

# A Time to Show Courage

By Geoffrey Wells



Well, I started out the year with many plans as your president for 2025. I want to address a lot of issues that are important to our members and the people we represent. I have started working with groups to address ethics and attorney advertising among other issues. Then all heck broke loose with the wildfires in the first week of January in Los Angeles. We had to immediately pivot and focus in providing pro bono services to homeowners and businesses that lost everything. We connected with United Policyholders which will help many of our neighbors and citizens navigate through the insurance maze of dealing with wildfire damage. (<https://uphelp.org/recovery/disaster-recovery-help/>)

Then we were hit with news of numerous proposed bills to address litigation funding, governmental liability, school districts damage caps, tort reform and other issues. I realized 2025 was going to be a challenging year, I just didn't realize that it was going to be this challenging. I didn't think our country would go through so much change so fast. I know it has never been more important for us plaintiff trial lawyers that represent consumers to keep our values of honesty, integrity, civility, and decency. However, after last month, I want to add another word that's important to the list. That word is "COURAGE." I had the opportunity recently to read the ABOTA magazine 2024 publication by the American Board of Trial Advocates. In that publication there is an article about the ABOTA courageous advocacy award given to the late Alexei Navalny. I suggest all of you read this article and reflect upon what we do and why we do it.

Most people might not know that Alexei Navalny attended the Peoples Friendship, University of Russia Law School and graduated with a law degree in 1998. He practiced law in Moscow, but quickly dedicated himself to promoting an open society based upon critical thought and free speech of the kind Russia has never known in Mr. Navalny's lifetime.

As we watch our government and the rule of law being challenged daily by our elected president and our unelected billionaire in the White House, it is time for all of us to speak up and show the type of courage Mr. Navalny showed in Russia.

Even though Mr. Navalny had numerous attempts on his life, including the placing of secret neurotoxins in his underwear when he was in Europe (that was done by a secret elite toxin group that followed him for several years). He ultimately recovered and returned to Russia after barely surviving from the poisonous exposure, only to be arrested and imprisoned for what would be the rest of his life. He went through all this because he wanted to speak up for freedom, democracy, and justice. Before he was murdered in prison, someone was able to smuggle out some of the most powerful passages ever recorded by a human seeking freedom for the people of his country. Responding to the question often asked of him, why he came back to Russia in January 17, 2024, he said the following "I have my country in my convictions. I don't want to give up on my country or betray it. If your convictions mean something, you must be prepared to stand up for them and make sacrifices if necessary."

Referring to the current Russian government, he said the following, "it will crumble and collapse. The Putin state is not sustainable. One day we will look at it and it won't be there. Victory is inevitable but for now we must not give up."

Navalny, a man with a wife (Yulia) and 2 children, sacrificed everything for the principal of democracy, free speech and justice.

In our state and our country, we must all stand up for our beliefs, and the people we represent. We must show courage in our practices and in our lives. We must give back to the communities where we live.

Last November at our conference in San Francisco, I asked all of us to stand up for people who don't have a voice, to stand up for women and girls, for immigrants, for people who may not look or speak like you, for the rule of law, for democracy and the right to a trial by jury. Now is the time to show courage. It has never been more important to stand up for freedom, democracy, and the rule of law for the people in our cities and counties and states.

As we continue to monitor tort reform initiatives in our state and push back against the attempts by corporate America to reduce people's rights and access to the courts of justice, we must stay strong, stay together and show courage every day. ■

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