

Knowing What You Are Fighting For

By Geoffrey S. Wells, CAOC 2025 President



“A strong leader accepts blame and gives credit to others” – John Wooden

I am so honored and excited to be your President in 2025. I have been a member of this association since 1988, so I have personal knowledge of the past fights on tort reform and the numerous attempts to limit justice for the people we represent. I have worked with CAOC past presidents Browne Greene, Bruce Broillet, and Christine Spagnoli in the practice of law and political arena for over 30 years.

One of my favorite movies is “Cinderella Man,” which is a true story about a washed-up heavyweight boxer in the depression era named James Braddock. His career hits rock bottom when he injures his hand and can’t work at his second job as a dock worker. He doesn’t have enough money to pay for the lights and heat in his apartment with his 3 kids and wife in a basement apartment in New Jersey in the winter. His kids start getting sick from the cold and his wife leaves with the kids and moves in with her parents. Ultimately, Mr. Braddock starts fighting again and wins a few fights. He makes a comeback and gets enough money to turn the electricity and heat back on. His wife and kids are able to come back to the apartment. He wins a key fight against the number one contender and gets a shot to fight for the heavyweight championship. At the press conference the reporters are badgering him with questions. “How can it be that he is set to fight for the championship after a lousy career as a fighter?” He tried to explain that for many years he was injured and had a badly broken hand that never healed. Then he says what really was on his mind, he says, “This time around I know what I’m

fighting for.” The reporters chuckle and ask what is that? His response is a classic, he says, “MILK” (as in milk and food for his wife and kids).

For many of our clients, that is what we are fighting for ... MILK and the ability to get accountability and justice!

I will never forget the look on my client’s face when I won my first jury trial. It wasn’t about a lot of money. It was about accountability and justice. The realization that 12 citizens heard our story and believed in us. This year I want you to know that I believe in each and every one of you. I believe in justice and doing things the right way with integrity to make our communities safer and the people we represent have a voice in our cities, counties, and state.

I want all of us to aspire to restore the honor, integrity and civility to our law practice and our public servants in our great state. All of us need to speak up and support our judges, clerks, and their staff. All of us need to stand up and support our elected representatives in the Senate and the Assembly.

All of us need to stand up for our teachers and librarians. If you hear something negative say something positive.

I am writing this message at a time when we don’t know the outcome of the presidential election. Many people believe this might be the most consequential election in our lifetime. I feel like the world is watching us and holding their breath to see if America can live up to its promise of democracy, justice, and fairness for all.

When the election is over, let’s remember to take time to engage in decency and civility with those on the other side. Election campaigns are tougher than ever

these days, let’s not forget who we are as Americans once the race is over.

Let’s remember what we are fighting for in 2025 ... MILK!

A special note to Kathryn Stebner, who was a first (but not last). She has never been afraid to tell us who she is and why CAOC needs to look more like the people we represent. Kathryn, I promise to keep those seats open for everyone.

To past President Greg Rizio, who came out of the bullpen and pitched a shut-out in extra innings for all our members and clients. Honestly Greg, we can never repay you for the incredible work you did this year.

I want to personally acknowledge the sacrifice and skill of Nancy Drabble, Saveena Takhar and Lea-Ann Tratten, this year and that will hopefully provide peace and protection into the future.

To Nancy Peverini and Jacqueline Serna, thank you for the master class in political dialogue. I didn’t learn any of that in law school.

A shout out to Samantha Farmer Helton, who I feel like we have grown up together in the world of political fundraising.

To Laurie Klimchock and Katie Pebler, I stand ready as President to keep helping you to get more people involved in 2025.

Finally, to the CAOC staff, looking forward to always being there for you to overcome any obstacle and finding solutions while still having fun. ■

Geoffrey S. Wells is a partner with Greene Broillet & Wheeler, LLP. Geoff has been named by Super Lawyers as one of the Top 100 Lawyers in L.A. County. He is a past president CAALA, and is the 2025 president of CAOC. www.gbw.law