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Appellate and constitutional
law attorney James C. Ho

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**A Legal Primer
for Consumers**

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Sen. Cornyn's Adviser

When John Cornyn was elected to the Senate in 2002, he called a friend in Washington, D.C., and asked for the names of a few good lawyers to be considered for his chief counsel. He received one name: James C. Ho.

Ho was not your typical pick. He was not a political operative, had never worked on Capitol Hill. And he had never worked with Cornyn. None of this mattered to the senator.

"I was looking for the smartest lawyer I could find," Cornyn says. "People who are more political or ideological tend to be lazy with their legal skills. Jim is the most diligent person I've ever worked with. It's not an 8-to-5 proposition. He was willing to do what needed to be done."

Ho, who is 35 and has worked in all three branches of the federal government, is neither ideological nor political. He harbors no desire to run for office. He just loves the law and everything about it.

"I knew in high school I was interested in the law," says Ho, who grew up in Los Angeles. "I phrase that very specifically. Because I'm interested in law from all its aspects, politics included."

After graduating from the University of Chicago Law School, he landed in Houston, where he completed a clerkship on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit.

Then he moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked for Gibson Dunn & Crutcher in the firm's appellate and constitutional law practice. Though he enjoyed it, he wanted to hone his legal skills further, so in 2001 he joined the U.S. Department of Justice, working there until Cornyn hired him in 2003 to be his chief counsel on the Judiciary Committee.



Ho was named one of the best aides under 35 by the respected publication *The Hill*.

There, he advised Cornyn and other senators on the committee on a variety of issues, including freedom of information, immigration, civil rights and constitutional law. He helped plan hearings and draft legislation. He became one of Cornyn's trusted advisers and earned respect from both sides of the aisle, being named one of the "Best 35 Aides Under Age 35" by *The Hill* magazine.

"In Washington it's easy to be branded by who you work for," says Tara Magner, a former counsel to Sen. Patrick Leahy who worked with Ho on several issues. "Looking at Jim's résumé, you would think he was a conservative Republican. Anyone who spends five minutes talking to him, you realize there's more than that. He is not ideological in his dealings with people," Magner says. "I do believe he is quite open-minded."

Leahy and Cornyn don't agree on a lot. But they found common ground on the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which both men wanted to have more bite. Ho and Magner helped draft legislation to overhaul FOIA for the senators. After extensive negotiations between the House, Senate and Department of Justice, President Bush signed the bill on Dec. 31, 2007.

Judge Reed O'Connor, who replaced Ho as Cornyn's chief counsel and was recently appointed to serve as a U.S. district judge for the Northern District of Texas, says Ho dives into topics and when he develops an opinion, you may not agree with it, but you know his reasoning is sound. "He's very tough to keep up with," O'Connor says. "He has a brilliant mind. I don't think he thinks of himself in that way. So there's a humility there that is unique and endearing to people around him. There are not a lot of people who are on that level of both energy and intellect."

After two and a half years in Cornyn's office, Ho secured a clerkship with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. "Anyone who hears Justice Thomas' laugh ... he's just a very warm person," Ho says. "Other clerks of other justices will come back and visit him. It was an incredible year to get to know Justice Thomas."

After his clerkship, Ho and his wife, Allyson, moved to Dallas. He returned to Gibson & Dunn's appellate and constitutional law practice, working on cases across the country.

Ho's interest in law is partially driven by the experience of his family emigrating from Taiwan when he was a year old. In his spare time, he writes articles on various legal topics, including birthright citizenship, the law that grants automatic citizenship to anyone born in the United States. He recently testified on immigration law before the Texas Legislature and serves on the board of the Human Rights Initiative of North Texas. He's made time to work on a pro bono immigration case.

"[Emigrating] certainly explains my motivation, why I like spending so much time in certain areas," Ho says. "I'm an immigrant. I was born in Taiwan and came here at a very young age. I love this country." ◀



Left: Ho with Justice Thomas; right: with Sen. Cornyn.

