

## TOP BOUTIQUES IN CALIFORNIA 2017



Alex Dreun / Special to the Daily Journal

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

### POLITICAL & CAMPAIGN LAW

### LOS ANGELES AND SACRAMENTO

## Kaufman Legal Group APC

If one compiled a list of President Donald Trump's main adversaries in California, it would look a lot like the client list of Los Angeles-based Kaufman Legal Group APC.

"Proudly so," said founder Stephen J. Kaufman. "It's a great feeling to know that we represent people who are leading the charge, both in Washington and here in California."

Attorney General Xavier Becerra, U.S. Senator Kamala D. Harris, Senate Pro Tem Kevin de León and Congressman Adam

Schiff are all clients. So are the Assembly Democratic Caucus, California Legislative Black Caucus, Latino Legislative Caucus and the Courage Campaign.

Not bad for a firm founded on the hope that political law might mature into a viable industry. Kaufman said he had a lifelong interest in politics, but at first didn't see a path toward merging that with a legal career.

"When I went to law school, there was really no such thing as election law," Kaufman said.

Nor did his law school, UC

Hastings College of the Law, offer courses in campaign finance or election law. But the forces that would turn California into an epicenter for this growing field were already in play. The state's Political Reform Act was passed in 1974 —and modified many times since.

Kaufman tried business law after graduation in 1987, but decided to open his own political firm in 1996 in Los Angeles. The area offered both politics and scale. Both the city and county of Los Angeles features an active ini-

tiative process. If it were its own state, Los Angeles County would be the eighth most populous in the country.

Kaufman grew its Sacramento presence in the last year by hiring attorney Gary S. Winuk to manage the branch office there. Winuk was the chief of the Enforcement Division at the Fair Political Practices Commission from 2009-2015.

He said he got to know Kaufman while facing him as an adversary in enforcement cases, and has gained a new appreciation for the work done by political compliance attorneys.

"One of the many challenges I face working in the private sector is advising clients on the integration of federal, state and local campaign and ethics laws," Winuk said. "This added layer of complexity was not something I faced regularly at the FPPC."

The firm recently promoted two veteran attorneys, Stacey J. Shin and Joseph A. Guardarrama. But Kaufman remains small by choice, with just six attorneys, compared to 16 support staff. This large staff-to-attorney ratio is fairly common in the political world; much of the work, such as tracking and reporting campaign contributions, is done by support staff.

Meanwhile, it takes attorneys years to master the ever-changing craft of political law.

"It's a very difficult area of practice," Kaufman said. "You can't just pluck people off of the street."

— Malcolm Maclachlan