



From the President

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SECK LAW



Why would anyone want to practice in federal court?

BECAUSE IT'S WHERE WE FIGHT FOR OUR CLIENTS' CIVIL RIGHTS

Trying cases in federal court is not for the faint of heart. It is different from state court. Some say it is harder to navigate the rules of civil procedure and even harder to win your case. Common complaints are that federal rules are too rigid, the trials move too fast, and the judges are too strict. Most civil trial attorneys avoid federal courts (and federal claims) like the plague.

There is, however, a special group of trial attorneys who thrive in that environment. They are a special breed. They live and breathe Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP). They welcome the quick 21-day turnaround from the time a motion for summary judgment and the date on which an opposition must be filed. They have no problem being given a 30-minute time limit for jury selection and a maximum of eight hours to try their entire case. Most of these lawyers are civil rights attorneys. For them, federal court is home.

The federal courthouses are usually beautifully designed with stunning architecture. In large cities or urban areas like Los Angeles, the federal courthouses also tend to be massive. As you approach, you feel as though the building will swallow you up. When you enter the building, you are greeted by security at the entrance and subject to a screening that is reminiscent of an airport security checkpoint pre-TSA precheck. Once you slip your shoes back on, you gaze up and see the official portraits of the president and vice-president of the United States. You walk through the hall, careful not to slip on the marble floor while taking in the art decorating the walls. Once you reach your courtroom, you take a deep breath and pull the metal handle of one of the wooden double doors, feeling its weight. You enter the courtroom and exhale. I say "you," but I really mean me.

I can remember my first civil rights trial in federal court. The room was large. The lighting was soft (much less harsh

than the florescent bulbs I was accustomed to). The judge sat on an elevated bench that appeared to be half a football field away. He sat higher than any other judge that I can recall. It was as if he was perched above us by at least a story. The large digital clock, prominently displaying every passing second, underscored the court's emphasis on punctuality and efficiency. It served as a reminder that we were to arrive on time each day and the court's time was not to be wasted.

Sitting in that courtroom, I felt physically smaller, yet strangely, more significant. I suppose it was the formality and seriousness of the atmosphere. It commanded respect, amplifying the importance of the role I played. Not many spaces can do that. And, although I felt fear, I also felt excitement and a profound sense of pride.

This issue of Advocate features several articles on federal practice and procedure. Even if you have never stepped foot in a federal courtroom, there is much to learn from our fellow federal practitioners and judges. Some of CAALA's most recognized (and awarded) trial lawyers are federal practitioners. Bernard Alexander. Dale Galipo. Carl Douglas. Arnaldo Casillas. Humberto Guizar. Gretchen Nelson. They impart their wisdom by speaking at our annual convention in Las Vegas and teaching the next generation of trial lawyers through CAALA's Plaintiff Trial Academy. We are fortunate to have to have so many talented lawyers within our ranks and they want to share their knowledge with others for the collective benefit of our organization and our clients.

Other resources on federal practice and procedure that are available are the Advocate article archives (www.advocatemagazine.com) and our document bank (www.caala.org). You can find general practice tips and in-depth analysis of case law and codes.

The document bank is a treasure trove of sample demand letters, complaints, depositions and trial documents. They are carefully curated, readily accessible, and easy to download. CAALA encourages its members to broaden their practice. File a federal case, or two. Try a federal case, or two. Tap into the resources available to you. Next month, Denisse Gastelum and Christian Contreras, two zealous civil rights attorneys, will serve as editors of Advocate's issue dedicated to civil rights law.

Some may question the appeal of federal practice. They ask, "Why would anyone want to practice in federal court?" For me, the answer is clear – it's about acquiring versatile skills that ultimately benefit the clients we serve. Mastering both federal and state procedures is an invaluable asset. Every skill you acquire is one more tool in your belt that can be used to serve the people we represent. The ability to evaluate, consider, and properly plead both state and federal causes of action while moving seamlessly through the courts is an incredible skill to employ. Speaking both FRCP (federal rules of civil procedure) and CA-CCP fluently is art. Without question, the beneficiaries of our expanded knowledge are the thousands of people we serve.

Although much of my time is spent trying cases in state court, I still make it a point to engage in federal law practice. When I find myself missing the federal courtroom, I can readily tap into that federal courtroom feeling often by simply walking into the Spring Street Courthouse in downtown Los Angeles. It was once the United States Court House where judges for the United States District Court for the Central District of California presided over cases. The Los Angeles Superior Court now occupies the space, but it still has the air of a federal building and I still hold my breath for a moment each time I enter. 📍