

Rising Star: Covington's Kayleigh Scalzo

By Sarah Martinson

Law360 (August 10, 2020, 2:56 PM EDT) -- Kayleigh Scalzo of Covington & Burling LLP has successfully defended companies against bid protests over contracts worth billions of dollars, landing her a place among the government contract attorneys under 40 honored as Law360 Rising Stars.

WHY SHE BECAME A GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS ATTORNEY:

Scalzo knew in law school that she wanted a career in which she could write and see the immediate impact of her writing, but she didn't know what area of law she wanted to pursue.

After graduating from law school and spending about a year as a Covington associate doing mostly white collar work, she decided to clerk for U.S. Circuit Judge Bruce M. Selya of the First Circuit to do some soul-searching.

When Scalzo returned to Covington after her clerkship, one of her friends at the firm recommended that she pursue government contract litigation, where cases are decided based on briefs that need to be well-written.

"I knew when I came back to the firm I wanted to write and not just write up witness memos or notes or what have you, but I wanted to do [[Government Accountability Office](#)] persuasive advocacy writing on a regular basis," Scalzo said.

HER BIGGEST CASE SO FAR:

Scalzo co-led Covington's defense of UnitedHealthcare against two bid protests in Kansas state court disputing a Kansas Medicaid managed-care services contract worth up to \$15 billion awarded to the insurer. Covington successfully defeated the protests in 2018 after a two-day bench trial in which Scalzo had a leading role.

The case was particularly challenging because while Scalzo's team was writing court briefs, they were also preparing for a two-day trial



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STAR
2020

Kayleigh Scalzo
Covington

Age: 34
Home base: Washington, D.C.
Position: Partner
Law school: George Washington University Law School
First job after law school: Associate at Covington

that took place only a couple of months after the bidders filed their protests, Scalzo said.

Scalzo distinctly remembers standing outside Covington's Washington, D.C., office on Palmer Alley taking a break for a smoothie when she received the news that they won the case. Scalzo screamed and yelled after hearing the news, drawing the attention of bystanders.

"What was particularly notable and exciting about that case is not only that it moved so quickly but that we had an actual trial as opposed to just briefing," Scalzo said.

HER PROUDEST MOMENT AS AN ATTORNEY:

The Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition, an organization that provides legal representation to immigrant detainees, referred a case to Covington in 2016 involving a West African gay man seeking asylum, which Scalzo took on as pro bono work.

Scalzo represented the man in an individual merits hearing in February 2017, where she successfully proved he was eligible for asylum in the U.S.

Scalzo said that after he was released from an immigration detention center in Richmond, Virginia, she went to pick him up and bring him back to D.C. and got to be the first person to show him the U.S. outside a detention center.

"It was a case of a magnitude I had never experienced before and winning was probably one of the very best moments of my life," Scalzo said.

HOW THE LEGAL INDUSTRY WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS:

Scalzo said that when she was entering the government contracts space, she had a friend ask her, "Hey, isn't government contracts for former military folks?"

But the government contracts bar has become more diverse and will continue to grow more diverse to include people who have different backgrounds that don't include former government or military work, she said.

"I think people like me who have no free-standing connection with the procurement community or government ... can feel at home in the government contracts bar," Scalzo said.

— *As told to Sarah Martinson*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2020 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2020, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.