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June 22, 2007, 3:01 pm

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**Law Blog Q&A: Christopher C.S. Manning**

Posted by Peter Lattman



We're sitting around here anxiously awaiting the imminent verdict in the much ballyhooed [Great American Pants Suit](#), which is expected to be handed down late this afternoon or Monday. D.C. administrative law judge Roy Pearson filed a lawsuit demanding \$67 million from the Chungs, whose Washington dry cleaners had allegedly lost his pair of trousers. (Click [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for prior Law Blog coverage.)

How does the Law Blog pregame for such things? By interviewing [Chris Manning](#), the Chungs' lawyer in the case. We've tried to reach Judge Pearson, but calls and emails have gone unreturned.

**How'd you get involved in the case?**

The case was originally filed in June 2005 but I became involved in January 2006, when the Chungs retained me. I went to [Washington & Lee] law school with their cousin, who recommended me to them.

**What was your initial reaction to the case?**

That it was ludicrous. At the time, he was only asking for approximately \$50,000 but I still couldn't believe that Pearson was pursuing a claim that should have been brought in small claims court. I also felt sorry for my clients that they were having to endure this madness.

**How'd all the publicity start?**

A [local neighborhood newspaper](#) first picked up the story. Then [WJLA](#) the local ABC affiliate — picked up the story, with me holding the pants. After that, Marc Fisher's [Washington Post] column ran in late April which really set it off. [The story has since been featured on Today, Nightline, Good Morning America, MSNBC, Fox News, CNN and a host of other networks.]

**And now you're apparently in hot demand from media around the world?**

Worldwide we get constant requests from South Korea, Great Britain, Australia, South Africa and for some reason we're getting a lot of attention from Amsterdam. My father was recently in Ireland and was having a meal in Dublin and someone next to him was talking about the case.

**What do you do when you're not litigating missing pants cases?**

I do about half business-related litigation and half real-estate litigation. My partner does corporate transactional work. [Both Manning and his partner worked in Big Law before striking out on their own in 2004: Manning worked at Bryan Cave; [Sossamon](#) at Hogan & Hartson.]

**How has having your own [firm](#) worked out?**

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The Wall Street Journal's Law Blog focuses on legal matters important to the business community. Dan Slater is the lead writer. Before becoming a journalist, Dan worked as a litigator at a New York law firm. The Law Blog also includes contributions from reporters and editors at the Journal and Dow Jones Newswires. Have a comment or tip? Write to [lawblog@wsj.com](mailto:lawblog@wsj.com).

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It was an entrepreneurial move and we've really very much liked it. And we've derived enormous satisfaction out of assisting small businesses like ours that are emerging and growing, like the Chungs'. We started with no clients and through effective networking, hard work and good work we've developed a healthy stable of returning business.

### Have you enjoyed your 15 minutes of fame?

I think I'm at 14.59 minutes. Honestly, it's been [bittersweet](#). I really haven't enjoyed it because all the exposure has been at the expense of my clients and this has been a very difficult time for them financially and emotionally and, as a result, it's been a trying time for me. This has really significantly affected the Chungs. They've had to take off from their business and it's had a deleterious effect on their revenues. Even if they win on Monday, this ordeal continues because Mr. Pearson will likely appeal. [The Chungs have set up a legal defense fund at [www.customcleanersdefensefund.com](http://www.customcleanersdefensefund.com).]

### Can you get attorneys fees if the judge rules in your favor?

If we win or if he's given a paltry sum, we can move for attorneys fees to be paid for by him. The judge would have to find he brought the suit in bad faith. It's a pretty high bar and any ruling will be appealed, and then there's the question of whether he'll be able to afford it. So it's unclear.

### What has this whole experience taught you about your chosen profession?

On the one hand it makes me feel good that I can champion a cause that I really believe in, and I truly believe in defending the Chungs against this overly aggressive, vexatious litigation, but on the other hand I'm saddened there are individuals like Mr. Pearson who will abuse the legal system in an attempt to harass other individuals. But I will say that Pearson is the exception rather than the rule when it comes to litigants and lawyers in this country.

### What's the C.S. stand for?

Canon Swindle. Christopher Canon Swindle Manning - the middle names are family names.

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What's the C.S. stand for? Hey so Lattman does have some journalist blood.

Comment by Obs. - June 22, 2007 at [4:41 pm](#)

C S seems to render at least a couple of great names.

Clive Staples and now Canon Swindle. Excellent.

Comment by Earnest Williams - June 22, 2007 at [5:19 pm](#)

That is ludicrous! That's what small claims court is all about. Pearson's pursuit of this family-owned business is taking up precious courtroom resources while those with legitimate lawsuits are delayed their day in court.

Comment by John Merchant, California Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse - June 22, 2007 at [5:23 pm](#)

CS's business as a result of the publicity should be booming. Hope he's giving the Chungs a big discount.

Comment by Anonymous - June 22, 2007 at [6:25 pm](#)

He sounds like a good man. Christopher Canon Swindle Manning for Attorney General. Think it over GWB.

Comment by Esq. - June 22, 2007 at [6:59 pm](#)

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I think it's funny that his middle name is "Swindle."

Comment by Anonymous - June 23, 2007 at [1:49 am](#)

This will be for the next twenty years what the McDonald's hot coffee was to the nineties. The only difference of course is that the McDonald's case had merit, if you troubled to look beyond the headlines. The professional was just getting voer McDonalds, but now we have to live down this. I have been screwed by a dry cleaner, and I believe that this guy got screwed. But why, o why, did he have to claim such damages? We should all mourn his petty pleading. It will be with the profession for at least another ten years.

Comment by I'm so tired of this - June 23, 2007 at [2:48 pm](#)

This case has helped boost our efforts to dismantle our legal system. To learn more about how you can help take apart the system that has allowed this frivolous lawsuit, go to the Institute for Legal Reform.

Comment by Tort Reform - June 24, 2007 at [8:42 am](#)

I agree with Mr. Merchant. Pearson's quarrel should not even be allowed in court. He is wasting precious resources. It would be more efficient if he was compelled to arbitrate his case with the American Arbitration Association.

Comment by Anon - June 24, 2007 at [8:44 am](#)

So tell me all you legal beagles, just how would you evaluate Manning's effort in light of this ludicrous case being allowed to drag on this long? Any opinions on this matter?

Comment by My pants are in the washer as I type this - June 24, 2007 at [6:38 pm](#)

It doesn't sound like there was anything Manning could do to end this faster.

Comment by anon - June 24, 2007 at [9:01 pm](#)

Not exactly sure what you think Manning could do to speed this up, anon - capitulate?

Comment by Earnest Williams - June 24, 2007 at [9:39 pm](#)

No, being of the non-legal profession, I was simply wondering if Manning could have had this sham of a case dismissed well before it got to this (what seems to be late) stage?

This must be extremely trying times for the Chungs and I would hate to see them suffer one second longer than they absolutely needed to (and should not have to endure to begin with).

Does the judge have the power to either dismiss or declass the claims to small claims court, where it belongs as a query in point?

Comment by My pants are in the dryer as I type this - June 24, 2007 at [9:52 pm](#)

"either dismiss or declass the claims to small claims court"...

By that I mean at the beginning or very early stages of the case, of course. It just seems that any sane person or judge would have realized the lunacy of this case and that is why I am perplexed as to why this case was not dismissed long before now? The decision is expected tomorrow is it not? A statement needs to be made here about such acutely frivolous cases and that statement should have long ago been made.

Comment by My pants are in the dryer as I type this - June 24, 2007 at [10:18 pm](#)

My understanding is that Manning did everything he could--i.e. moved for Summary Judgment early on but the first judge in the case was very pro-consumer and wasn't willing to make a strong decision to dismiss it. The judge must have held that there were disputes of fact compelling a trial."

Comment by Jonestein, P. A - June 24, 2007 at [10:24 pm](#)

Honestly, Manning strikes me as a very compassionate person with a lot of integrity -- not to mention he's easy on the eyes...

Comment by Allison S. - June 24, 2007 at [10:41 pm](#)

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Thanks for the reply Jonestein. Pro consumer or not, how can the ludicrous damage claim attached have been allowed to fester to this stage by any judge? Disputes of fact aside, I strongly feel this case should have been hammered down to small claims court from the get-go. I mean this isn't Enron for Court's sake.

Comment by My pants are on the ironing board as I type this - June 24, 2007 at [10:48 pm](#)

Allison, I am not trying suggest Manning does not have genuine compassion or integrity as I do not even know the man. I was merely asking what the legal beagles thought in regards to the way the case was handled thus far. A report card, from those following it, of sorts. Anyhow, hopefully the Chung's get some good news tomorrow and Pearson gets the stugots. Good night.

Comment by My pants are on the ironing board as I type this - June 24, 2007 at [10:52 pm](#)

I've been following this case a bit on TV, print, etc. and I think the outrageous damages claim only came at the very end--inappropriately, right before trial and after the time for moving to dismiss had expired. The damages claimed were evidently much less until then. Pearson is a real piece of work.

Comment by Jonestein, P.A. - June 24, 2007 at [10:56 pm](#)

Does this fellow ever go by:

"Can"

as in "Can Swindle" you!

Shouldn't a capable lawyer have been able to dispose of this absurd case prior to this point?

Or are we seeing the American "justice" system at work in all of its glory?

Comment by "Can Swindle" - June 25, 2007 at [7:29 am](#)

From what I can tell, it seems like Manning has done a very solid job. Used all of the tools in his arsenal and, very likely, will prevail when the verdict comes in. He was faced with a very liberal jurisdiction and a very difficult situation (to include the media scrutiny) and, hopefully, made it as positive for his clients as possible.

Comment by Jonestein, P. A. - June 25, 2007 at [8:13 am](#)

Dismissal at the pleading stage is very disfavored in our legal system, but some judges are willing to do it. The rest simply don't have the time or want to work on resolving cases at the earliest possible point. And, logically, why should they--often the litigants decide not to proceed once their initial anger or defensiveness dissipate. Here, Manning tried to get the judge to manage the case but the judge was not willing to do so. Hence, the trial.

Comment by Reality Time - June 25, 2007 at [9:48 am](#)

Chris C.S. Manning is H-O-T!!!

Comment by Swindle Lover - June 25, 2007 at [5:58 pm](#)

Canon Swindle = Can Unswindle.

Comment by Me - June 25, 2007 at [6:04 pm](#)

His real last name is Swindle. But what lawyer would want to go by the last name Swindle? So he changed his last name to Manning, his mother's maiden name. But regardless of his name, he did a wonderful job at defending this couple. I congratulate him and his law partner and hope this brings them much success!

Comment by tulanegrad - June 25, 2007 at [6:12 pm](#)

I say congrats to Mr. Manning. The holding of this case is simple. You shouldn't have to lose your shirt simply because you may have lost some jerk's pants. Pearson should be disbarred and sanctioned. This type of litigation gives the judicial system a bad name. Kudos to Mr. Manning for his work on behalf of the Chungs. Manning apparently wasn't the Chung's first lawyer, but based on the results of this case, I'm sure they won't ever hire anybody else.

Comment by dcayani - June 26, 2007 at [9:31 pm](#)

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