



Varu Chilakamarri

Partner

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OVERVIEW

Varu Chilakamarri is a partner in the firm's Environment, Land, and Natural Resources practice group. Her practice focuses on litigation services, primarily in environmental permitting, enforcement, and regulatory law. She has significant experience litigating federal appeals. Varu also counsels clients on government-facing matters, which often involve strategic analysis of legal risks and opportunities presented by statutory and regulatory frameworks.

Varu joins the firm after a 17-year career at the US Department of Justice, where she was a successful district and appellate court litigator and held various policy and leadership roles. Most recently, she served as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the DOJ's Civil Division. In this role, Varu was the head of the Torts Branch, an office of over 230 litigators and staff who defend the United States in a wide range of suits for monetary damages—including toxic tort cases arising out of environmental regulatory actions, constitutional tort cases, and cases brought under unique statutory compensation programs.

Before that, Varu was an appellate attorney in the Environment and Natural Resources Division, serving as lead counsel in complex civil and criminal appeals. These included facial challenges to the constitutionality of federal laws and regulations, and challenges to the validity of federal permitting and land use decisions (e.g., cases involving the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act). She also litigated enforcement cases, including those involving violations of substantive environmental laws, recordkeeping requirements, and various Title 18 provisions. She argued cases before the US Court of Appeals for the Third, Fifth, Ninth, Tenth, D.C., and the Federal Circuit, and she has practiced in several other federal appellate and district courts. Varu was also appointed as the Division's first counselor for animal welfare matters and served as Chief of Staff to the Assistant Attorney General in DOJ's Environment and Natural Resources Division.

Varu's work often centered on novel legal challenges arising from a broad suite of federal statutes, including two preemption lawsuits that went to the US Supreme Court.

Varu joined the DOJ in 2006 through the Attorney General's honors program as a trial attorney in the Civil Division's Federal Programs Branch, and during her tenure, also worked in the office of the Associate Attorney General as Acting Deputy and served on detail to the White House Counsel's Office. Before joining the DOJ, Varu clerked for Judge R. Guy Cole in the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and Judge Timothy B. Dyk in the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Attorney General's Award for Outstanding Service to the Justice Department (2013)
- Special Commendation Award for Outstanding Service to the Civil Division (2012)
- Perseverance Award from Civil Division (2010)
- Outstanding Performance Awards from the Environment and Natural Resources Division (2016, 2018, 2020)
- Ex officio member of the Department of Justice's State Secrets Review Committee (2013-2014)
- ABA/BNA Award for Excellence in Intellectual Property (2004)
- Leon Robbin Gold Medallion in Patent Law at Georgetown University Law Center (2004)

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- Speaker, "The Major Questions Doctrine: Doctrinal Conundrums and Practice Implications," 2024 Administrative Law Spring Conference, 10 May 2024
- Speaker, "WBA Got Skills: Developing What it Takes to Lead Forward |Leadership vs. Management: A Fireside Chat," Woman's Bar Association, 25 April 2024
- Participant, "Administrative Law After the Major Questions Doctrine and Chevron," Harvard Law School symposium, 25 March 2024

EDUCATION

- J.D., Georgetown University Law Center, 2004
- B.A., The Ohio State University, 2001
- B.S., The Ohio State University, 2001

ADMISSIONS

- Bar of District of Columbia
- Bar of New York
- Supreme Court of the United States
- United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit
- United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit
- United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit
- United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP POWERED BY HUB

- 15 May 2024, EPA Issues New Power Plant Rules
- 6 May 2024, EPA's New Strategic Civil-Criminal Enforcement Policy: Will Enhanced Coordination Lead to More Criminal Enforcement?
- 16 April 2024, Trade Association Best Practices: What Your Trade Association Needs to Know (and Might Not)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- *APA Litigation: Procedural Mechanisms that Focus Environmental Controversies*, 2019 No. 2 RMMLF- INST 9, Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation Special Institute (2019) (Article and Presenter)
- Harvard Law School, *The Animal Welfare Act at Fifty* (Conference Presenter and Panel Moderator) (2016)
- Structural Nonobviousness: How Inventiveness is Lost in the Discovery, 10 Va. J.L. & Tech. 7 (2005)
- Taxpayer Standing: A Step Toward Animal-Centric Litigation, 10 Animal L. 251 (2004)
- The Legislative Attempt to Combat Terrorism via the Safe Drinking Water Act, 91 Geo. L. J. 927 (2003)

NEWS & EVENTS

- 22 February 2024 , Environmental Law Conference, Hosted by The American Law Institute and The Environmental Law Institute
- 5 December 2023, K&L Gates Adds Pair of Justice Department Lawyers in Washington, D.C., Office

AREAS OF FOCUS

- Environment, Land, and Natural Resources
- Appellate Litigation
- Mass Tort
- Public Policy and Law