

# Daily Journal

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## TOP 100 • 2020

### LITIGATION

## Debra Wong Yang

As the Fall 2020 school semester begins, many international college students owe a debt of gratitude to Yang. As a partner in Gibson Dunn's Los Angeles office and co-chair of its crisis management practice group, she worked to have an immigration policy rescinded that would have banished those on foreign student visas if their coursework was only available online amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It was a really difficult situation. Cruel, even," said Yang. "As it became clear that coronavirus wasn't going to go away with the flip of a switch, universities were trying to provide meaningful curriculum."

In early-July 2020, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency directed students enrolled in full online classes to leave the country or face immigration consequences. Gibson Dunn then filed suit on behalf of 20 universities in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon, challenging the policy as a violation of the Administrative Procedure Act. *University of Oregon, et al., v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security et al.*, 6:20-cv-01127-MK (District of Oregon, filed July 13, 2020).

By the end of July, ICE issued a new policy that would permit international students to reenter the country for online-only classes if they were enrolled as of March

2020. New international students remain prohibited.

Gibson Dunn's lawsuit is still pending as the situation evolves, Yang said.

High-profile, headline-grabbing cases have become Yang's forte. Her public and private sector legal clients have included New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie in his "Bridgegate" investigation, Johnson & Johnson in its talcum powder litigation, and the University of Southern California in the "Varsity Blues" college admissions scandal.

Yang was the first Asian-American woman to serve as a U.S. Attorney, appointed by President George W. Bush in 2002. She's also worked as a Los Angeles County Superior Court judge, an L.A. Police Commissioner, and an adjunct professor at the University of Southern California School of Law.

"I've been exposed to a myriad of substantive areas, and I enjoy practicing across that broad spectrum."

Yang said she's at a point in her professional and personal life when she'd like to be more civically engaged. She already serves on the board of the Otis College of Art and Design, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the nonprofit River LA, which is working to revitalize a 51-mile stretch of the Los Angeles River.

— Jennifer McEntee



### GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER LLP

#### LOS ANGELES

SPECIALTY: WHITE COLLAR, LITIGATION, CRISIS MANAGEMENT, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & DATA PRIVACY