

Woman behind Silicon Valley sex discrimination case on stand

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The woman behind a Silicon Valley sex discrimination case spent Wednesday under fire from an attorney trying to sink her multi-million-dollar case against a top venture capital firm.

Ellen Pao tightened her lips at times as she concisely and carefully responded to Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers attorney Lynne Hermle, who worked to expose flaws in a scenario painted by Pao during the previous two days in a more amicable fashion during direct examination by her lawyer.

Legal insiders maintain that it is important for Pao to win the trust of jurors who will decide whether being a woman resulted in her being harassed at KPCB and her career path there blocked.

The civil trial launched here last month pits an iconic venture capital firm against an employee shown the door not long after her affair with a married partner.

A jury is being asked, essentially, to decide whether the suit filed by 45-year-old Pao is a stand against a "boys' club" atmosphere at KPCB or a money grab by an employee who lacked the skills to join the rarefied ranks of Silicon Valley venture capitalists.

Pao's lawsuit asks for \$16 million in pay she contends she would have made if she had not been fired from KPCB in late 2012.

Judge Harold Kahn is expected to rule Thursday regarding whether KPCB lawyers can show jurors evidence that Pao is in financial difficulty.

KPCB wants to let the jury know that it may be money and not a quest for gender-equity that is behind Pao's lawsuit.

Pao, a graduate of Harvard Law School, was asked about her motive by her attorney, and said on the stand that she was in court because she wanted her story to be heard.

Tilted playing field

Pao's complaints include being snubbed at a celebratory work dinner on the apparent basis that "women kill the buzz." She also told of enduring bawdy conversation by male co-workers.

Pao contended she was given a book of salacious poetry by a male colleague, while Hermle countered with evidence that the tome was reciprocation for a gift and was bought by the man's wife.

Hermle maintained in trial that Pao was never elevated to the top ranks at the venture capital firm because she did not have the skills for the job, and not because she was a woman or because she had an affair with a co-worker.

Hermle had Pao confirm a list of her KPCB peers, many of them men, who were also not promoted while she worked at the venture firm.

Pao was also shown a series of annual employee reviews that contained critiques including tendencies to pursue her own agenda, be territorial, clash with others, and display "a sense of entitlement."

Pao indicated during her testimony that she felt misunderstood.

"It seemed like people didn't see that I took the partnership's interests first," Pao said.

Pao confirmed under questioning that she was vying for a job at Google's [venture capital](#) arm in mid-2011, about six months before another KPCB employee review that included an offer to help her "transition" to a new job.

Google did not offer Pao the job.

Pao is now interim chief executive at news-centered social website Reddit, where she said she has been given millions worth of stock options.

That could become more important if jurors side with Pao and then are asked to calculate how much she was harmed financially.

Ended affair

Pao had protested that her performance review was left in the hands of a partner with whom she had an affair that ended angrily after she learned he did not plan to leave his wife for her.

Attorneys for KPCB countered that Pao was hired in 2005 to be an office manager for renowned partner John Doerr and years later got a chance at an investment role but didn't make the grade.

KPCB was established in 1972 and became a revered Silicon Valley [venture capital firm](#) by backing successes such as Facebook, Amazon, and Google.

Renowned KPCB partner John Doerr hired Pao in a technical aide position to write speeches, do research, and other tasks.

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