

## INTERVIEW WITH LISA J. PINO

*Lisa J. Pino is an attorney, public service executive, and former Obama and Biden political appointee who holds fifteen years of legal, program, policy, and management experience across public health, civil rights, immigration, food insecurity, agriculture, and equity fields. Most recently, she served in the Biden-Harris administration as the Director of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and on Biden's Agency Review team for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Prior to the Biden administration, she was appointed by Governor Andrew Cuomo as the New York State Department of Health's Executive Deputy Commissioner during the COVID-19 public health emergency. As the agency's #2 official, she served 19.5 million New Yorkers, conducting over 7 million vaccinations at 15.2 million doses, administering 100,000-314,000 COVID-19 tests per day, hiring 6,000 contact tracers, and donating over 1 million PPE sources.*

*In the Obama-Biden administration, Pino served as Senior Counselor to Secretary Jeh C. Johnson at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) where her portfolio included business management, employee engagement, cybersecurity, the pandemic response to Ebola and Zika, and immigration matters. Before DHS, she was also appointed as USDA's Deputy Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights and the USDA Deputy Administrator of SNAP under Secretary Tom Vilsack. In this latter role, she led SNAP during its historic growth to 46 million Americans and 17 million children, and represented First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! campaign in Spanish and English to fight childhood obesity in rural and underserved communities. A native New Yorker, First-Gen daughter of refugee and immigrant parents, and the first college graduate in her family, Pino has mentored college students and graduates for 20 years in volunteer capacities. She received her B.A., M.A., and J.D. from Arizona State University (ASU) with honors as a Pell Grant recipient. She began her service as a Union Summer community organizer advocating for immigrant workers at Stanford University to receive fair wages, and as a bilingual Americorps paralegal at Arizona Legal Aid, where she later became a staff attorney representing farmworkers. Her recognition includes ASU's College Leader and Gold 'n Gavel awards, the U.S. Spain Council's Young Leader award, and an induction into the Hispanic Scholarship Fund's Hall of Fame.*

*In addition to her public service, her law practice experience includes Mayer Brown LLP's Global Mobility and Migration group in Washington, D.C., and Littler Global LLP's business immigration firm in Phoenix, Arizona. In these roles, Pino's clients included foreign nationals, the U.S. government and military, and multinational corporations located in Asia, Europe, the United Kingdom, MENA, and Latin America. Her law clerk and externship experience includes Osborn Maledon LLP, The Innocence Project, The Florence Immigrant Rights and Refugee Project, the U.S. Attor-*

*ney's Office of the Southern District of New York, the U.S. Library of Congress, and the Government Accountability Office.*

*In July 2022, The Aspen Institute awarded Pino a two-year Health Innovation Fellowship. As an Aspen Fellow, she is currently developing a venture that will better inform public health policymakers of the opportunities to strengthen health equity for the benefit of low-income children, individuals, women, and families.*

Hello Lisa and welcome to the *Harvard Latin American Law Review*! Thank you very much for sitting down with us to speak about your background and your journey to becoming the Director of the Office for Civil Rights in the United States Department of Health & Human Services. We are so excited to learn about your previous experiences in public interest, private practice, government, and your most recent work you completed at HHS, as well as discuss your perspective on some of the current issues facing Latin American communities across the United States.

**To start, tell us a little bit about yourself. I understand you are a first-generation Latina and the first in your family to graduate college. How has that shaped who you are today?**

Yes, I am the proud daughter of immigrant and working-class parents who emigrated to New York City. Like many of our families, mine took tremendous risks and sacrifices to build a life in the United States, and specifically, in New York. Both of my parents were impacted by political turbulence at a young age, and their gratitude for becoming Americans has only grown. My mother emigrated from Cuba as an exile from the Castro regime. My father is from Spain, but emigrated after encountering political turbulence in Argentina, where he relocated as a young adult to join extended family.

After studying his craft in Barcelona, my father moved to the Bronx and began altering polyester suits in the 1970s. Today, he has worked for the same American designer for 36 years, and a designer who has held my father with great kindness, respect, and regard. My mother moved to Brooklyn with my aunt the same year my dad arrived in New York, but soon left her first job at a nearby purse factory. The factory's fumes pushed her to apply at Manhattan beauty salons as a self-taught manicurist. Ultimately, she became her own best ally, and developed her own rewarding career in the beauty, fashion, and advertising industries until 9/11 chilled the city's economy.

I am deeply proud of what they have accomplished and sacrificed, and for everything they have provided as a family. Their story and their identity as New Americans have shaped every aspect of my life. First, I became a public interest and immigration attorney from my want to protect them and other immigrants at all costs. Immigrants are too often targeted and exploited, and tragically such schemes pervade today. Second, as much as my parents at-

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tempted to dissuade me from politics, I was drawn due to my belief that good people can be elected, and that institutions can serve as an arm to help people. Third, their value of the industries that uniquely define New York, such as fashion and beauty, have shaped my own style, consumerism, and views on our planet. On fashion, I am an advocate for sustainable clothing and textile production as craft, artisanship, and an economic engine for quality manufacturing. On beauty, I see it as a platform to expand individual expression, and as a commercial enterprise that can dually empower or oppress women. As a tailor's daughter, spools of thread, thimbles, and chalk spilled into every corner of our home, so I'm thrilled to see upcycling, thrifting, and reviving older garments as treasured pieces become a movement of its own in fashion, commerce, and style, and within the climate debate.

As a First-Generation college student, navigating toward graduation is hard and overwhelming. No one can understand what it takes to break through this academic achievement but your colleague First-Gens. For many of us, finances can be a major barrier if our families cannot afford the rising cost of law school, which is supremely expensive.

In my case, a partial scholarship from my first private college of attendance was not enough, and devastated my family's finances. I had to quickly shift, and researched other options after working odd jobs failed to fund the gap between my college costs and my family's financial resources. Ultimately, thanks to a Pell Grant, I transferred to an affordable college, and moved out west to Arizona State University. Aside from affordable tuition and the Pell Grant, my new college offered resources, classes, people, and programs to support my reaching the finish line. Today, Harvard offers free tuition to students and families whose income fall within certain thresholds, offering First-Gen applicants options that were not as known or extensive as when I applied. Thankfully, other institutions are following suit. For this reason, I recommend that students apply first, and negotiate financial aid later. Not until you apply will you know how much finances will shape your pursuit of education, and you might be pleasantly surprised by the results, but we owe ourselves that first chance of applying before we predict or limit potential higher education outcomes.

**Latinos face a lot of barriers and remain underrepresented in law and government. What are some of the ways we can try to improve this problem and increase the representation of Latinos pursuing a career in the law as well as support the next generation of leaders?**

Although representation is slowly improving in law and government, that is correct, representation in these sectors remains disproportionately low in comparison with the presence and needs of the Latinx community. The 2020 Census tells us that we are now 62.1 million Latinos encompassing 18.9% of the U.S. population yet we remain barely visible across industries and lead-

ership. Twenty years ago when I applied to law school, Latinas represented less than 1% of all attorneys. Today, we are 2%, and Latinx attorneys represent 5% of the bar according to the American Bar Association's 2020 Profile of the Legal Profession.<sup>1</sup> In sum, we have much work to do to solve Latinx underrepresentation in law and government, and other communities of color are similarly underrepresented in practice, as only 5% of lawyers are African-Americans.

To solve this critical lack of representation in law and government, there are four ways that we can improve this talent gap and increase Latinx representation to favor the next generation of leadership:

*1) Get involved as a constructive ally; hold the legal field and government accountable for systemic barriers that impede Latinx representation.* The legal profession and government hold the responsibility of opening doors for new lawyers and leaders, but the pace of change is too slow. In response, you can write or meet with a school's administration, or donate, fundraise, or volunteer with organizations that mentor and sustain law and public sector students. Volunteering as a mentor with your alma mater, local law school, or state bar can change a student's life and boost their confidence. And if you work for an employer, then take the time to hire and retain diverse candidates, join affinity groups, interview students, advocate for inclusion, accelerate the process, and become a trusted voice of support when they are in the room.

*2) Support and join organizations that offer pre-law programs and networks for attorneys, national and local, and offer opportunities for aspiring public servants.* I encourage aspiring attorneys, law students, and public servants to join, reach members, and attend events with entities such as the American Bar Association, Council on Legal Education and Opportunity, Hispanic National Bar Association, Americorps, and local networks like the Council of Urban Professionals in the New York metropolitan area. For those seeking careers in government, most students pursue majors in political science or public administration, but any major or degree can lead to work in policy, legislation, campaign work, and advocacy. For Latinx students, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute and Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities offer great internship and employment opportunities. The more experience you can accrue, and the stronger your network, the better. Whether working or interning in your state capitol or on Capitol Hill, the experience will foster a lifetime of knowledge and relationships for your growth and career.

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<sup>1</sup> See ABA Profile on the Legal Profession, AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION, 1, 109 (July 2020) <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf>, archived at <https://perma.cc/BQT3-FX6R>.

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3) *Make a financial plan for your dream career; do not let the financial costs of becoming a lawyer or public servant deter you from a rewarding life.* We can achieve our goals with consistent actions and awareness by building a plan, and a financial plan is essential for Latinx students seeking a career in law or government. Law school is expensive, and government jobs often offer lower compensation for internships and entry-level roles. While Big Law is a popular employment option to mitigate law student loans, students can also select a less costly law school to mitigate debt, or one that offers a better financial aid package over a more highly ranked school.

4) *Expand the mental health resources and support systems for Latinx students seeking careers in law and government.* Understanding that you are not alone in your pursuit of becoming an attorney or public service professional, and that the path can be hard, enables us to understand that the hard times are a common experience. With as much pressure we already hold as Latinx achievers, in our effort to redeem and make our families proud, we can forget that we can only do so much alone. Being kind to ourselves, valuing who we are, reprogramming our inner voice with compassion, and seeking mental health support keeps us whole and healthy. Law school is when that stressful attorney lifestyle begins to take hold and manifest. Don't let the stress win. The sooner you can place your physical, mental, and spiritual health at the forefront, the more ingrained these practices will become to allow your career to evolve at its best, and favor a healthy, rewarding life, which is the best barometer for success.

**I understand you are an immigration attorney by practice. Can you tell us a little bit about that experience? Additionally, can you share a few things you think are important to know about immigration law and the practice of it?**

Yes, I began my training as an immigration attorney in Arizona. My immigration law professor, Roxie Bacon, funded fellowships with The Florence Immigrant Rights and Refugee Project, or FIRRP. I became one of the last fellows there after 9/11, and externed with a group of exceptional attorneys and staff. The work was hard, but we made up for the stress with good laughs, dogs in the office, beers at Gibby's, and drives through the desert.

Back then, FIRRP worked out of a little office in Florence, and we drove to the detention center a few times per week to meet detainees, represent them during hearings, or offer Know Your Rights for clients seeking pro se representation. FIRRP set the foundation for my interest in immigration law. Years later, although I had not planned to join Big Law, I joined Mayer Brown's immigration practice in Washington, D.C. after the Obama administration ended and the Trump administration commenced its quick reversals of immigration policies with the travel ban. That too was a rewarding experience, as counseling clients through a turbulent time of change and fear trig-

gered enabled me to help clients overcome the stress of obtaining their visas, green cards, and preserve their lawful status.

As for what to know about immigration law, there are generally three areas of immigration law: 1) family-based immigration 2) business immigration, and 3) asylum and removal. The life of a family-based immigration attorney is rewarding as you are directly interacting with your local community or clients, however this area of practice still holds long hours, and usually pays less.

Business immigration involves corporate immigration, and is where you will find global law firms like Fragomen or other Big Law firms that have immigration practices. As a business immigration attorney, you will interact with the client's HR or immigration team on strategy, and in some cases communicate directly with the employees for high-level roles or complex issues. In this area, corporate clients are seeking your counsel to hire or retain talented immigrants for their labor force. The work hours can also be long as unexpected outcomes occur at airports and other points of entry, or corporate needs become urgent, but compensation will generally be higher than and will depend more upon the scale, volume, and quality of immigrant and non-immigrant visa applications.

As for asylum and removal practice, there are attorneys like those on the FIRR team who specialize solely in asylum, deportation, and removal proceedings. This path is also rewarding but can be stressful. Unlike criminal law, the government does not provide free representation in detention. Thus, if you cannot afford an immigration attorney while you are detained, you are on your own. We could certainly have more FIRR-like organizations for detainees who do not have access to counsel. If there were one change I could propose within immigration law, it would be to provide detainees with counsel. Doing so would elevate the immigration practice, streamline the process, save money, time, and hassle for both parties, and begin to address our broken immigration system until we can achieve comprehensive immigration reform, or CIR. Not since 1986 under the Reagan administration has comprehensive immigration reform occurred. With the growing division and polarity among political parties, we may be waiting decades more for a legislative reform that matches the reality of immigration needs and the economic benefit that immigration provides.

**You have worked in the government, in public interest, and in private practice. Our readers are diverse in their interests and likely will be pursuing careers in one of those three areas. What are the challenges of working in each of these sectors and what advice do you have for Latin American law students and lawyers in general who may want to pursue a career in those sectors?**

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This is a terrific question, as your readers evaluate which practice paths are fulfilling, profitable, or flexible, such as to raise children or take care of aging parents. In my experience, the following addresses the benefits and challenges encountered in each sector:

*Government.* County, state, and federal government offers meaningful work on current societal challenges and issues, but the hiring process is slow, and applicants might be frustrated by the pace and bureaucracy. What might take days or weeks in the private sector can take months or years in government, and that frequency might discourage new attorneys. Conversely, a litigation role in government, whether on the prosecution or defense side, reaps a treasure of experience that is hard to find for beginning attorneys in the private sector. Another attractive benefit of government work is that there are no billable hours, and you are less likely to work long hours unless you are a litigator, in senior management, or work in an area prone to urgent matters. My advice is to intern first to discover if government work is a good match for your interests before embarking upon post-graduate employment. If after a few years of full-time employment you may prefer the private sector, your government experience will distinguish your application and serve as an asset during your transition. Another advantage of government roles is the flexibility to apply to another internal agency, unit, or division as an internal candidate.

*Public Interest.* The parameters of public interest law are broad but excluding government work, public interest generally refers to legal aid or non-profit organizations that are mission-centric like the ACLU, Earthjustice, or Human Rights Watch. My legal aid experience was unique as Equal Justice Works and Americorps once jointly offered volunteer roles within legal aid, which is how I began my work in Arizona's legal aid housing unit as immigrant families were targeted for unlawful evictions and predatory lending schemes in South Phoenix. I later returned to legal aid as a staff attorney for migrant farm workers. Public interest work offers a fulfilling sense of mission, direct experience with clients, and teaches the importance of being resourceful. You will face corporate lawyers as opposing counsel whose access to abundant resources might shock you, but you will find the theory of the case and litigate well because the law stands on the side of your client, and social justice is of value to you.

*Private Practice.* Private practice comprises the most common career path for attorneys. The spectrum can range from solo practitioner to a global firm like Mayer Brown, where I practiced in their Global Mobility and Migration Group. Private practice offers great experience, normally requires billable hours, and compensation varies. The benefit is that you will accrue experience in your niche area of practice at an impressive speed, and if you enjoy the culture and company of your colleagues, you will be content, well-compensated, and productive. The challenge of firm life is often the pursuit of

work-life balance, as the industry's increasing billable hours demands can fatigue associates.

If managing the workload becomes too challenging, or other cultural issues are affecting your productivity, such as a lack of equity or demands at home like childcare, address these matters with your partner and firm right away. Most firms host Employee Resource Groups, or affinity groups, for Latinx, Black, AAPI, and LGBTQ+ attorneys to join, and developing these relationships throughout the firm is essential. Chief Diversity Officers are thankfully now becoming the norm at large firms, and the American Bar Association has shared enough data about the exodus of women, and women of color, from firms to motivate systemic change. While Latinx attorneys and partner representation varies geographically, the road to parity for women and people of color remains long at the partnership level, but change is underway. Research, summer, and talk to lawyers at your firm of interest beforehand to get a glimpse of its leadership and culture, and to manage your own expectations. The more likely you join a firm with an understanding of your responsibilities and expectations, the more likely your duration of employment will endure.

**What are some issues that Latin Americans in the United States are facing today that in your view are misunderstood, under-reported or under-taught? Which initiatives have you undertaken in your career so far to address those issues or amplify the awareness of their existence?**

Immigration is misunderstood, health disparities are under-reported, and the contributions of Latinos and benefits of bilingual education are under-taught. Our complex identity deserves a significant amount of new attention, respect, and coverage; when pieces that are well-written or edited are published or produced it is often thanks to Latinx journalists. It's not enough.

Immigration reporting tends to typecast immigrants with blame or characterize them as criminals rather than examine the root causes of migration, systemic barriers to a lawful immigration status, or the immigrants' contributions by paying taxes, joining the labor force, harnessing creative capital, or stimulating the economy from small businesses to corporate America.

Health disparities were already under-reported before COVID-19, and remain a neglected topic despite the pandemic's magnification of health inequity. Let's demand more content that addresses the impact of obesity, diabetes, mental health, access to health care, and public charge in the Latinx community, and for all communities of color.

For under-taught issues, we need tributes to Latin figures outside of Hispanic Heritage Month, a full embrace of bilingual education, and respect for cultural heritage that goes beyond certain misunderstood holidays like Cinco de



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Mayo. In Washington, D.C. for instance, there is a phenomenal, bicultural, bilingual school called Centro Nia that offers a first-rate charter school education coupled with early childhood education, healthy meals, health care, and other services, but includes an embrace and history of Latin culture. We need more Centro Nias in communities, what a difference that would make.

My work in service, whether in immigration or public health, aimed to break barriers wherever I could. Doing so is challenging, but I have been fortunate to work with some wonderful people in my life, in appointed and career roles, inside and outside of government, who believed in the work and did not hesitate to help. When I first moved to Washington, D.C. in 2009, after witnessing and experiencing the recession's devastation of Arizona, when Phoenix neighborhoods were boarded up from foreclosures, thousands were both laid off and desperate for work, and small businesses were both shut down, I arrived at USDA with a sense of urgency like a fire engine. I remember people telling me how passionate I was, and not understanding the coding of that language. I felt a tremendous responsibility to do something immediately for people who were hurting, and that conviction doesn't fade away.

About six months after starting as the USDA Deputy Administrator of SNAP, I asked the team how we could build an immigration guide that would open trust among eligible Latinos. The motivation came from learning from the Economic Research Service's food insecurity analysis, which indicated that Latinos were the least likely population to enroll for SNAP despite their eligibility. The reason why immigrants were reluctant to sign up for benefits, even if they experienced severe hunger, was and remains public charge. In 2011, a year and a half later, we issued USDA's first comprehensive non-citizen policy guidance, and addressed the topic for the first time since the Clinton years. We also hosted listening sessions around the country, from downtown LA to the Rio Grande Valley to the South Side of Chicago, and we listened to the community. We also tried a joint public charge letter between USDA and USCIS, but the moment was not ripe. Then, when I thought our guidance might also fail, we received the green light to post the immigration guidance on the USDA website. It was one of the proudest moments of my career, and I remain grateful to the Food and Nutrition Service team that contributed their all along the way. Our intent was to issue a piece that would open doors, build trust, and put more food on the table in homes. Although you can't measure the precise scope and impact of the guidance, I trust we made a difference to address food insecurity in immigrant homes and amplify awareness of hunger.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See U.S. Dep't of Agric., Food and Nutrition Service, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Non-Citizen Eligibility, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligibility/non-citizen-eligibility>, archived at <https://perma.cc/ZDJ6-WL6S>.

**You have spoken previously about your hopes for comprehensive immigration reform, or at least a statute to protect Dreamers. In your view, why is this reform so necessary and what does your ideal reform package include?**

Millions of us hope for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, or CIR, which last occurred in 1986 under the Reagan administration. It's incomprehensible that CIR looms almost four decades later. Even if politics is polarized, the Dream Act should have passed by now. Dreamers embody the American Dream. They have overcome insurmountable odds and had their hearts broken an excruciating number of times, but persevere and remain hopeful without a timeline or guarantee. If we don't extend grace to Dreamer children and youth, then it's time to reassess our core values.

Every day without the Dream Act, and CIR, is our loss, and a needless tearing of families apart. The absence of reform debilitates our economy, our workforce, our innovation, our humanity, and our families. At this point, CIR is the fastest way to reignite our economic competitiveness and elevate American innovation. I'd tell Congress that we've run out of time. The world is changing by the millisecond, and our 20th century immigration laws are becoming more outdated by the minute. The lack of CIR distances America's global competitiveness each day. It's easy to see the distance as an immigration lawyer. How many more students, engineers, inventors, researchers, artists, scholars, business leaders, or medical professionals can we reject? You'd be surprised how many visas, green cards, and citizenship requests are questioned, turned down, or never submitted because people give up. Before moving to D.C., I thought the business case for CIR could compel legislation because math does not lie.

At some point, when Dreamers embody the best of who we are as educated, hard-working, risk-takers full of potential and promise, we have to reckon and say we owe them better. We have been here before, but Senators Durbin and Graham just reintroduced the Dream Act. Let's hope and activate advocacy with urgency that this round is the final winner, and soon.

**What are some initiatives that you have undertaken in your civil rights roles, and how did you structure your goals for each position?**

I have formally held two civil rights roles, the first as USDA's Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights during the Obama administration, and the second as Director of the Office of Civil Rights at HHS under the Biden-Harris administration. Both offices held fiscal, organizational, workforce development, personnel, and data analytics challenges due to a high volume of civil rights complaints, the state of its caseload management systems, and the availability of capacity-building tools needed to automate data reporting mechanisms. When determining how to make the best use of taxpayer dollars and fulfill a government re-

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sponsibility, it is essential to measure your outcomes with consistency and data integrity. For this reason, ensuring valid complaints processes and characteristics such as the date of case filing, assigned geographical region, nature of case, case status, and other identifiers will determine the agency's management success and accountability. In both roles, I developed proposals for streamlining and automating civil rights complaints within a balanced budget to adopt new infrastructure aimed to sustain rising caseloads, workforce demands, and client expectations.

At USDA, we built a data analysis reporting structure from scratch thanks to a data scientist, contractor, and one of our senior lawyers. From there we met with a smaller team representing each impacted USDA agency on a bi-weekly basis. As a group, we met for a working lunch session, discussed decision points openly, and supported each other through the last stages of vetting and the final adjudication of case findings. The work was collaborative, highly collegial, and developed a best practice model further enhanced by placing mediation soon after the case was filed, which accelerated early case resolutions and settlements. At HHS, I began a similar effort in light of increased HIPAA caseload since the pandemic (over 60%) with heightened workforce demands and diminished resources. As the office did not have an automated caseload reporting mechanism in place, the business case for adopting common software systems (i.e. Tableau, SAS, Oracle, Google Analytics, etc.) is that today's technological tools are less expensive, easier to use, and better at risk-management than legacy predecessors. When most legacy programmers are retired, finding staff who can code programs over 15 years old becomes challenging, but the good news is that software keeps evolving. Just as a smart phones, televisions, and laptops gets smarter and cheaper with each iteration, the same for case management software.

In terms of structuring policy, legal, and other organizational goals, that effort varies day-to-day but is a balance between your long-term policy initiatives, your vision timeline as aligned with leadership, and the grit of managing the business of getting things done, such as checking your budget, solving personnel matters, responding to an IT crash, or troubleshooting a data compromise. At USDA, our civil rights team partnered with DOJ to distribute class-action awards filed by Black, Hispanic, women, and Native American farmers over the decades, and held ourselves accountable to make sure discriminatory farm loan practices would never occur again. We also issued USDA's first Limited English Proficiency guidance, and extended program protections for LGBTQ+ clients, and other populations. At HHS, we issued guidance related to HIPAA protections and equity related to COVID-19 vaccinations, Disability FAQs also related to the pandemic, extreme risk protection orders to prevent firearm injuries and deaths, cyber protections in health care, hate crimes guidance, and audio-telehealth policy among other sensitive efforts as the public health emergency continued.

In sum, whether you are a law firm partner managing business immigration cases around the world, or are leading a government agency during a global pandemic, be ready for the unknown, and embrace change as a constant. Cultivate a workplace of trust, safety, and security where people understand that failing offers growth, learning is a regular practice, and curiosity motivates innovation. Although I began my career as an attorney, the data analysis, business reengineering, design thinking, and business practices that I've learned over the years are a critical skill set to my leadership ability. You too may unexpectedly embark upon a new expertise that may seem difficult to trace or identify from where you are now. It might be supply chain, AI, or human resource management, but know that your law degree remains a bookmark between different seasons of your career that ultimately cultivate a lifetime of learning and growth. As long as you are having fun, being challenged without being overwhelmed, feel valued, and share values with your peers, then your career will fulfill your aspirations, and most of all, play one but important part of a bigger, richer life.

**You have had the opportunity to work on a number of issues that you are passionate about. Can you tell us what your favorite accomplishment is so far in your career?**

It is hard to pick one, but I treasure serving the Obama administration at USDA to build food security, amplify access to nutrition assistance programs, and extend civil rights protections to American farmers and diverse groups in the aftermath of the 2008 recession. The opportunity to add that needed focus among communities of color while contributing my background as a bilingual, bicultural Latina was highly rewarding.

As USDA's Deputy Administrator of SNAP, it was a privilege to be a part of a critical time when hunger reached unprecedented numbers, and every day was spent to close that gap. This period of work included: the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 to improve the nutrition of school meals; meeting former First Lady Michelle Obama and the honor of representing her during Let's Move! events to end childhood obesity in rural America, Spanish-speaking households, and in Native Country; driving USDA's non-citizen policy guidance; developing MiPlato, the bilingual counterpart to MyPlate; hosting USDA's SNAP retailer locator in English and Spanish; launching a pilot with Feeding America to allow immigrant families to apply on-site for SNAP at the food bank; hosting listening sessions where we brought state, county, and municipal leaders together with elected officials, teachers, parents, pastors, and promotoras to address hunger; and working with advocates to persuade California to remove fingerprinting as a requirement for SNAP clients. These memories endure, and I hope some of that good intent remains. It was an exciting time to be a part of change you could believe in to make a difference in the lives of all Americans.

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**We like to leave our readers with a quick speed round of questions to finish off and give them a bit of a personal view.**

**Favorite book:** Fiction- *The House of Mirth*. Non-Fiction- *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

**Favorite dish to cook:** Pasta like cacio e pepe or puttanesca, which writing down makes me realize it's time for a rebrand.

**Favorite dish to eat:** Cocina criolla ropa vieja, arroz blanco, platanos maduro, aguacate y cebolla.

**Favorite motto or quote:** "Everything is copy." Nora Ephron.

**One person you admire:** Coco Chanel.

**Harvard or Yale:** Harvard. Does anyone answer Yale, other than a Yale?

