

MVP: Williams & Connolly's Lisa S. Blatt

By Jack Karp

Law360 (November 15, 2024, 12:51 PM EST) -- Lisa S. Blatt of Williams & Connolly LLP's appellate practice won high-profile victories at the U.S. Supreme Court involving injunctions against employers and the scope of federal bribery law in corruption cases, earning her a spot as one of the 2024 Law360 Appellate MVPs.

Her biggest accomplishment:

It's hard to say which of her wins at the Supreme Court was her biggest accomplishment of the past year, Blatt said.

She won a 6-3 ruling in June holding that federal bribery law only criminalizes quid pro quo bribery and not rewards given after an official act, overturning the conviction of former Portage, Indiana, Mayor James Snyder.

"Anytime you get a victory for an individual client, there's just nothing more gratifying as a lawyer," Blatt said.

The argument in Snyder's case was "by far one of my most favorite arguments of all time," she said, explaining that the government's position — that a federal law prohibiting public officials from taking bribes also extends to gratuities that don't require a quid pro quo — lent itself to so many open questions and hypotheticals about what is a willful gift.

"I love any time I can use popular culture, and I got to talk about restaurants and just had a lot of fun in the oral argument," said Blatt, who brought up Harry & David gift baskets, gallbladder surgery and dinner at the Cheesecake Factory during the hearing.

"It was just too much fun coming up with hypotheticals where the government could not answer," she added.

Blatt also reached a milestone this year, arguing her 50th case before the justices in April.



In Starbucks v. McKinney, she won an 8-1 ruling on behalf of the coffee giant that a traditional four-factor test applies when the National Labor Relations Board seeks injunctions to halt serious labor violations while prosecutors challenge them in the agency's internal courts. The justices declined to apply a less exacting version of the test that the board had sought.

That case wasn't as challenging because the decision below "was so wrong," Blatt said, but it was meaningful because "I have spent my whole career working out of Starbucks preparing for arguments."

She remembers going over her notes for her first argument at Starbucks, and said she is "just a big, big, big, big, big fan" of the coffee chain.

When Starbucks hired her team to handle the case, she went out and bought "every conceivable Starbucks paraphernalia," and her entire office is now covered in Starbucks items, Blatt said.

"So I would say it was just more of a personal connection as opposed to the legal issues," she added. "It was No. 50, and it was Starbucks."

Her biggest challenge:

Continuing to do consistently good work — and a lot of it — at the high court has been one of Blatt's biggest challenges.

She's already argued two cases before the court this term, defending CBD companies against a commercial trucker's attempt to bring a racketeering claim and disputing heightened evidence standards for Fair Labor Standards Act overtime exemptions.

And Blatt and her team have argued cases before the justices in every one of their last three terms.

"We've had a three-year running streak of a lot of merits cases, and it is challenging to keep up that level of intensity and consistency at the Supreme Court," she said.

"I have unlimited energy so far. I don't know how long it'll last, but right now I have unlimited energy," Blatt said. "But it's just relentless. You have to keep at it."

What motivates her:

Storytelling is what gets Blatt excited about appellate law.

"Just bringing a case to life, bringing somebody's story to life" is what drives her, she said.

"I usually think of my client as always being bullied by the other side, and your job is to protect and defend them," Blatt explained.

She also likes to fight, and to win. She's never thought of herself as someone who likes to settle cases, Blatt added.

"You get very attached to the client, and the more attached you are to your client, the more motivated you are to win," she said. "I like to fight to the death. I'm not interested in sitting down and bringing everybody together."

Her advice for junior attorneys:

Blatt tells appellate attorneys coming up behind her to find a mentor.

"Find somebody who will promote you and look for opportunities, and who recognizes your talent and doesn't want to be in your way," she said.

"And don't let other people's perception of you define you," Blatt added.

She's serving as a mentor right now for Williams & Connolly partner Luke McCloud, whom Blatt called "a once-in-a-generation talent." McCloud has already argued twice at the high court and is also an attorney of color, something that's "very rare" at the Supreme Court, she said.

"I want to get him as many arguments as possible in the next coming years," Blatt said.

--As told to Jack Karp. Editing by Adam LoBelia.

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