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TRAILBLAZERS

IMMIGRATION

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PIONEER SPIRIT Laura Reiff majored in political science before going to the George Washington University Law School. “I always knew I wanted to do policy work. While in law school, I worked for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and a Central American immigration group. I did a lot of pro bono work through the clinic.” Reiff began her career at a firm where she focused on business immigration. “But I like doing international work that impacts people. So, I switched firms.”

TRAILS BLAZED Reiff has served as national co-chair of the firm’s immigration and compliance practice for almost 20 years and has grown the practice to nearly 100 team members. She also spent nine years as managing shareholder of the firm’s Northern Virginia office.

Reiff advises corporations on a variety of compliance-related issues, particularly related to Form I-9 eligibility employment verification matters. She has been involved in audits and internal investigations and has successfully minimized monetary exposure as well as civil and criminal liabilities on behalf of her clients. She develops immigration compliance strategies and programs for both small and large companies and helps businesses create, manage and use “regional centers” that can create indirect jobs toward the 10 new U.S. jobs whose creation can offer EB-5 permanent residence for investment. Reiff represents individual investors in obtaining conditional permanent residence. Her practice also consists of managing business immigration matters and providing immigration counsel to address the visa and work authorization needs of U.S. and global personnel.

Currently, about 30 percent of Reiff’s practice includes policy work on Capitol Hill. “The work I do that is most meaningful is in the policy area. Because I’ve worked on business immigration policy for 30 years, I have a reputation for being able to work both sides of the aisle. I’ve been working on comprehensive immigration reform since 1999.” She cites putting together the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition among her major accomplishments. The trade group consists of businesses involved in the hospitality, construction, meatpacking and other industries concerned with undocumented labor in the workforce. “There is no visa type to bring lesser and semiskilled workers into the United States, and our members have workers who don’t have status. Or they are part of industries that need a mechanism to have workers come into the country. We’ve advocated for a way to get people out of the shadows and bring them into the United States, where U.S. workers don’t want these positions. We have a lot of ideas, and a lot of legislation has been introduced. It’s an ongoing effort, and we are still working for a comprehensive solution. But we’ve at least been able to make people understand what is needed.”

Reiff has served on the board of the National Immigration Forum. “We established ‘Bibles, Badges and Business,’ a nonpartisan group that advocates for immigration policy that recognizes the business needs, law enforcement concerns and religious aspects. We have brought disparate groups together to go to the Hill to talk about why we need a solution. We also included veterans, as there are a lot of veteran immigrants in our workforce. As a board member and former chairperson, we have made a great impact. It’s just the facts and the facts according to these groups.

FUTURE EXPLORATIONS This is one of the most difficult times to practice business immigration law, or immigration law in general. “I’ve been through many administrations. We are in a demographic situation in the United States where we have a low unemployment rate, baby boomers are retiring and we don’t really have enough workers to meet our needs. The administration is trying to both push GDP and hire Americans first, and I’m not sure that can work. It’s very concerning that there are policies that would end temporary protective status and keep others out of a workforce that is already challenged. Policies are making it harder to recruit, retain and keep workers legally. We are hoping we can help shape immigration policy going forward to fully address the needs of U.S. businesses for skilled foreign workers in our country.”

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