOC President Elect

Doug Saeltzer, Lea-Ann Tratten, Nancy Drabble, and CAOC PAC Chair Roger Dreyer started forming the War Council right away. There were many calls and Zoom meetings that Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. A countermeasure team was formed, a political team was hired, and an initial fundraising budget of \$30 million was set – so much accomplished immediately. I can't say enough about the leadership of the War Council: Doug and Geoff were incredible, Roger was a force, and Lea-Ann and Nancy were politically brilliant, well connected, and highly respected in Sacramento. Geoff Wells – Rock solid from start to finish: a true leader, encourager and skilled consensus builder. It was a pleasure to work with this team from start to finish.

The first War Council Zoom was set for Tuesday, October 5. No turning back.

How was it working with Lea-Ann, Nancy, and the CAOC team again?

It's hard to explain the effectiveness, power, and influence the CAOC team has in Sacramento until you've truly experienced it. I've stayed in touch with the CAOC team over the years, but candidly, I missed working with them on a daily basis. We would not have won this battle without the expertise of Lea-Ann and Nancy. Many members did a lot and played a huge role in this success, but it was all orchestrated by the political experts. Samantha Helton was also critical to the success, keeping track of fundraising up and down the state in a historic fundraising campaign. The entire CAOC team deserves so much credit!

How was it negotiating with Uber?

Uber is a formidable foe and a difficult party to negotiate with. Based on intel we had about Uber's negotiations with lawyers in Nevada and Texas, we had a sense of what we were getting into. Uber wanted to essentially restructure the justice system for automobile accident victims – caps on damages, caps on attorneys' fees, limits on an injured party's freedom to choose their own doctor,

elimination of common carrier status, utilization review, among other things. The negotiations were handled through the governor's office. Niall, Doug, and Nick were able to narrow the issues down to three key points. Several meetings took place, then Uber walked away. We stayed strong, knowing our counter-initiative was devastating to Uber and that they'd come back to the table. They did.

This came down to the wire; You flew to Sacramento the day of the deadline. What was that day like?

To get a deal done, we had a Wednesday, June 17, 2026, 5 p.m. deadline to have an agreement in place and the contents of a bill ready for submission to the Legislative Counsel. We flew to Sacramento Wednesday morning without a deal. But we'd succeeded on a key issue the night before – Uber agreed to use the “billed” amount as the database. That was a big step toward a deal. The last major hurdle was which percentile would be used. It was a crazy day. CMA and SEIU were brought into the negotiating room, and the governor's office played a key role. With the clock ticking, all knew that if we didn't reach a deal, both initiatives would go to the ballot. Pressure was mounting.

Around 2:30, we reached a deal. The next step was getting the governor's office to sign off and support the bill –

mission accomplished! We had about 90 minutes to finalize the bill for submission. It was done on time and submitted to the GO. Thanks to the Governor's support, we got priority in committee scheduling, help with legislative drafting, and an RN (request number) submission, which I later learned was the lead version that carried the Governor's support. A huge Thank You to Governor Gavin Newsom and his team! The bill passed unanimously in both houses and was signed on time by the governor on Thursday, June 25. Both initiatives were then simultaneously withdrawn at the Secretary of State's office. The deal was done! 