

Varu Chilakamarri

Partner

Washington, DC
+1.202.778.9165

Varu.Chilakamarri@klgates.com

OVERVIEW

Varu Chilakamarri is a partner in the firm's Environment and Energy practice group. Her practice focuses on litigation services, particularly in appellate matters and in administrative, environmental, and energy law. Varu also counsels clients on government-facing matters, which often involve strategic analysis of legal risks and opportunities presented by statutory and regulatory frameworks.

Varu joins the firm after a 17-year career at the US Department of Justice, where she was a successful federal district and appellate court litigator and held various senior leadership roles. Most recently, she served as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the DOJ's Civil Division. In this role, Varu was the head of the Torts Branch, an office of over 230 litigators and staff who defend the United States in a wide range of suits for monetary damages—including toxic tort cases arising out of environmental regulatory actions, constitutional tort cases, and cases brought under unique statutory compensation programs.

Before that, Varu was an appellate attorney in the Environment and Natural Resources Division, serving as lead counsel in complex civil and criminal appeals. These included facial challenges to the constitutionality of federal laws and regulations, and challenges to the validity of federal permitting and land use decisions (e.g., cases involving the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act). She also litigated enforcement cases, including those involving violations of substantive environmental laws, recordkeeping requirements, and various Title 18 provisions. She argued cases before the US Court of Appeals for the Third, Fifth, Ninth, Tenth, DC, and the Federal Circuit, and she has practiced in several other federal appellate and district courts. Varu was previously appointed as the Division's first counselor for animal welfare matters and served as Chief of Staff to the Assistant Attorney General in DOJ's Environment and Natural Resources Division. Varu's work at the DOJ often centered on novel legal challenges arising from a broad suite of federal statutes, including two preemption lawsuits that went to the US Supreme Court.

Varu joined the DOJ in 2006 through the Attorney General's honors program as a trial attorney in the Civil Division's Federal Programs Branch, and during her tenure, also worked in the office of the Associate Attorney General as Acting Deputy and served on detail to the White House Counsel's Office. Before joining the DOJ, Varu clerked for Judge R. Guy Cole in the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and Judge Timothy B. Dyk in the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Recognized by *The Legal 500 United States* as a Recommended Lawyer for Environment: Litigation, 2025-2026
- Outstanding Performance Awards from the Environment and Natural Resources Division, 2016, 2018, 2020
- Ex Officio Member of the Department of Justice's State Secrets Review Committee, 2013-2014
- Attorney General's Award for Outstanding Service to the Justice Department, 2013
- Special Commendation Award for Outstanding Service to the Civil Division, 2012
- Perseverance Award from Civil Division, 2010
- ABA/BNA Award for Excellence in Intellectual Property, 2004
- Leon Robbin Gold Medallion in Patent Law at Georgetown University Law Center, 2004

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- Speaker, “The New Administrative State: Executive Ascendancy in a Post-Chevron Era,” 2026 Environmental & Energy, Mass Torts, and Products Liability Litigation Committees' Joint Regional CLE Program, ABA Litigation Section, January 2026
-
- Panelist, “Administrative Law in Transition: Regulation and Executive Action After Loper Bright,” ALI CLE, 23 June 2025
- Panelist, “NEPA Reform: Recent Decisions and Market Implications,” Environmental Business Journal, 20 June 2025
- Speaker, “Energy Emergency: Executive Power and the Future of US Energy,” Regulatory Transparency Project, The Federalist Society, 21 May 2025
- Speaker, “Exploring Innovations and Issues at the Nexus of Water Quality and Toxic, Emerging, and Ubiquitous Contaminants,” ABA SEER - Flow Forward: North American Water Quality Forum, 16 May 2025
- Speaker, “Administrative Law: Recent SCOTUS Decisions Impact Regulatory Powers of Federal Agencies Including the Death of Chevron,” ABA 2025 Litigation Section Annual Conference, 1 May 2025
- Panelist, “Deference in Flux: Navigating the New Legal Landscape Post-Loper,” National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL), 14 November 2024
- Speaker, “A boutique seminar which will focus on current court rulings and regulations that will have an impact on your business,” Chemical Industry Council of Illinois, 25 September 2024
- Guest Faculty, “Regulation and the Administrative State After *Loper Bright, Corner Post, and Jarkesy*,” ALI CLE, 29 July 2024

- Speaker, “Careers in Appellate & Beyond,” SABA-DC's Appellate Section, 23 July 2024
- Speaker, “70th Annual Natural Resources and Energy Law Institute,” The Foundation for Natural Resources and Energy Law, 18 July 2024
- Speaker, “The Major Questions Doctrine: Doctrinal Conundrums and Practice Implications,” 2024 Administrative Law Spring Conference, 10 May 2024
- Speaker, “WBA Got Skills: Developing What it Takes to Lead Forward |Leadership vs. Management: A Fireside Chat,” Woman's Bar Association, 25 April 2024
- Participant, "Administrative Law After the Major Questions Doctrine and Chevron," Harvard Law School symposium, 25 March 2024

EDUCATION

- J.D., Georgetown University Law Center, 2004
- B.A., The Ohio State University, 2001
- B.S., The Ohio State University, 2001

ADMISSIONS

- Bar of District of Columbia
- Bar of New York
- Supreme Court of the United States
- United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit
- United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit
- United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit
- United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit
- United States District Court for the District of Columbia

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP *POWERED BY HUB*

- 15 July 2026, Fanning the Flames: Second Circuit Splits With Ninth Circuit on Federal Preemption of Natural Gas Restrictions
- 30 June 2026, Supreme Court Expands Presidential Control Over Independent Agencies: Key Takeaways for Regulated Businesses

- 11 June 2026, United States: Supreme Court Scissors up Saba's Rescission Argument Under Section 47(b) of the 1940 Act
- 1 April 2026, Heat Check: Federal Courts Weigh In on Natural Gas Appliance Restrictions
- 27 February 2026, United States: Second Circuit Applies Loper Bright to Reject Reliance on SEC Definition of Investment Adviser in Enforcement Action
- 9 January 2026, Race for Space Superiority: Trump Administration Continues Sweeping Space Policy Changes
- 10 December 2025, Office of Space Commerce Seeks Industry Input on Revolutionizing the US Mission Authorization Process
- 26 November 2025, Supreme Court to Redefine the President's Power to Fire Independent Agency Heads: Implications for Business
- 25 November 2025, Quick Guide: Independent Regulatory Agencies
- 13 October 2025, Litigation Minute: A Year After Loper Bright Part II: States Follow Suit
- 17 September 2025, "Enhancing American Greatness in Space": President Trump Signs Executive Order to Expand the Domestic Commercial Space Industry
- 14 August 2025, Litigation Minute: A Year After Loper Bright: Lessons From a Legal Shake-Up
- 5 August 2025, More Federal Agencies Streamline NEPA Procedures to Expedite Review and Permitting
- July 2025, Universal No More–Impact of Supreme Court's Injunction Decision on President Trump's Executive Orders
- 3 July 2025, FERC and DOE Roll Back NEPA Rules to Accelerate Permitting
- 30 June 2025, EPA Plans Reset of GHG and Mercury Rules for Power Plants
- 2 June 2025, Course Correction: Supreme Court Steers Toward Greater Predictability in NEPA Reviews
- 30 April 2025, Trump Administration Dials Up Deregulation
- April 2025, The Trump Administration's Deregulation Initiative: Opportunities for Industry Over the Next 30 Days
- 7 April 2025, Natural Gas Bans: From New York to Washington, Courts Shift the Landscape on Legality of State and Local Gas Bans
- March 2025, Loper Bright: Navigating the New Regulatory State and Implications for the Trump Administration Agenda
- March 2025, The Corporate Enforcement Landscape and the Bondi DOJ: Change, Continuity, and Predictions
- 25 February 2025, Trump Administration Asserts Control Over Independent Agencies

- February 2025, Asset Management Regulatory Year in Review 2024
- 4 February 2025, D.C. Circuit Vacates PHMSA's LNG-by-Rail Rule
- 22 January 2025, Trump Issues Sweeping Executive Order Declaring National Energy Emergency
- 18 December 2024, Rollbacks and Repeals: How a New Administration Effectuates Policy Changes
- 12 November 2024, The Post-Chevron Toolkit
- 12 July 2024, Corner Post Magnifies Regulatory Uncertainty After Loper Bright
- 3 July 2024, Jarkesy's Impact on Agency Enforcement Proceedings: Potential Implications for the SEC and Beyond
- July 2024, Chevron Overruled: Understanding the Supreme Court's Decision in Loper Bright/Relentless and What it Could Mean For Regulated Communities
- 28 June 2024, The End of Chevron Deference: What the Supreme Court's Ruling in Loper Bright Means for the Regulated Community
- 18 June 2024, Quick Guide: Agency Deference Caselaw
- 15 May 2024, EPA Issues New Power Plant Rules
- 6 May 2024, EPA's New Strategic Civil-Criminal Enforcement Policy: Will Enhanced Coordination Lead to More Criminal Enforcement?
- April 2024, Trade Association Best Practices: What Your Trade Association Needs to Know (and Might Not)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- "State and Federal Rules Conflict Over Food, Food Packaging Regulations," *Packaging Digest*, 8 December 2025
- "How DOGE's Bite Can Live Up To Its Bark," *Law360*, 16 January 2025
- "The End of Chevron Deference: What the Supreme Court's Ruling in Loper Bright Means for the Regulated Community," *The Journal of Federal Agency Action*, September-October 2024
- "3 Ways Agencies Will Keep Making Law After Chevron," *Law360*, 2 July 2024
- *APA Litigation: Procedural Mechanisms that Focus Environmental Controversies*, No. 2 RMMLF- INST 9, Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation Special Institute (2019) (Article and Presenter)
- Harvard Law School, *The Animal Welfare Act at Fifty* (Conference Presenter and Panel Moderator) (2016)
- Structural Nonobviousness: How Inventiveness is Lost in the Discovery, 10 Va. J.L. & Tech. 7 (2005)
- Taxpayer Standing: A Step Toward Animal-Centric Litigation, 10 Animal L. 251 (2004)
- The Legislative Attempt to Combat Terrorism via the Safe Drinking Water Act, 91 Geo. L. J. 927 (2003)

NEWS & EVENTS

- 24 June 2026, K&L Gates Advises US Chamber of Commerce Coalition in New Jersey Supreme Court Case on Expert Testimony Standards
- 15 June 2026, K&L Gates Successfully Represents Closed-End Funds in US Supreme Court Case on Investment Company Act
- 5 May 2026, K&L Gates Advises American Maritime Partnership on Defense of Jones Act Constitutional Challenge
- 9 December 2025, "Under the Wire" CLE Seminar | Powering Progress: Navigating Energy Policy, Judicial Deference, and Data Center Infrastructure
- 14 November 2024, Deference in Flux: Navigating the New Legal Landscape Post-Loper, Hosted by National Association of Women Lawyers
- 13 November 2024, K&L Gates Releases Post-*Chevron* Toolkit
- 29 July 2024, Regulation and the Administrative State After Loper Bright, Corner Post, and Jarkesy, Hosted by ALI-CLE
- 10 July 2024, Media Cover K&L Gates' Response to US Supreme Court's Chevron Decision
- 22 February 2024 , Environmental Law Conference, Hosted by The American Law Institute and The Environmental Law Institute
- 5 December 2023, K&L Gates Adds Pair of Justice Department Lawyers in Washington, D.C., Office

MEDIA MENTIONS

- 22 May 2026, *Law360* | Seven County's Legacy Still Unwritten A Year Later

OTHER MEDIA MENTIONS

- Quoted, "FERC's Fate Uncertain As Humphrey's Executor Teeters," *Law360*, 9 December 2025
- Co-Author, "States and Federal Rules Conflict Over Food, Food Packaging Regulations," *Packaging Digest*, 8 December 2025
- Quoted, "Trump bid to expand power comes before Supreme Court," *USA Today*, 8 December 2025
- Quoted, "Lawyers Urge Uncertain Firms To Comply With CARB GHG-Disclosure Rules," *Inside EPA*, 6 November 2025
- Quoted, "Amid 'Profound' EPA Enforcement Decline, States May Pick Up Some Slack," *Inside EPA*, 24 October 2025
- Quoted, "FERC Finding Friendlier Courts In Gas Project Approval Fights," *Law360*, 3 October 2025

- Quoted, "Legal Fight Over Greenhouse Gases to Test 'Competing Realities'," *Bloomberg Law*, 30 July 2025
- Quoted, "Trump wins again. Conservatives like Amy Coney Barrett again. Supreme Court takeaways," *USA Today*, 27 June 2025
- Quoted, "Supreme Court hands big win to fossil fuels, agency power," *The Hill*, 2 June 2025
- Quoted, "Projects Get Some NEPA Relief, But How Much Is Unknown," *Law360*, 29 May 2025
- Quoted, "Interior's Energy Permits Plan Has Legal And Practical Risks," *Law360*, 25 April 2025
- Quoted, "Rules Could Vanish As Soon As Saturday With No Public Notice," *Inside Health Policy*, 18 April 2025
- Quoted, "Trump Administration Continues Deregulation Push," *Pensions & Investments*, 17 April 2025
- Quoted, "DC Circ. Asks If FERC Oil Orders Are In Its Purview," *Law360*, 14 March 2025
- Quoted, "Trump Overhaul of Air Regulations Faces Post-Chevron Uncertainty," *Bloomberg Law*, 14 March 2025
- Quoted, "FDA Updates 'Healthy' Food Labeling Regulations to Reflect New Nutrition Standards," *Food & Wine*, 11 January 2025
- Mentioned, "What Are 'Healthy' Foods? The F.D.A. Updates the Labeling Terms," *The New York Times*, 19 December 2024
- Quoted, "US Supreme Court rulings usher in era of regulatory caution," *The Financial Times*, 10 December 2024
- Quoted, "US Supreme Court rulings usher in era of regulatory caution," *Sky News*, 10 December 2024
- Quoted, "High Court Creates Litigation Openings for Regulation Challenges," *Bloomberg Law*, 25 November 2024
- Quoted, "Post-Chevron Ruling Toolkit Rolled Out by ERISA Law Firm," *401(k) Specialist*, 13 November 2024
- Mentioned, "Courts Grapple With Loper Fallout Amid Doubts On New Deference Standard," *InsideEPA.com*, *Water Policy Report*, 11 October 2024
- Quoted, "The Biggest Enviro Decisions Of 2024: Midyear Report," *Law360*, 14 August 2024
- Quoted, "Chevron Deference Overturned: 3 GC Actions to Prepare for Regulatory Uncertainty," *Gartner*, 1 August 2024
- Quoted, "Chevron doctrine's end will insert courts into regulatory process, Buttigieg says," *Trucking Dive*, 26 July 2024
- Quoted, "US businesses may soon find that deregulation comes with risks," *Financial Times, Block Journal and Teknomers*, 10 July 2024

- Quoted, “Supreme Court's Chevron, Corner Post decisions could delay energy investments, spur litigation: analysts,” *ESG Dive*, 8 July 2024
- Quoted, “Regulatory uncertainty ahead as SCOTUS rulings give companies incentive to sue government,” *Legal Dive*, 3 July 2024
- Quoted, “Wall Street's top regulator faces worsening battle in wake of Supreme Court ruling,” Reuters, Rethinking 65, *Market Screener*, and *US News & World Report*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “Pollution Curbs, Non-Compete Bans at Risk by Chevron Ruling,” *Bloomberg Law and Yahoo! News*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “Supreme Court ends Chevron deference in landmark decision,” *American Banker*, *Asset Securitization Report*, and *National Mortgage News*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “SCOTUS overturns Chevron doctrine, limiting federal agency reach,” *Utility Dive*, *K-12 Dive*, and *HR Dive*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “In big win for business, Supreme Court dramatically limits rulemaking power of federal agencies,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “K Street cheers SCOTUS' Chevron ruling,” *Politico.com*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “Supreme Court curbs power of federal regulators, overturning 40-year precedent The decision affects how federal agencies can regulate the environment, workplace conditions, food safety and other areas of American life.,” *USA Today and The Columbus Dispatch*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “Chevron's End Is Just The Start For Energized Agency Foes,” *Law360*, 28 June 2024
- Quoted, “Chevron Ruling Poised to Boost Business for Corporate Litigators,” *Bloomberg Law*, 1 July 2024
- Quoted, “Chevron Ruling May 'Hamstring' SEC Rulemaking Agenda: Lawyers,” *FundFire and Financial Advisor IQ*, 1 July 2024
- Quoted, “Will recent Supreme Court rulings 'devastate the functioning of the federal government?',” *Government Executive*, 1 July 2024
- Quoted, “DC Circ. Gives FERC More Clarity On Scope Of Climate Reviews,” *Law360,* 17 June 2024
- Quoted, “DC Circuit LNG fight showcases rift on social cost of carbon,” *E&E News*, 20 May 2024
- Quoted, “DC Circ. Probes Carbon Capture In LNG Approval Challenge,” *Law360*, 17 May 2024

AREAS OF FOCUS

- Environment and Energy
- Administrative and Regulatory Law
- Appellate Litigation

- Mass Tort
- Product Liability
- Public Policy and Law

INDUSTRIES

- Energy
- Transportation and Logistics