



*To the left: Protesters fill the international terminal at San Francisco International Airport on January 29, 2017, in the wake of President Trump's executive order temporarily barring refugees and citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States. Photo: Getty Images*

**O**n her way to San Francisco International Airport (SFO), Janel Thamkul, associate corporate counsel at Google, stopped at Office Depot. She'd read on Facebook that individuals arriving into the country were going to need lawyers. And those lawyers needed a printer, right away.

The Facebook plea came following the January 27 announcement of President Donald Trump's brand new executive order, which prohibited refugees and visitors from seven Muslim countries from entering or reentering the United States for 90 days; blocked refugees from all countries for 120 days; and prohibited Syrians indefinitely.

"It was a huge shock," Thamkul recalls, "to go through your Facebook feed and immediately see the real impact on people who were detained. I headed to SFO to see if there was anything I could do to help."

Thamkul was one of hundreds of lawyers who went to airports around the country to volunteer their legal skills in the burgeoning resistance to Trump's agenda. Having taken an oath to uphold the Constitution, lawyers dove in head first to oppose what many considered were extreme actions of the new administration. In the months since the inauguration, lawyers have also volunteered their time on issues related to voting rights, racial justice, governmental ethics, and environmental protections. In fact, attorneys have become the unlikely heroes of the resistance movement—so much so that those long-worn lawyer jokes may go the way of 35-mm film and coal mining jobs.

When Thamkul arrived at SFO's International Terminal that day after picking up a printer, she discovered that a designated lawyer area had been set up near Starbucks. There

were about ten attorneys there wearing "lawyer" nametags.

"I walked around at first to get a sense of what was going on," she recalls. Then she heard about another passenger exit area. She headed there and found more lawyers holding signs reading, "If you saw anyone detained, talk to us." Thamkul used the printer she brought to print out similar signs in English and Arabic. Together with other attorneys, she approached waiting families, mostly families of color, and assessed, based on nationality and immigration status, the risk of whether a passenger had been detained. Lawyers also handed out detention information sheets.

As people departed planes, many thanked the waiting lawyers. "But some called us names," Thamkul says. Some of the protestors got rowdy and airport police briefly appeared wearing riot gear. "It was eye-opening."

According to Thamkul, who serves on the board of Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach, lawyers are particularly attuned to the gravity of situations like those that occurred at airports around the country that weekend following Trump's executive order. A law school education provides a unique historical perspective on what happens when "constitutional rights are abrogated," she explains. "When we hear that immigration isn't protected by the Constitution, we know that can be a proxy for racial discrimination and xenophobia just like what happened with Japanese internment" during World War II. "That's one step away from encroachment on my rights, on the rights of people I care about. Lawyers know to be watchful and vigilant. It's up to us to hold up the red flag when we see rights being encroached upon."

Among other lawyers at SFO that weekend were associates from Keeker, Van Nest & Peters, including Jay Rapaport, Eduardo Santacana, Chessie Thacher, and Ian Kanig. "First and foremost, we represent the rule of law, and it's threat-

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—Janel Thamkul

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ened now,” Kanig says. “Lawyers are an integral part of maintaining order and normalcy.”

At the airport, the Kecker group worked “to separate fact from fiction” and to try to connect with family members waiting for people who hadn’t made it through the terminal, Santacana recalls. “Even though we don’t typically practice immigration law, the philosophy of our firm is that the practice of law is more or less the same. We use the same tool kit so we’re prepared to take on whatever comes our way. This was an emergency and we went to SFO to do triage. We had support from our firm and the legal community.” Rapaport confirms that the “vast majority” of lawyers at SFO that weekend were not immigration lawyers. “But that’s what we’re here for: to stand up to injustice.”

The Kecker lawyers assisted a pregnant Iranian pharmaceutical company executive who was returning to the United States following a business trip, as well as a man whose wife’s elderly Iranian parents were detained since early that morning. Although the Kecker lawyers weren’t allowed to speak directly to detainees, they were in phone contact with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to determine the appropriate course of action in each case.

For Thatcher, the most compelling moment at the airport that weekend came when people began chanting “Let the lawyers in” to meet with detainees. “People viewed the Trump order as an overreach of power,” she says.

“And they saw lawyers as having the ability to fight power with knowledge.”

At another point, lawyers were asked to come to the front of the area where they received a standing ovation while people chanted, “Thank you, lawyers.” According to Rapaport, lawyers were thanked “not just for a skill set but for what we represent. It gives people hope and encouragement.”

Even lawyers in training have pitched in with the resistance to the new administration. Alexandra Andorfer, a second-year student at UC Hastings College of the Law, planned to go to SFO that weekend, ready to serve as “an impromptu law clerk and do research with my free Lexis/Westlaw password.” But in a measure of how engaged the legal community was, Andorfer was actually turned away because there already were so many lawyers volunteering. Still, Andorfer stands ready to join in the next time her legal skills might be needed. Young law students, she notes, are uniquely poised to assist the resistance. Specifically, with social media, “we’re so accessible to each other” that grassroots student movements are easy to form.

President of the Hastings chapter of Ms. JD, Andorfer is especially eager to help with efforts related to preserving affordable health care and reproductive rights. “I’m always looking for ways to help underserved populations,” says Andorfer, who also organized the seventy-person Hastings contingent at the San Francisco Women’s March during in-

auguration weekend. Though she plans to go into corporate law after graduation, resistance work will remain on her agenda throughout this administration. “The education I’m getting and the skill set I’m learning can help other people. There’s enough going on in this administration, it will always come up.”

Law students “know what’s at stake” in this administration, adds Zoey Surdis, a second-year law student who co-organized Hastings’s Women’s March contingent with Andorfer. “It’s a perplexing time. We’re taught to be impartial advocates for clients no matter how heinous the crime. But the very laws we’re told to uphold pose a direct threat to civil rights and the Constitution,” explains Surdis, who regularly does pro bono work through Hastings’s Legal Advice and Referral Clinic. “So we’ve started to mobilize.”

Back at Kecker, “After the initial chaos from airport weekend, our firm shifted into gear,” Rapaport says. “We had a large team working around the clock on broader immigration issues.” In early February, Kecker partnered with the ACLU to file suit in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California contesting the travel ban. Specifically, it filed a class action complaint for declaratory and injunctive relief on behalf of the ACLU, Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay, and three students from Muslim countries possessing valid F-1 student visas. The complaint alleged that President Trump’s order was really just a proxy for illegal xenophobia and violated both the First and Fifth Amendments as well as the Immigration and Nationality Act, which ensures that the United States doesn’t adopt discriminatory immigration policies.

According to Santacana, Kecker had an all-hands meeting in which it pledged its support to causes that “protect the vulnerable from the unconstitutional, discriminatory practices of the administration.” Kecker committed to do more pro bono this year, according to partner Jamie Slaughter because “as lawyers, we swore to uphold the Constitution.”

After volunteering that weekend at SFO, Thamkul took a step back from the overwhelming energy such an effort requires to avoid issue fatigue and to assure that she would be able to step up to the next such challenge. “I focused on

my job and being present with my children. As a private citizen, I will continue to contribute financially to organizations fighting the good fight and increase my engagement with pro bono work serving communities at risk.”

Indeed, attorneys looking to get involved might want to pace themselves the way Thamkul has done. “It’s going to be a long four years,” Rapaport says. “There will be many opportunities to help out in ways we can’t even anticipate yet.”

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