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LIFETIME ACHIEVERS 2018

BY RYAN LOVELACE

IN A STRING OF NATIONAL UPHEAVALS, FROM “DON’T ASK, Don’t Tell” to the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the legal entanglements of the president’s daughter and son-in-law, Jamie Gorelick has been a steady hand amid crisis and controversy.

It’s a talent—and a resume—that’s helped make Gorelick into a “premier Washington practitioner,” says former U.S. Solicitor General Seth Waxman, her friend and partner at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr.

Gorelick was a notable D.C. presence even before she served as deputy to then-U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno under President Bill Clinton, when a profile in *The Washington Post* declared her “strong where Reno is weak.”

“She is a tough, demanding manager, exerting influence over every policy and practice that emanates from the top,” the paper said.

Gorelick was well prepared to help run the day-to-day operations of the Justice Department, having already worked as the Defense Department’s general counsel. As the Pentagon’s top lawyer, she was asked to implement the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy banning sexual discrimination in the military while preventing vocally gay, lesbian and bisexual people from serving.

“I enjoy work that cuts across all three branches of government and that has communications and reputational issues at stake,” Gorelick says.

Never one to shy from unpopular work that challenges the status quo, Gorelick says the political tumult of the late 1960s attracted her to Washington. She soon began work on her first assignment—backing President Richard Nixon’s efforts to keep control of his papers in the wake of the Watergate scandal.



Gorelick says her experience as a woman working in environments where women were underrepresented helped her develop fearlessness. Following 9/11, she was the only female member of the commission that investigated the events leading up to the attacks.

As chair of Wilmer’s regulatory and government affairs department, Gorelick has recently represented oft-criticized members of the first family, namely Ivanka Trump and her husband Jared Kushner, who is senior adviser to President Donald Trump. That representation, along with Gorelick’s work representing Kushner on Russia-related matters after her former Wilmer colleague, Robert Mueller, became special counsel, all ended on Dec. 31, 2017.

Waxman says Gorelick is like a sister—the pair are trustees of each other’s estates. He calls her an expert at crisis management, and says when it comes to formulating a political and legal strategy, it’s intensely comforting to have Gorelick on your side.

“Some people might say her greatest achievement was ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,’ or there’s been way too much ink spilled on her representation of Jared and Ivanka; that’s not how I think of her,” Waxman says. “I don’t think that the people who know her work well and who’ve come across her—the many, many people who’ve come across her in their professional lives—think of her with respect to any one particular achievement. They think of her more as incredibly skilled and accomplished, like the complete package.”

Gorelick long ago eschewed life in politics and decided against a career as a judge. She doesn’t rule out returning to government work, however.

“I do think it is time for a new generation of people to come in and help,” Gorelick says, “but I am a patriot and I’ve always been willing to help where I’m needed.” ■

Jamie Gorelick

Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr

ADVICE TO YOUNG LAWYERS:

“No. 1, know your stuff. Learn the law and become a really good and grounded lawyer.

No. 2, lead with your values and don’t forget them. No. 3, listen to others. No. 4, know when to leave.”