

Caitlin Halligan Profiled in Lawdragon's "Lawyer Limelight"

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Few law firms operating at the top of the profession have ever stacked their rosters of talent as quickly and impressively as Selendy & Gay, which was co-founded by renowned litigators [Philippe Selendy](#) and [Faith Gay](#) in 2018. When building out its appellate strength, the litigation boutique could not have scored better than [Caitlin Halligan](#).

Halligan, who clerked for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, served an eight-year stint in the New York Attorney General's office, including six years as New York's Solicitor General, and four years as General Counsel of the New York County District Attorney's Office. The mix of commercial and public interest cases at Selendy & Gay is a natural fit for Halligan, who pursued a law career after witnessing first-hand one of her generation's most public human rights abuses.

Lawdragon: Were there early experiences that led you toward a career in law?

Caitlin Halligan: After graduation, I received a fellowship to teach at a university in Central China. It was my first time out of the country, and I spent a year there teaching history and writing and travelling around Asia. At the time, I planned to go to graduate school to study history when I returned – definitely not law school!

In 1989, I ended up in the middle of the Tiananmen Square protests in Beijing. Watching my Chinese friends put so much on the line to question their government was a remarkable experience and helped me to appreciate just how valuable it is to have the freedom to engage on public issues and challenge our own government when we disagree. As a result, when I returned to the U.S., I went to work on Capitol Hill for my hometown representative from rural Arkansas, and eventually headed to law school.

LD: What experiences after that were important in your development as a lawyer?

CH: The opportunity to clerk for two wonderful judges was equally formative. The first was Judge Patricia Wald, who was the first woman to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, and its first chief judge as well. A mother to five children, she was a tremendous mentor. Her ability to skillfully navigate a deep commitment to her family, alongside an incredibly accomplished career, convinced me and my co-clerks that such a path might be open to us, too. I was also lucky to clerk for Justice Stephen Breyer. My year in his chambers – and the chance to see the Supreme Court at work – was enormously exciting and allowed me to learn about appellate writing and advocacy from the very best lawyers in the country.

I also had the privilege of serving as Solicitor General of New York at a relatively early point in my career. Representing the state and its agencies in a wide range of challenging matters, taking on affirmative litigation, and learning management skills – all of it was challenging and very fulfilling. And I think every government lawyer will tell you that there is a special pride that comes with representing the public, every time you sign a brief or stand up in court.

LD: How has your practice evolved over your career?

CH: Although much of my practice is focused on appellate work in the state and federal courts, through the years I have also worked extensively on cases at the trial level, from developing legal strategy to handling dispositive motions. The substance of my practice is quite varied, as it has been since my early days as a lawyer. As Solicitor General, I handled an incredibly diverse range of cases – constitutional questions, statutory interpretation, administrative law, and common law. As General Counsel to the Manhattan District Attorney, my practice primarily involved state criminal law. And in private practice, my work is again wide-ranging, from constitutional and statutory law to questions of commercial law and contract interpretation. This chapter of my career is especially engaging because I find myself constantly learning about new areas of law and the many different sectors in which our clients work.

LD: What made you decide to leave an established firm and join Selendy & Gay, which was just a year old at the time?

CH: Selendy & Gay stood out as an exceptional place – started by a small group of lawyers practicing at the top of the profession, who wanted to take on difficult but important cases, build a meaningful sense of community, mentor young attorneys, and make real time for pro bono and public interest work. All of that really aligned with my own values.

For me, practicing in a place that does excellent work, has a collegial atmosphere, and is centered around giving associates room to take on meaningful professional challenges is the ideal approach to lawyering. The chance to join the firm was really exciting, and being part of Selendy & Gay is even better!

LD: Can you speak to your pro bono and public interest work?

CH: Public interest and pro bono work are an essential part of our practice at Selendy & Gay, and have been a fundamental component of my own practice. Just in the past few months, we have filed briefs in defense of the Affordable Care Act, and on whether the insanity defense is constitutionally required in criminal cases. We are representing a tenants' organization in defending New York's rent regulation statute against a sweeping constitutional challenge. And we represent the American Federation of Teachers in a fight for fair access to public service loan forgiveness provided by Congress.

Cases like these are very rewarding. They allow us to bring high-quality lawyering to clients in need of assistance. They give our attorneys valuable experience trying cases and drafting appellate briefs, while working on matters that are important to them. And they allow the firm to engage in a meaningful way with matters of true public interest – something that has been important to me at every stage of my career.

Read the [full interview in Lawdragon](#).