

Rising Star: Gibson Dunn's Krista Hanvey

By Emily Brill

Law360 (July 29, 2020, 7:38 PM EDT) -- Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP partner Krista Hanvey took the lead on the benefits components of EnSCO PLC's merger with fellow offshore drilling company Rowan Co. PLC, earning her a spot among the employee benefits attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

MOST INTERESTING DEAL:

Hanvey helped represent EnSCO in its 2019 merger with Rowan, which created the multibillion-dollar offshore drilling company Valaris PLC.

The transaction marked Hanvey's first time taking the lead on the benefits component of a merger, she said. She also made partner while working on the deal, she said.

Over the course of her work on the deal, she learned about the U.K. corporate governance code, as EnSCO was based in London. She negotiated new management contracts with the combined company's executive chairman and chief executive officer. And she led the attorney team that crafted benefit packages for employees of Valaris, which has a presence on six continents.

"Any time you have a multijurisdiction business combination, it's complex," Hanvey said. "It's interesting trying to treat everyone fairly."

WHY SHE'S A BENEFITS ATTORNEY:

Hanvey said she became a benefits attorney after taking a class on the Employee Retirement Income Security Act at law school with her favorite professor, Eric Chason.

Before that class, she found herself drawn to tax law. While in the class, she realized that going into employee benefits law would allow her to "add the problem-solving aspects of tax to a people-oriented practice area."



Krista Hanvey
Gibson Dunn

Age: 34
Home base: Dallas
Position: Partner
Law school: William & Mary Law School
First job after law school: Associate at Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP

"While tax is fun, it's not always very tangible — you're doing these structure charts with triangles and circles — but with benefits, you know there are direct benefits going to people," Hanvey said.

She said she knew coming out of law school that she wanted to go into benefits, and she "was very persistent."

"I got my office next to the one benefits partner. I literally stood in his office doorway asking how I could help," Hanvey said.

Now, Hanvey gets to mentor people out of Gibson Dunn's Dallas office, and over videoconference during the COVID-19 pandemic.

HOW HER PRACTICE AREA MIGHT CHANGE:

Hanvey said she's seen employee benefits law become less siloed over the years, and she anticipates that trend continuing. Benefits attorneys need to know a decent amount about other areas of law, such as securities law, to do their work now, she observed.

"As I've grown, I've shifted to doing more of the securities disclosure work," Hanvey said. "I think the role of BigLaw outside firms is to have a general awareness of all the issues that might come up in compensation and benefits and help address them."

Ten or 20 years ago, attorneys were more divided, Hanvey said — "there were securities lawyers, then ERISA lawyers." That's not so much the case anymore, as evidenced by cases like *Jander v. IBM*, she said.

That case asked the U.S. Supreme Court to decide whether employee stock ownership plan managers should rely more on securities law or on ERISA when assessing their duties upon learning the company is about to decrease in value. The high court kicked the case back to the Second Circuit, saying it hadn't received adequate briefing to answer that question.

PROUDEST MOMENTS AS AN ATTORNEY:

Hanvey said her proudest times as an attorney don't come during work on multibillion-dollar transactions but during the daily grind of helping companies handle their benefits issues.

She said that each day she helps around 10 to 15 clients with issues ranging from drafting 401(k) plan amendments to negotiating severance agreements to interpreting language in an employee welfare plan's governing document.

"I really feel like I've had the best day and I'm at the top of my game when I'm able to go through a day and feel I've helped a lot of clients with different things all across the board," Hanvey said.

— *As told to Emily Brill*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2020 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2020, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.