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California voters sat out this election

We raised $8.1 million to elect consumer-friendly state legislators and congressional representatives

By Lea-Ann Tratten

California voters decided to sit on the couch this presidential election year. Los Angeles turnout was lower than any election in more than a decade. The pundit class is writing liberal California's obituary, and the Sacramento elite say California is more moderate than before. Surely on certain issues, that shift is clear. The demise of Proposition 6 (prison slavery) and the overwhelming passage of Proposition 36 (stiffer criminal penalties for theft) show that Californians have grown impatient with crime.

Low Democratic voter turnout makes President-elect Trump's margins appear greater than they are – his raw vote remains the same. But many voters, especially Democrats, are unhappy and they do not believe politicians can fix things. This general malaise, coupled with angry proposition voters, can easily be misinterpreted. When the Sacramento elite claims the electorate is moderate, it gives them license to become more corporate. That is a mistake and is contrary to what we see in targeted Democratic legislative races.

Los Angeles Assembly races

In Los Angeles, Consumer Attorneys of California prioritized two Assembly races where two Democrats faced off in the general election: one candidate backed by corporate interests and the other backed by CAOC, environmentalists and labor unions. Assembly District 50 (Riverside County) was especially important. Eloise Gomez Reyes prevailed over incumbent "Chevron Cheryl" Brown in 2016. To lose this seat to a Democrat who proudly accepted support from insurers, Big Oil, and Big Tobacco, the rogue's gallery of special interests, would have been devastating.

CAOC backed Robert Garcia, a schoolteacher who ran with the backing of Eloise Gomez Reyes, and waged a campaign against the corporate candidate, Adam Perez. Our campaign highlighted the bad money and showed voters who had their back. Robert won.

In Assembly District 57 (Los Angeles), a seat held by 100% consumer-vote-record legislator Reggie Jones Sawyer, a similar dynamic played out. Efren Martinez got the corporate nod and Sade Elhawary was the consumer champion. Sade won.

In each case, voters had a choice of two Democrats and chose the more progressive candidate.

Voters are fed up, and they are fed up with corporate control of our legislature. When given a choice, they most often will choose the candidate who will put people over corporations. This scenario played out throughout California.

A more progressive 2025 Legislature

In general, the 2025 California Legislature is slightly more progressive, which should bode well for consumer attorney issues, but we must fight back against the storyline that a more moderate Legislature means a corporate-friendly legislature.

Consumer attorneys should feel proud of our successes. CAOC endorsed a record-breaking 34 legislative candidates, and 70% of our endorsed candidates identify as a woman, a person of color, or a member of the LGBTQIA community. Our political program raised $8.1 million to elect consumer-friendly state legislators and Congressional members. The always astonishing Samantha Farmer Helton and CAALA's own Geoff Wells raised that historic sum from 1180 stalwart attorneys who funded the fight for justice. Hats off to the fundraising team and the donors who helped bring victories and build relationships.

Two CAOC members were directly part of that program. Attorney Kipp Mueller waged a textbook campaign against a Republican in a purple legislative district. In a typical presidential year, Kipp would have prevailed. The devastatingly low turnout made victory elusive. However, Kipp already won in so many ways. His hard work, trustworthiness and winning personality made him a favorite in Sacramento. Kipp gives consumer attorneys a *good* name, and when he next goes to Sacramento, he will carry the consumer-attorney message.

Derek Tran (D) wins congressional seat

Finally, after a much-too-close race, in late November Derek Tran won the 45th Congressional District. His district takes in part of Los Angeles and Orange counties. Derek ran a beautiful campaign, emphasizing his consumer-attorney heritage. We need Derek in Washington, D.C. to help provide a check on a Trump Administration running wild. Derek and the trial lawyer community should stand proud, as Derek represents the best of us to the world.

Political organizer Mark Wirth to retire

Statewide, CAOC interviewed 66 candidates, with 79 volunteer attorneys giving their time to help choose our next representatives. It is yeoman's work, and it is bittersweet that our yeoman, Mark Wirth, is retiring after 22 years of service. Mark is a union guy who earned his stripes in the rough and tumble political world of Torrance. He breathes politics in all the best ways. He is intuitive, insightful, dedicated and strategic. Mark has led CAALA and CAOC through many political battles, all the while approaching his work with grace and humor. I can't imagine our political program without him. Mark is simply irreplaceable. Now it is time for him to hang up his spurs and just enjoy life. He has trips planned stateside and abroad; he has earned this well-deserved rest. I will simply miss him.

Frankly, we all need a rest from this bruising election. The national results are a punch in the gut. However, we will be back at it in a few months. Such is the life of a trial lawyer. So long as we stand up to corporate malfeasance, corporations will place a target on our backs. To continue serving justice, we will fight onward.


Tratten

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