For years, D. Jean Veta has been at the center of defending the rights of the LGBTQ community in Greater Washington. And despite gains in equality in recent years, she said the work is far from done.

"Marriage equality was terrific," said Veta, a partner at the District office of Covington and Burling LLP, "but we do not yet have true equality – in the workplace, in public accommodations or even in successfully defending against those who would chip away at equality wherever they can."

A native of Cheyenne, Wyoming, Veta – who still ventures out there every summer to work on a friend's cattle ranch – was a driving force in a July 2010 case heard by the D.C. Court of Appeals. Through her work at Covington, the firm won a victory on behalf of several clients who sought to prevent a ballot initiative that would have limited marriage in the District to opposite-sex couples.

The initiative – which never made it to ballots – tried to prohibit same-sex marriages and roll back existing protections for couples married in other states. It wasn't her first brush with a high-profile case, though. In 1981, she served as a law clerk to a federal district court, Judge Harold H. Greene, when he issued the opinion that broke up AT&T's monopoly. "That laid the foundation for the explosion in the telecommunications industry," Veta said.

Following that clerkship, Veta arrived at Covington. She took a temporary break from the firm for three years as a political appointee of the Clinton administration, spending time as deputy general counsel at the Department of Education, and later as deputy associate attorney general at the Department of Justice.

She managed to break some ground in law school, too. While studying at Tulane, Veta served as the first woman editor-in-chief of the ***Tulane Law Review*** since World War II. The job "really honed my writing skills and enhanced my ability to present complicated issues in an understandable fashion," she said.

Veta's interest in helping people and a desire to make a difference on a national level were what drew her to a career as a lawyer, she said. Covington's long-standing practice of hiring a diverse set of lawyers, including those in the LGBTQ community, is starting to be reflected more broadly in the legal industry, she said.

"My father always told me that it was important to do something you love, and that there's no greater curse than to wake up in the morning and to have to go work at a place you hate," Veta said. "And I've just been very fortunate to have a career where I love to get up in the morning and go to work."

*– Joseph Coombs*

## Q&A | THE LITIGATOR

▶ **Proudest moment in advocating for LGBTQ rights:** When D.C.'s highest court relied on arguments from our amicus brief to uphold marriage equality in D.C. This was five years before the Supreme Court declared marriage equality as the law of the land.

▶ **The most frustrating moment:** In early 2009, when we represented a lesbian mother who was deprived access to her daughter after our client separated from her former partner. This was before marriage equality, and our client had not gone through the formal process of adopting her daughter. Prior to our entering the case, Maryland's highest court had ruled during an appeal in 2008 that, under Maryland law, a nonadoptive parent must be treated essentially as a third-party stranger and was required to meet a much more demanding standard for visitation rights. We were unable to persuade the trial court that our client met this demanding standard. I am happy to report that, in 2016, we were involved in a similar case, but this time, Maryland's highest court overturned its prior ruling and concluded that such parents should be treated as de facto parents and subject to the same standards as a child's formal legal parent.

▶ **How has the environment for LGBTQ workers changed?** While there is still work to be done, I think work environments generally have become more hospitable to the LGBTQ community, with better access to benefits for spouses and by offering a more welcoming environment.

▶ **Who has most inspired you in your work?** The LGBTQ advocates and straight allies who were battling these issues long before I became a lawyer and in the early years of my career. Chief among those are my colleagues at Covington. I also was deeply inspired by my friend, Roberta Achtenberg, who, among other things, became the first openly gay Senate-confirmed nominee to a federal government position, which occurred during the Clinton administration.

▶ **What should be next in the fight for LGBTQ equality?** The biggest fight facing us is one of complacency. In 27 states, it is still legal to fire someone for being gay — and in even more states for being transgender. In about 31 states, LGBTQ people can be turned away from public accommodations.

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