



United We Stand: Defending the American Dream

Happy 2017, and welcome to *L'Eagle Perch*! This column will spotlight heroes of our justice system. People who passionately fight to maintain law and order, to assist victims and the needy, and to maintain the civil, compassionate society that we treasure as Americans.

America's founding is steeped in heroism. Our original heroes are the brave, pioneering pilgrims. They left their known world behind, enduring a treacherous voyage into the unknown. For months, they crossed a tempestuous ocean, in an overloaded, suffocatingly cramped, stinking ship. They were "all in the same boat," literally and figuratively—risking their very lives, for freedom. To break free from the chains of tyrannical kings and churches who would dictate every aspect of their lives, and inflict indiscriminate punishments of unspeakable horrors. Burning and torturing people for their religious beliefs. Taking personal property on a whim. Dictating marriages and occupations, restricting travel and creative endeavors.

America's founding runs deep in my blood. My maternal lineage traces back to the Mayflower. My ancestors settled Southampton (Long Island), growing corn and squash, and fishing, living peacefully beside Shinnecock Indians. They were whalers and farmers, sailors, reverends, and merchants. My ancestors fought for life in an untamed wilderness—and also fought for America, in our Revolution (the founding of a nation) and our Civil War (the maintaining of a nation).

My father, on the other hand, has given me the perspective of a first-generation, modern-day immigrant. He grew up in a humble suburb of Paris, France, during WWII—witnessing death, cruelty, and ceaseless terror at the steely grip of Nazi soldiers. Malnourished, he would forage for chestnuts and berries in the woods, or grab toss-away scraps of stale bread from a café. He never forgot the rumbling engines and sight of the first American bombers flying over Paris in the moonlight (as he and his family fell to their knees, thanking God for America's arrival), or the liberation of France, as American tanks and troops swarmed across the countryside, to where my father had fled. Taken in by an American diplomat, my father voyaged across the ocean on the *Queen Mary* (now docked

in Long Beach). His first sight of the United States was the Statue of Liberty, torch held high, backed by the majestic New York City skyline. Stars lit up his eyes, for America's might, heroism, and promise.

My ancestors and my father are profound heroes to me. They were all deeply thankful, every day, for the priceless gift that is the United States of America.

Historically or today, America has always been the world's only true "light on a hill." A refuge for tortured, persecuted, poverty-pummeled people from around the globe. A land of seemingly limitless opportunity and prosperity, allowing us to chase our dreams, unfettered by a king's dictates, or artificial class structures that predestine one's lot in life. We are the only nation ever built upon the keystone principle of "We the People" having fundamental, "inalienable" rights to life, liberty, property, and equality (and thus, human dignity). And America is the only sanctuary the world has ever known, where the human spirit is encouraged to soar as high as one's dreams and abilities can take them. We can all be "eagles," gliding over, or gazing upon, a glorious landscape.

Orange County is a shining jewel of America's potential. But sadly, America—and Orange County—have been battered in recent decades. Our constitutional gifts of "inalienable" rights and protections have been shredded by the seemingly insatiable claws of a monstrously burgeoning, and invasive, government. Never before have we had so many political leaders, Supreme Court Justices, activists, academics and media, lobby against our Constitution as an outdated, out-of-touch document.

That's a Liberty-Bell warning to all of us. It should send resonating shivers through our collective soul. *The bell tolls* for the United States of America—unless we unify to stop it.

Tragically, "We the People" are no longer unified on a joint mission of shared values. We are largely shattered into often-fiercely (and violently) divided factions, in the throes of a tragic identity crisis. A recent social media movement depicts pictures of people proudly urinating on our flag, or stuffing the "stars and stripes" between their naked buttocks. Other individuals (both non-citizens and citizens alike) militantly wave the flag of their *birth* nation,

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while railing against U.S. symbols, at forums such as our high schools and political rallies. In major cities, groups unabashedly chant “DEATH TO AMERICA!” (as I have personally witnessed in my travels). Others protest against our national anthem as being “offensive”—instead of profoundly respecting it, and recognizing it as a deeply inspirational and moving remembrance of people coming together to fight for freedom against overwhelming odds. Our “flag” through the “night” still standing . . . a symbol of keeping hope alive for our survival against tyranny. How are we not *all* emotionally rooted to such meaning?

America’s treasured, founding values and ideals, and the “American Dream” itself, are under an unprecedented attack from those who should appreciate it the most—immigrants. Never before has our country opened itself to so many people who openly express contempt for it, or who are blankly dispassionate for it—as opposed to thankfully embracing this country with every cell of their being (as my father, and past waves of immigrants, did). Many refugees have and continue to relocate into our towns and cities, not to assimilate into American culture and ideals, but to *remake* this land into the very kind of oppressive and volatile nation that they escaped from in the first place.

As a society, America has lost its fiery passion for itself. Too many of us have grown apathetic (which can be just as dangerous as those who attack America’s premise). We have largely lost all sense of America’s founding and values—and thus, appreciation for the staggering importance of the United States in world history. Many college graduates, for example, can’t even tell you who fought in the Civil War (China? Russia? Canada?), or how long America has been around (1492?), let alone get into the key details of our Constitution (such as the pointedly limited scope of federal powers). War of 1812? That was with Mexico, right? In a recent poll, when college students were asked to name a Supreme Court Justice, 10% identified television’s Judge Judy! Asked to name a *Founding* Father, the top answer was Abraham Lincoln. How can citizens appreciate and vigilantly protect the gifts they’ve been given, if they are ignorant of the monumental self-sacrifice and heroism it took to attain them?

I truly believe that Orange County is one of our country’s most critical epicenters in our fight to preserve America’s precious, embattled rights and liberties, our American dreams, and America itself as a safe harbor for people of the world. Coast to

coast, there is no finer, more unified “army” of legal/justice system talent. Our judges and justices, commissioners and court staff. U.S. Attorneys, district attorneys, and public defenders. Our police, sheriffs, and elected officials. And our rich array of attorneys across the legal spectrum who serve their clients honorably, provide *pro bono*, volunteer to speak to teenagers on constitutional issues, and so much more.

And no county in the entire nation has as many first-generation immigrants who are such potently passionate, patriotic leaders in the legal and political arenas. To name just a few: Susan Kang Schroeder, Chief of Staff at the District Attorney’s office (born in Korea). The Honorable Francisco F. Firmat (a Cuban refugee). OCBA past-presidents Joseph Chairez (Mexico), and Lei Lei Wang Ekvall (Taiwan). The Honorable Nho Trong Nguyen (a Vietnamese refugee), and the Honorable Luis A. Rodriguez (Costa Rica). Serge Tomassian (French), chair of the World Affairs Council. People who come from all around the globe (many of them “dirt poor”), and lead such accomplished lives as caring, responsible citizens, are proof-positive of America’s solitary greatness. Talents and potential can soar on the American landscape like no other place on Earth.

There is a special element that binds us here in Orange County, and empowers us as a force for good; it is our collective belief in the American dream, the values of compassion and civility, and the idealism of our justice system. We, the Orange County legal community, are the ones who must staunchly “carry the torch,” preaching why America’s founding is the most pivotally important event in the history of the world. We must advocate for our core principles and values, as framed within our constitutionally based legal and justice system. Be not ashamed of American pride and patriotism, and never be bullied into silence. There is no better way to help people, than by defending—and vocally *championing*—America’s unique greatness.

French philosopher Charles de Montesquieu, stated: “There is no greater tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of the law and in the name of justice.” We must never blindly worship or trust those in power. Elected officials are the People’s *servants*, not our *masters*. It is thus our sacred duty to watch over them with an “eagle’s eye,” to ensure the integrity of our legal and justice systems—and thus, of society at large.

It is my fervent desire that 2017 be a meaningful year in the annals of the OCBA.

To that end, I would like to advance the following, three initiatives:

1. Honoring Law Enforcement

Murders of police officers have increased by a horrifying 80% in 2016 compared to 2015 (including shootings, stabbings, and assaults). In California, assaults on officers have risen nearly 50%. This is a deadly serious, sickly, tragic crisis. Police forces across the nation are under a sweeping, propagandist-style attack, based on utterly false factual premises and narratives. This politically orchestrated, villainous attack has stirred up racial hatred, and literally threatens to undermine our civil security and stability. Crime rates are soaring across California, and police recruitment is down. We must therefore defend, honor, and more closely unify and integrate the OCBA with Police, Sheriffs, our District Attorneys (really, the largest “law firm” in Orange County), and our Public Defenders.

2. Human Trafficking

In June 2016, Larisa Dinsmoor (of the Public Defender’s office) and I co-chaired a Human Trafficking seminar. The all-star panelists highlighted the rash of tragedies and horrors occurring right here in our county, with labor and sex trafficking. We must mobilize the might of the OCBA to help combat human trafficking here in Orange County (and all the related crime it spawns in all of our neighborhoods), and to assist with victims and their rehabilitation.

3. Amicus Alo

Latin for “friend support/care,” Amicus Alo will be a support group designed to assist those OCBA members with disabilities and serious illnesses.

People love referring to lawyers as sharks. Well, sharks have to keep moving, or they drown. Likewise, let’s never fail to proactively “be on the attack” for positive change. Let’s swim together as a formidable force, on the hunt to continually make a positive difference for our members, our community, and our justice system!

Please email me at united@ocbar.org, if you would like to be a part of an initiative.



Michael L. Baroni is honored to serve the OCBA membership as your 2017 President. Please feel free to email him at united@ocbar.org with any comments or questions.