

You may not want to pick a fight with Karen Koehler, pictured here in Pioneer Square at the site of the Kristopher Kime beating

FROM THE WRONGFUL DEATH MARDI GRAS-CASE TO R-67, KAREN KOEHLER FIGHTS THE GOOD FIGHT

PRIZE FIGHTER

KAREN K. KOEHLER HAS NEVER shied away from controversy. The petite 47-year-old led the winning side in last year's highly contentious fight for Referendum 67—a measure designed to hold insurance companies accountable if they shirk on customers' claims by awarding policyholders triple damages. And in 2001, she took on the high-profile wrongful death case *Kime v. City of Seattle*, which most lawyers wouldn't touch, involving the beating death of 20-year-old Kristopher Kime during the Pioneer Square Mardi Gras riots. ¶ "In school and in classes, I always wanted to be on the underdog's side," says Koehler, who had already mapped out her law career in eighth grade. It was clearly a good choice: Her most recent accolade came last July, when she became the first woman of color elected president of the Washington State Trial Lawyers Association. ¶ Sitting in her Lower Queen

Anne office, the dark-haired, affable single mother of three looks more like a spry teenager than a hard-nosed, pinstriped litigator. She takes an unusual approach to her work as well. "I'll take a case on as a matter of principle," she says, "and people think I'm a little crazy." ¶ She credits her parents—her Chinese-American mother is a lawyer, her German-Jewish father is a scientist who emigrated from Nazi Germany—for her nonconformist nature. "I'm not typical in my thought patterns," she says. "I think it's from my parents, especially my mom, who was totally a maverick." ¶ With the success of Referendum 67, Koehler, who spent her early years in law as an insurance defense attorney, has come full circle. "The passage of R-67 ... will now level the playing field," she says. Meanwhile, her plans for the future include inspiring young people of all backgrounds to become lawyers. *Elizabeth Economou*