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TOP BOUTIQUES 2018

POLITICAL &
CAMPAIGN LAW

Kaufman Legal Group APC

LOS ANGELES

While court days can be postponed, election days cannot. That's why Stephen J. Kaufman said political campaign litigation is an extremely expedited branch of the law.

"So whereas most litigation takes months, if not years to play out, these matters are all heard within weeks, if not days," he said.

Kaufman and his team spent their summer ensuring their clients, candidates and voter initiatives would be printed on the Nov. 6 ballot.

One client is San Diego State University, which seeks to send a proposal to purchase the old San Diego Chargers stadium from the city of San Diego and redevelop the site with a new sports venue for its own team along with housing.

It's one of two ballot measures seeking to breathe new life into the former Chargers stadium and its immediate vicinity after the team moved to Los Angeles.

But the city of San Diego wanted to prevent the university's proposal from appearing at the polls and challenged it in court, alleging that seeking voter approval interfered with the city's ability to manage its own finances.

Kaufman, however, successfully contended the city's objection in court.



Sam Diephuis / Special to the Daily Journal

From left, Gary Winuk, Stacey Shin, Stephen Kaufman, Joseph Guardarrama, Leilani Beaver and George Yin of Kaufman Legal Group APC.

"The court should allow the voters to approve these matters, to vote on these matters," he said. "Voters should have a voice in November and if any constitutional issues were to be raised, they can be raised subsequent to the election."

That's another department of Kaufman's firm: defending victorious ballot measures.

In recent years, his firm has represented and advised high-ranking officials such as U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris, California Secretary of State Alex Padilla and California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, who this past summer was challenged in court by a Republican opponent.

The contention was Becerra should have been ineligible for the position because he was not

actively practicing law in the five years before he was appointed attorney general, a violation of state law.

However, a Sacramento County Superior Court judge and appellate courts sided with Kaufman's defense.

"The law relating to qualifying for the office of attorney general does not make any distinction between an attorney who is not on active status or voluntary inactive status and the trial court agreed," he said.

Future seasons will be just as jam-packed as the political landscape continues to evolve.

"In terms of our day-to-day practice you can expect to see more instantaneous disclosure requirements from government agencies," said associate Joseph

A. Guardarrama, referring to the release of funding sources for candidates.

He recalled getting a bit of a breather during election years, but those days are long gone.

"It used to be that odd-numbered years we'd get a little bit of a breather," Guardarrama said. "Now, our clients are raising money and campaigning in odd-numbered years as well as even-numbered years."

Work wasn't as fast-paced when Kaufman opened the firm in 1996. While attending UC Hastings College of the Law decades before, Kaufman said he wasn't certain there'd be a room for him in politics.

"There really was no such area of practice in election law at the time," Kaufman said.

— Arin Mikailian