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Postelection, Orrick Litigator Vows to 'Stick It to the Man'

Leigh Jones, The Am Law Daily

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IP litigation hotshot Neel Chatterjee has named his newly formed practice group "Stick It to the Man."

He's only half-joking.

The Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe partner in Menlo Park, California, asserts that the recent political turn of events warrants such a group, and he's not shy about saying so.

"I'm always my own authentic me," said Chatterjee, 47, whose parents emigrated from India in the 1960s.

The morning after Republican Donald Trump won the presidential election, Chatterjee posted on Facebook that he was forming the "Stick It to the Man" group. It's more of a concept than a "real thing," he said, but he's serious about filing civil rights and First Amendment lawsuits, should the opportunity arise under the incoming administration. He also posted on Twitter a few days later that he was forming SITTM, as he calls it.

Asked who, exactly, is the man, Chatterjee replied, "The government."

And why does it need to be stuck?

To be held accountable when it does not recognize the rights of citizens, he said.

"Stick It to the Man is to inspire people," he said. "The solution is to not wring your hands and complain. It's to express your opinion."

For example, Chatterjee, a married father of two, said that if Trump tries to start a Muslim registry, as he proposed during the campaign, "this Hindu's Muslim registration card will be his California bar card."

After Trump announced that his choice for U.S. attorney general was Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama), Chatterjee posted that he expected "to make some new law in the area of civil rights." Sessions is known for his hard-line position on immigration, among other things.

Chatterjee's public candor about Trump's ascendancy is in contrast to the largely tight-lipped reaction from Big Law. Ted Boutros, a litigation star at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, in October offered, on Twitter, to represent pro bono anyone Trump sues for exercising free speech rights, and others have joined him. Chatterjee tweeted that he would help with that effort.

But, as ALM reporter Susan Beck [wrote on Dec. 1](#), there has been "no potent, organized outcry from the bar or the leaders of Big Law" to Trump's pronouncements—on everything from torture to speech rights to barring Muslim immigration—that critics say threaten the rule of law. Chatterjee said that so far, about 20 attorneys have indicated that they'll join the Stick It to the Man movement.

"I really want to find a case where a bunch of us brown lawyers join forces," he said.

Although she doesn't agree with him on most political issues, National Republican committeewoman Harmeet Dhillon said that Chatterjee is "striking a good balance" in vocalizing his concerns. Dhillon, a San Francisco lawyer who's known Chatterjee for more than 15 years, presented a Sikh prayer during July's Republican National Convention in Cleveland.

"He expresses his viewpoint without putting other people down," Dhillon said. "That's the product of being a good advocate."

Should a case arise that Chatterjee wants to pursue, he'll know his way around the courtroom. Chatterjee, often brought in at the last minute to try the cases, represented Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg against the Winklevoss brothers. The movie "The Social Network" fictionalized that case. Other clients include Oracle, Logitech, eBay and Synopsys.

He's an avid "Star Wars" and "Star Trek" fan and has spoken at Comic-Con, the comic book convention. He has Orrick business cards that say, underneath his name, "Partner and very handsome man."

The Stick It to the Man effort taps into Chatterjee's fundamental beliefs. About a week after the presidential election, Chatterjee and three associates from Orrick's Washington office stood outside the White House with signs. His read "Free Hugs." The associates' signs read "Stop the Hate," "Believe in Yourself," and "We Are More Alike Than Different." He chronicled the event on Facebook.

"We just wanted to be voices, to be positive ones amongst all the anger we see around us," Chatterjee posted. He also said that he doled out a few hugs that day.

Chatterjee mostly posts on Facebook, where he has 1,631 friends. It's his preferred social media outlet, for no other reason than it's what he's accustomed to, he said. He has just 86 Twitter followers, a number he said was "embarrassing."

On Nov. 15, he wondered, in a post, what position Scott Baio, the actor from "Happy Days" who spoke at the Republican National Convention, could expect to receive in the Trump administration.

Late last month, he retweeted a post with a photo of Donald Trump. It read, "The Orange One screamed @nbc for using this pic of him. He hates it. Don't spread it around the internet anymore."

So far, Chatterjee hasn't received any complaints from clients about the Stick It to the Man group, he said.

"The way that I look at it, when people are making a decision about hiring me or not hiring me, they won't decide based on my politics," Chatterjee said. "Authenticity is something people sniff out. Dishonesty is something people sniff out. If I'm not my authentic me, I've lost my currency as a lawyer."

Karen Anderson, senior director of global litigation and intellectual property at VeriFone Inc., said she appreciates Chatterjee's fearlessness. She has used his legal services for about a decade. "I like to know my outside counsel not only as outside counsel but as human beings," Anderson said. "The better the relationship, the better the communication, the better the service."

Orrick's leadership says that it's OK with Chatterjee, too.

"We want every member of our team to be comfortable being themselves, so long as they treat others with respect and embrace our core values," said Orrick CEO Mitchell Zuklie in an email sent in response to a request for an interview. "Neel certainly personifies that."

An Orrick spokesman declined to provide details about the firm's social media policy but said that it calls for using good judgment, respecting client confidentiality and client considerations and generally demonstrating a respectful, professional approach. The firm does not require lawyers to limit their social media musings to practice-related content.

And as long as lawyers like Chatterjee and Boutros keep the business coming in, their firms are likely to give them broad latitude to voice their opinions, said Jason Costa, a principal at The Costa Group, a law firm consultancy.

"When a firm starts losing business, or other partners start hearing complaints from clients, then the calculation changes," he said.

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