

Daily Journal

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TOP 100 LAWYERS IN CALIFORNIA

EDITORS' NOTE

From the mortgage crisis to the Gulf oil spill to virtually every major intellectual property dispute, California lawyers are playing leading roles. But they don't just clean up big messes. They secure funding and regulatory approval for cutting-edge developments in water, energy, technology and biotechnology that are the promise of the future.

We aim for this list to be a kaleidoscope of the California legal scene. There are divorce attorneys and public finance lawyers, prosecutors and criminal defenders and much, much more.

We reviewed hundreds of nominations from members of the legal community and from our own editors and reporters to compile this list. It is never an easy task — the list isn't long enough — but it is fun. Read on. We know you'll enjoy learning about these people as much as we did.

— The Editors

EDWARD ZAEKE

In his capacity as Akin Gump's renewable energy guru, Zaelke works to secure a vast array of complex funding options in ways that mitigate the inherent financial risks that come with these huge multi-million- sometimes billion- dollar undertakings. Zaelke sees this "financial engineering," as he calls it, as a key piece in the renewable energy field.

"As important as it is that these wind turbines get better or that solar panels get more efficient, what makes a project commercially successful or not commercially successful is the rate of return and the risk that are built in," Zaelke said. "So if you can take risk out of the project that allows the rate of return to broaden and you can figure out a way to make the rate of return to increase by shifting the layers of debt then you're bringing value to the project."

Making these projects commercially viable is critical to change the perception about renewable energy, Zaelke said.

"I still have the sense that there are a lot of folks that think that there's a bunch of hippies out there trying to destroy the oil industry," he said with a laugh.

He worked with the Australian private equity company Macquarie Capital to help fund an \$800 million project in the Mexican state of Oaxaca that closed in early March 2011. The deal also included wind turbines from a Danish company. Zaelke said that while this may look like it increases the complexity of the deal, it really only changed a few logistics on the ground.

"In some ways the intricacies of the country are important," he said. "In this case it meant knowing something about the local land laws and the Indian tribes that were going to be affected, but 85 percent of the commercial deal was the same type of commercial deal we'd do in the U.S."

For all the positive environmental impact these projects produce, for Zaelke there is an underlying sense of pride that inspires him.

"I can look back on when I decided to do this for a career and the environmental side was part of it, but part of it was very patriotic," he said. "[Renewable energy] was a way to do it ourselves."

EDWARD ZAEKE

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
Los Angeles

Practice type: Corporate

Specialty: Global Project Finance/
Renewable Energy

— Henry Meier



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