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Big Guns

Washington lawyers may tend to dress alike, but they're not all the same when dealing with problems. Here are 30 of the very best—plus 800 more who are close behind. Hang on to the list—when you really need a lawyer, you might want one of these.

By Kim Isaac Eisler

Some of those on our list of Washington's top lawyers have represented presidents. Others have defended murderers and thieves. Some might have represented—or might yet represent—you.

If the United States is a nation of laws, Washington is a city of lawyers: There are more here per capita than in any other city in the world. There are more here than in many entire countries.

This list of top lawyers in private practice skews toward those who represent people as opposed to corporations. It excludes some important but technical fields of law. But some areas of corporate and constitutional law are so bound up with our city that we couldn't ignore them. That includes lawyers who practice before the Supreme Court, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and federal agencies like the Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Communications Commission.

Most people get through life without having to hire an attorney for anything more serious than drawing up a will or overseeing a real-estate transaction. But legal trouble can happen to anyone—and often does without warning. Lots of Washingtonians are arrested on criminal charges, from drunk driving to vehicular homicide. You might be called to testify before Congress. More common is a letter from the IRS—or from an attorney representing a departing spouse. You can slip and fall on an unshoveled sidewalk—or someone can fall on yours.

One thing you'll discover if you need one of these lawyers: They don't come cheap. For a good criminal-defense lawyer, the floor is close to \$400 an hour. Rates for the top attorneys reach \$1,000 an hour. Most lawyers bill in six-minute increments, meaning a one-minute call counts as six minutes—a tenth of an hour. So if you call

a lawyer for a quick question, try to get six minutes' worth of advice.

Divorce lawyers' fees are the hardest to gauge. Some charge more but work fast. Others are relative dawdlers but charge lower rates. A common number here is \$450 an hour. Try to find a busy divorce lawyer. A busy lawyer wants to get on to the next case. If you walk into an empty waiting room or the attorney tends to ramble, it could get very expensive.

I have spent much of the past 20 years writing about Washington lawyers. I have met, spoken to, and observed thousands of them. I've become friends with a few.

This is the fifth time that *The Washingtonian* has compiled a list of top lawyers. It is created primarily by peer recommendation. We asked, by telephone and e-mail, some 1,000 attorneys who (excluding themselves and members of their firms) the top practitioners in their fields are and whom they would hire to represent them in a range of areas. Then we checked on those people and asked for their recommendations. We invited them to take shots at one another; many availed themselves of the opportunity. One wrote that a colleague "should not be included on any list of best lawyers. No knowledgeable client would or should retain this individual."

In some areas, such as securities law, there is virtual unanimity about who the best are. In a contentious field like divorce, it gets hard after the top guy, Sandy Ain. In such cases we talked to clients, judges, and former judges to get their opinions.

In the end we came up with some 800 attorneys—about 1 percent of the estimated 80,000 lawyers around Washington. Among those, we identified 30 to single out as the very best. Such choices involve arbitrary decisions and

16. Paula M. Junghans (Zuckerman Spaeder). Many regard Zuckerman Spaeder as the city's best boutique law firm. Among its stars is the well-known William Taylor, whose clients have included US senators and other lawyers. But inside the firm, many lawyers stand most in awe of the white-haired, detail-oriented Paula Junghans, who was once acting assistant attorney general for tax at the Department of Justice.

Junghans's expertise on tax matters is unmatched; she's the first person anyone with serious tax issues should seek out. One who has is former Ernst & Young partner Robert Coplan, who, with others, is accused of conspiracy to defraud the IRS, tax evasion, and six other charges.

subjective judgments. We tried to pick people from across the region, from different practice groups, and from different law firms so no firm would have more than two on the top-30 list. In some cases, up-and-comers replaced veterans who had been on the list for many years—not because the older lawyers aren't good at what they do but to recognize newer talent.

Four times in the past we have chosen Washington's number-one lawyer. Previous winners are Robert Bennett of Skadden Arps, Brendan Sullivan of Williams & Connolly, Michele Roberts of Akin Gump, and Robert Barnett of Williams & Connolly.

Senate majority leader Harry Reid says this year's winner couldn't win confirmation as US attorney general. That might keep him from being the nation's top lawyer, but he is Washington's top lawyer.

Top Lawyers

Here are Washington's best—the top 1 percent.

The Wise Ones

For \$800 to \$1,000 an hour, you can get legal advice from former US senators, secretaries of State, even attorneys general. Here are Washington's wise men and women—and some of its most expensive legal talents, though you won't find many of them trying cases these days.

Roger C. Spaeder, Zuckerman Spaeder

You're Under Arrest

Sometimes advice isn't enough—you need a great criminal-defense attorney. Expect to pay \$500 to \$800 an hour—with a retainer of \$100,000 to \$200,000—for these white-collar criminal-defense lawyers. Fees are not generally deducted from the retainer—it's more like an insurance policy for the attorney and gets returned after the case.

William W. Taylor III, Zuckerman Spaeder

Roger E. Zuckerman, Zuckerman Spaeder

You're Going to Trial

If you don't need, or can't afford, any of the higher-priced lawyers listed earlier, try these top trial lawyers charging in the \$400-to-\$800-an-hour range. Many have more trial experience than their colleagues above.

Blair G. Brown, Zuckerman Spaeder

Francis D. Carter, Zuckerman Spaeder

Greetings From the IRS . . .

When you hear from the Internal Revenue Service and it's not about a refund, you want a lawyer who knows tax law. Here are some well versed in both personal and corporate tax matters.

Paula M. Junghans, Zuckerman Spaeder

Got to Get Reorganized?

You've done everything you can, but you need shelter from creditors. As with the tax attorneys, the bankruptcy lawyers in Maryland and Virginia are more likely to help individuals, while those in the big downtown DC firms are more likely to work for corporations.

Nelson Cohen, Zuckerman Spaeder

Norman Eisen, Zuckerman Spaeder

Food and Drugs

These lawyers typically deal with the Food and Drug Administration—either working to make sure your food is safe or trying to get approval to put products on the shelves.

William Schultz, Zuckerman Spaeder



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