

Arbitrator Chosen to Handle Charlie Sheen Case (Exclusive)

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Hon. Richard Neal has been chosen to oversee the fight between Sheen, Warner Bros. and "Two and a Half Men" co-creator Chuck Lorre over Sheen's firing from the hit CBS show, multiple sources tell *The Hollywood Reporter*.



Richard Neal

Meet the man who could decide **Charlie Sheen's** legal fate:

Hon. Richard Neal has been chosen as the neutral arbitrator overseeing the fight between Sheen, Warner Bros. and *Two and a Half Men* co-creator **Chuck Lorre** over Sheen's firing from the hit CBS show, multiple sources tell *The Hollywood Reporter*.

The parties to the arbitration were notified of the choice late last week by letter from JAMS, the dispute resolution company overseeing the private proceeding. Attorneys for Sheen, Warners and Lorre had submitted a "strike list" of possible JAMS neutrals, winnowing down the group of

possible arbitrators to only a few before settling on Justice Neal.

A former California Court of Appeals judge, Neal has served as an arbitrator and mediator with JAMS since 2001. He's handled hundreds of private cases and been named a "top neutral" by LA's Daily Journal legal newspaper. But, interestingly, he's not an expert on the entertainment business.

Attorneys for Sheen, Warners and Lorre declined to comment on Neal's selection. But Hollywood litigators not involved in the case tell *THR* he's got a great reputation in legal circles for being fair and diligent with the cases he oversees. "Smart," "no-nonsense" and "conservative" are the words we hear again and again.

"He's first-rate, does not suffer fools lightly and has a brilliant legal mind," says **Marshall Grossman** of LA's Bingham firm. "He'll get to the right answer, that's for sure."

Others say Neal's straight-laced, by-the-book approach to jurisprudence will cause him to ignore the media circus surrounding Sheen and focus solely on interpreting his contract under the applicable law.

"He's a court of appeals guy, so he might give more credence to the written record," notes **Bryan Freedman** of LA's Freedman & Taitelman.

Neal's appointment comes as the Sheen legal matter heats up. As we've reported, the parties are jockeying over whether the dispute should be decided in arbitration or in a public courtroom, so one of Neal's first tasks might be to decide whether Sheen's entire dispute with Warners and Lorre is subject to the arbitration clause in his contract, which provides that JAMS will resolve conflicts arising from his deal.

JAMS previously decided that its arbitrator will determine the so-called "arbitrability" of the matter. But Sheen's lawyers want at least part of the dispute (especially the part concerning Lorre, who does not have a contract with Sheen) to be litigated in Los Angeles Superior Court, where Sheen has filed a \$100 million lawsuit claiming Lorre and Warners conspired to terminate him from TV's top-rated comedy.

If the Superior Court decides it has jurisdiction over the matter, it could take some or all of the case away from Neal. But courts are often extremely reluctant to assert jurisdiction over cases where there's an arbitration clause in play.

This morning, Judge Allan Goodman set an April 19 hearing date on the issue.

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