

The Supreme Court's Bar

By Kulvinder Singh

We studied their opinions in Constitutional Law courses and remember their names long after they left the bench...but did you ever consider being admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the United States?

The Supreme Court of the United States (the "Court") has its own bar and, once admitted to practice before the Court, you may come in on any argument day to a select area in front of the Justices, next to attorneys making oral arguments, and watch the action. I was admitted in open court during a visit to the east coast and the experience of listening to oral arguments was so memorable that I have returned again to see the Court in action.


Tradition states Justices each engage in a "conference handshake." That tradition began during the late 19th century under Chief Justice **Melville W. Fuller**. All of the Justices shake hands as a reminder that their differences of opinion would not prevent them from focusing on justice and proper conduct of the judicial process. When they are ready, everybody stands as the Justices enter through burgundy curtains promptly at 10:00 a.m. The Justices also stand as the Marshal of the Court chants, "The Honorable Chief Justice and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!"

Before presentations of arguments, the Court takes care of administrative business including motions for admission to the bar. If you were being admitted, the Marshal would state your name and introduce your sponsor, who then moves for your admission. The Chief Justice will then announce your name and

you stand, and then he will grant the motion. All new members are sworn in together. The new members and their sponsors have prized seats before the Supreme Court bench, next to attorneys presenting oral arguments that morning, and can stay and listen to the arguments from that unique vantage point.

Questions a Justice asks often indicate an opinion or view and an attempt to sway other Justices and raise questions about opposing views. The Justices have no peers except each other, and seeing them live is a treat. Justices sometimes get called the wrong name by attorneys who are nervous, trying to answer questions and get their points across in the 30 minutes allotted to each side for oral argument.

Members of the bar also have the ability to take guests with them on special tours of the building given by court staff and may use the library. Look for lawyers in morning coats, another tradition from decades past that has continued before this Court.

Various bar associations host trips to Washington where sponsors get to move for the admission of association members. You can find out more information on the ABA's website. Sponsors need to appear personally. Certain weeks of the October and February terms have been designated for hearing of oral arguments. Check www.supremecourtus.gov for this year's docket. 

*Roseville attorney **Kulvinder Singh's** solo practice includes primarily personal injury, criminal defense, and business legal representation. A graduate of Pacific-McGeorge and CSUS, he is a new member of the executive committee of the Solo and Small Firm section of the State Bar of California.*

