

# BEST LAWYERS

From the finest Supreme Court advocates to the toughest criminal defenders to the top divorce attorneys, this is your ultimate guide to Washington's very best legal talent. BY MARISA M. KASHINO

OUR #1 LAWYER

+30 MORE  
SUPERSTARS

## 1 THEODORE OLSON

*Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher*

This Supreme Court advocate and former solicitor general during the George W. Bush administration is one of the nation's most influential lawyers. Olson is at the forefront of the court battle over marriage equality, an endeavor he began in 2009 when he and New York lawyer David Boies filed a lawsuit in California challenging the state's same-sex-marriage ban. A prominent Republican, Olson says the issue isn't one of politics but of human rights.

Last year, in recognition of their efforts, *Time* magazine named Olson and Boies to its list of the 100 most influential people worldwide. The pair convinced the California federal-court judge to strike down the same-sex-marriage ban as unconstitutional. The case is now on appeal.

Olson may be best known as the lawyer who ensured Bush the presidency by successfully arguing *Bush v. Gore* at the high court, but his advocacy for same-sex marriage is becoming an equally prominent part of his legacy.

He has argued 58 times at the Supreme Court, including two appearances before the justices last term.

Olson represented the NFL Players Association this summer during appellate proceedings over the player lockout that threatened to delay the start of the NFL season. He says he's a Redskins fan, though it's tough to imagine he has time for football.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
CHRISTOPHER LEAMAN

decades-long contract battle with the Pentagon. Just as the excitement of arguing at the court hasn't worn off, neither has the thrill of winning. "That was satisfying," says Phillips.



**PATRICK REGAN**  
*Regan, Zambri & Long*

You won't find this personal-injury lawyer advertising on TV. Patrick Regan—widely regarded as a skilled and ethical plaintiffs' lawyer—works hard to counteract the negative stereotype associated with his practice.

"Unfortunately, when somebody is sitting in my office, it's because they or a member of their family has experienced a very significant tragedy," he says. "What's motivating about it is that through our efforts we're able to help them piece their lives back together."

Regan is gearing up for a February trial stemming from the fatal June 2009 train collision on Metro's Red Line. He is a lead attorney for family members of the crash victims suing the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Regan was also on the legal team representing Kathy Wone, the widow of Robert Wone, the young attorney murdered in a Dupont Circle rowhouse in 2006, in her wrongful-death civil suit against the three men who lived in the house. The case settled this summer.



**MICHELE ROBERTS**  
*Skadden*

Since leaving Akin Gump to join Skadden in March, Michele Roberts says she has felt "like a kid in a candy shop."

Skadden's clients, Roberts says, have a greater need for her particular skills—and anyone who has hung around DC Superior Court knows that Roberts's greatest talent is dazzling a jury.

Though she made a name for herself handling gritty street crimes—first as a DC public defender and then as a private criminal lawyer—Roberts's practice has evolved to focus on civil cases. The change means she spends most of her time arguing about money instead of jail time, but because criminal clients often plead before trial, the civil work brings more opportunity to get in front of a jury.

Among the new clients that Skadden has given her entrée to is pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, which is involved in a spate of litigation over its hormone-therapy drugs Prempro and Premarin. As of mid-November, Roberts was planning to go to trial in one of those cases by the end of the month. Also on her docket is a high-profile case for client Host Hotels & Resorts, one of the nation's largest hotel owners, which is accusing hotel brokerage Molinaro Koger and its president of fraud.



**DENYSE SABAGH**  
*Duane Morris*

As head of the highly regarded immigration practice group at Duane Morris, Denyse Sabagh has one of the most well-rounded immigration practices in town. She advises large corporations on employment immigration questions as well as people who need counsel on coming to the United States or fighting deportation.

She has been busy helping foreign companies and individuals navigate the complicated process of investing in new commercial enterprises in this country. She's also working pro bono for DREAM Act clients—undocumented students who risk deportation.

Some cases sound as if they're straight out of a movie script. Sabagh is fighting to get a Saudi-born World Bank employee allowed back into the country. While on a business trip last year, the client was stopped in London and told his US visa had been revoked. When he reapplied for a visa, he learned he had been denied based on suspicion of terrorist activity. In hopes of sorting out the government's suspicions, Sabagh got him a rare interview this summer with the FBI in Vienna, Austria, where he was questioned for three days. The matter is unresolved, but Sabagh continues to pursue it.



**PETER SAFIR**  
*Covington & Burling*

Name a big pharmaceutical company and there's a good chance that Peter Safir, co-chair of Covington & Burling's food-and-drug practice, counts it as a client. Eli Lilly, Sanofi-Aventis, Merck, and AstraZeneca, among others, seek his counsel on dealing with Food and Drug Administration regulations and getting their products approved. And when a drug company gets into trouble with the FDA, Safir is often the first line of defense.

Last year he represented the CEO of Genzyme, which makes drugs for rare genetic diseases, in negotiating a settlement after government inspectors uncovered quality-control problems at the company's plant. And for at least as long as Barack Obama is in the White House, there appears to be more work on the horizon. The FDA "has become far more enforcement-oriented and more aggressive," says Safir. "There's a real difference between the Bush and Obama approach."



**ANDREW SANDLER**  
*BuckleySandler*

The financial crisis has meant a financial windfall for Andrew Sandler. The former Skadden partner

broke from big-firm life in 2009 when his group of litigators merged with an existing small firm to form BuckleySandler, a law firm focused on financial-services and white-collar clients. Propelled by extraordinary demand from banking and lending clients who need help fending off government investigations, the firm has grown from 40 to more than 150 full-time lawyers in two years.

Though Sandler is chairman of the firm, and so has strategic and governance responsibilities in addition to his practice, his caseload of fair-lending and mortgage-servicing investigations and False Claims Act work has kept him billing upward of 2,000 hours a year. And you won't find him only in court. He also navigates regulatory issues for boards of embattled institutions at agencies such as the Federal Reserve and the Securities and Exchange Commission.



**RENE SANDLER**  
*Sandler Law*

Few people know the ins and outs of the Maryland court system better than Rene Sandler, who has spent her entire life and career in the state. She grew up in Montgomery County, clerked in Montgomery County Circuit Court, was a prosecutor in the Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office, and has been defending criminal clients as a private-practice

lawyer for 15 years.

Sandler is known for taking on challenging cases and throwing her energy into getting the best possible outcome. Last year she represented teenager Patrick Yevsukov, one of two boys accused of plotting an assassination attempt against then presidential candidate Barack Obama. She negotiated immunity from federal prosecution and got his charges reduced in state court.

"I've always taken on the fight of the underdog," she says. "I like to be creative and crafty in the way I put cases together."



**DAVID SCHERTLER**  
*Schertler & Onorato*

David Schertler fine-tuned his courtroom skills in the DC US Attorney's office, where he rose to chief of the Homicide Division in the '90s, prosecuting more than 50 jury trials. He opened his private law firm in 1996 and has since been involved in many of Washington's—and the country's—highest-profile criminal investigations. In 2009 he defended one of five Blackwater security guards accused of killing unarmed Iraqis. The charges against the men were dismissed in DC federal court, but the Justice Department's appeal of the case is ongoing.

Schertler's most closely watched case of the past year was his representation of Dylan Ward, one of

three men charged with crime-scene tampering and obstruction of justice in connection with the murder of Robert Wone, the young lawyer killed in a Dupont Circle home in 2006. A DC Superior Court judge acquitted Ward and his two housemates of the crimes in June

2010. A parallel wrongful-death civil suit was settled a year later.

There's a chance that murder charges still could be brought, but Schertler remains confident. "An investigation into a murder case like this will stay open forever," he says. But as for who did it—"it wasn't our guys."



**BRENDAN SULLIVAN JR.**  
*Williams & Connolly*

In 2009, when *The Washingtonian* last ran its Top Lawyers list, Brendan Sullivan had recently wrapped up

Washington's biggest case of the year, defending the now late senator Ted Stevens of Alaska against federal corruption charges. So it comes as no surprise that two years later, Sullivan—the area's most revered criminal defender—again finds himself in the middle of the splashiest legal scandal of the day as he guides Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. through an investigation into alleged phone hacking by its reporters.

That's not the only high-profile case keeping him busy. He has also been defending former Washington Mutual CEO Kerry Killinger against the first lawsuit filed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation against a top bank executive. The FDIC alleges that Killinger and others at WaMu made reckless loans while knowing the real-estate bubble was about to burst.

Though Sullivan is approaching 70, he says he has no intention of slowing down.

## PERSONAL-INJURY LAWYER PATRICK REGAN IS GEARING UP FOR TRIAL OVER 2009'S FATAL RED LINE CRASH.



**WILLIAM TAYLOR III**  
*Zuckerman Spaeder*

"I predicted early that the case would be dismissed, but nobody believed me," says William Taylor about his defense of Dominique Strauss-Kahn against sexual-assault allegations this past summer. Taylor turned out to be right but spent months battling claims that the former International Monetary Fund chief had attacked a hotel maid.