

## MEET MR. MECKLER

*Auditing legal fees has won him more business than friends.*

**M**ORE THAN HALF The Am Law 100 has encountered him. For those that haven't, it may just be a matter of time. Odds are they won't enjoy the experience.

Bruce Meckler, name partner at Chicago-based Meckler Bulger & Tilson, makes a living reviewing legal bills. His clients are mostly insurance companies who are stuck picking up the legal tabs of their insureds. When those insurers balk at the cost, they hire Meckler to put the bills under a microscope.

Of course, questioning whether it's reasonable to have an associate attend a deposition isn't exactly a ticket to the "most popular" award from the local bar association. "This is not a good business for making friends," says the 51-year-old Meckler. Of course, Meckler isn't exactly without friends. He has close ties to Governor Rod Blagojevich of Illinois and is currently representing him in an ongoing government investigation into allegations of hiring fraud.

Meckler's popularity (or lack thereof) aside, soaring legal costs

mean that his business is likely to grow. A recent survey of Fortune 1000 companies by The BTI Consulting Group, Inc., found that they spent \$54.6 billion on outside counsel last year, an increase of nearly 20 percent over the previous year. The same study estimated that the legal bills would rise another 9 percent this year.

Lately, much of Meckler's time has been spent scrutinizing more than \$400 million in bills from firms representing two drug companies involved in mass tort cases. His previous experience with the pharmaceutical industry includes a 2001 lawsuit between Steadfast Insurance Company and Purdue Pharma L.P. in Connecticut state court. Steadfast claimed that the fees Purdue spent while defending its prescription painkiller OxyContin were unreasonable. Purdue ran up more than \$400 million in defense costs in three-and-a-half years, including \$93 million from King & Spalding and \$75 million from Chadbourne & Parke. The case settled last summer.

Meckler estimates that he has



analyzed in excess of \$2 billion in legal fees, which has included bills from 58 firms in The Am Law 100. Meckler presents his group—which has grown to seven lawyers—as offering a unique combination of auditing expertise, trial experience, and the ability to give "qualitative opinions" about legal bills. The competition is mostly consulting firms. "They're not trial lawyers. . . . They're primarily number crunchers," says Meckler.

Meckler worked as a prosecutor for Cook County, Illinois, in the 1980s, then joined now-defunct Phelan, Pope & John, where he represented an insurance company in a suit against Sidley Austin and Foley & Lard-

ner over fees charged to the Bradley Trust. Since then, he has been in fee disputes with Kirkland & Ellis over work done for Motorola, Inc., in a toxic tort case; Weil, Gotshal & Manges for its defense of the Sony Corporation over alleged misuse of movie rights to *Philadelphia*; and Kaye Scholer, among others, who defended American Medical

Systems, Inc., in penile implant actions. Each of the cases settled, according to Meckler.

Meckler doesn't expect the defense bar to love him, but "I hope they respect what I do," he says. "Unfortunately, a lot of litigation that I get involved in gets very personal."

Meckler hasn't won over Paul Breene, a partner at Anderson Kill & Olick, who faced Meckler in the Purdue matter. Breene says Meckler's so-called legal audits are just an attempt by insurance companies to avoid their contractual obligations. "I think that he's an honest and decent guy," says Breene. "I don't agree with what he does for a living."

—ANDREW LONGSTRETH