

Legal Times April 19, 2004

ON TRIAL

Courtroom 218 at D.C. Superior Court drew quite a crowd for a misdemeanor case last week. Supervisors in the U.S. Attorney's Office, defense lawyers, law clerks, and even a judge dropped by to watch the spectacle that is *United States v. Sassower*. The main draw is nonlawyer defendant **Elena Sassower**, a White Plains, N.Y., resident and coordinator of the Center for Judicial Accountability who is representing herself before a D.C. jury against one count of disrupting Congress. Capitol Police claim Sassower broke the law when she spoke out at the end of a Senate confirmation hearing in May 2003. Sassower, who faces a maximum penalty of six months in jail and a \$500 fine, says she merely made a "respectful request to testify." The trial, which at press time had wrapped up its third day and was scheduled to continue on April 19, has not disappointed. During her opening statement, Sassower was nearly taken into custody by Superior Court Judge **Brian Holeman** after she ignored his order to finish up. A U.S. marshal remained in the room for the next two days. Assistant U.S. attorneys **Jessie Liu** and **Aaron Mendelsohn** called just four Capitol Police officers as witnesses and introduced a videotape of the hearing as evidence. On the video, a portion of which was played for the jury, Sassower can be heard — but not seen — yelling out just as Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.) calls for adjournment. Sassower, who plans to testify in her own defense, has desperately tried to make the trial about the lack of public input in judicial nominations and the alleged corruption of a federal appellate judge, but Holeman has consistently blocked her efforts to do so. Though Sassower has been conducting most of her defense on her own, she does have legal assistance. D.C. lawyer **Mark Goldstone**, whom Sassower says she paid \$5,000 has sat at her side throughout the trial — many times whispering advice into her ear.

— Tom Schoenberg