



We Can Make a Difference

by Gordon Mallon

When I was in college I had a poly sci class on local politics. We were each assigned to interview candidates from a particular state legislative race. I was assigned to interview Senator Ed Fadely and his challenger.

I met with Senator Fadely in his family room. We had a pleasant enough interview. I asked him why he chose to enter public life and serve in the legislature. His answer will stick with me for the rest of my life. (Keep in mind, this was more than thirty years ago and I still remember it.) He told me about how, when he was a child growing up in Missouri, his mother taught him that it was his duty to use the gifts he was given to serve his community to the best of his ability. He told me that he sacrificed time he could otherwise have spent in his practice because he felt he had a duty to his community. He did not want to use his abilities, his education, and his willingness to work hard merely for selfish gain, but to help those who were less gifted and privileged to have a better life.

Most everyone reading this fits in the same category as Senator Fadely. Those of us who are lawyers have been privileged to have at least Bob Dylan's "twenty years of schoolin'" (assuming kindergarten and the usual 12, 4, and 3); some of us have much more. (I spent the best three years of my life in the eighth grade.) Most of us who are not attorneys have received more and better education than the average person. Most of us have jobs that do not require us to perform hard physical labor or consist entirely of mind-numbing boredom. All of us are of way-above-average intelligence and good looks. We have been gifted and privileged indeed.

The great thing about OCDLA is that most of us are doing what Senator Fadely did, sacrificing

personal gain for the higher good. Many of us speak for the homeless, the poor, the orphans. Some of us help people living in less desperate situations but still caught up in circumstances they are ill-equipped to understand or navigate. We often deal with people—ordinary, everyday, next-door sort of people—who are facing the loss of everything in their lives and help them through relatively whole. We give them the ability to sleep at night, knowing that they have an advocate who knows what he or she is doing.

We also are active in making our community a better place outside our practice. We coach kids, serve on school boards, city councils, state bar committees, and perform other volunteer work. We care about our organization, OCDLA. Just this week (as I write this) I exchanged a couple emails with an attorney in my board district, Michael Romano, who took time to communicate with me about an idea he has to make our organization work better. We are passionate about helping make this a better world at many levels.

Another way we try to improve things is through the political process, which is the actual topic of this column. Because of our work, we gain a familiarity with the real-life consequences of some of the legislation that manages to work its way through our legislature and get signed by the Governor. We are uniquely equipped with this information and have a duty to share it with our decision makers. Often the decision makers are not

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interested in our information, not wanting to let facts cloud the clarity brought on by political expediency, but still we must try.

One such issue is whether undocumented aliens should be allowed to have driver's licenses. Though relatively minor in the grand scheme of things, this issue has received significant play in our current presidential campaign. Candidates are flip flopping all over the place on this issue, trying to catch the wave of what they hope is political expediency. Closer to home, this is an issue which is being discussed on the state level as well. So what do we in the defense community know about this? We know that people sometimes drive without licenses, often out of necessity because public transportation is not available and sometimes merely out of convenience. We also know that people without driver's licenses can't get auto insurance. I have known many undocumented people who have driver's

licenses and auto insurance. By making it impossible for undocumented people to get driver's licenses we are increasing the percentage of driver's on the road who are driving uninsured.

Maybe our decision makers think this is a small price to pay to take this sort of action. Maybe they will take our information into account. Maybe they will ignore it, like one might ignore a person with lettuce caught in his tooth at a party. But if we fulfill our duty to share information like this with our decision makers, at least there is a chance that they will consider the long-term consequences of their short-term actions.

This is just an example of the kinds of things we can do. Our lawmakers will at least listen to us. Please remember that most of these folks are trying to fulfill their duty to do their best to make things better just like we are. Let's make a difference. ☞

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