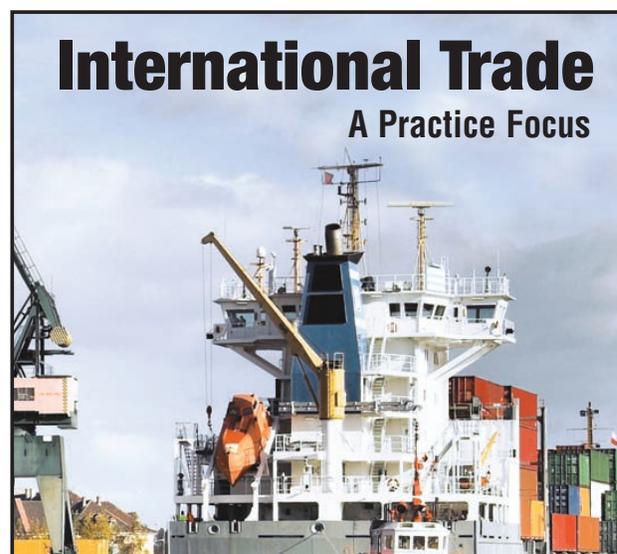


# Identifying **10** Leading International Trade Lawyers

By Jenna Greene

**S**ome are knights in shining armor for beleaguered domestic industries. Others are the champions of free markets, knocking down barriers at home and abroad. As the volume of goods and services being traded worldwide has expanded, so, too, have the duties of the international trade lawyers.

These 10 leading lawyers have to be a versatile bunch. Problems may be solved by raising U.S. countervailing duty claims, or by negotiating complex international agreements, or by pushing government officials to bring cases before the World Trade Organization. Experts in everything from uranium to chocolate to lumber, they may be sought out by industry leaders to level the playing field or to gain a home-court advantage. And in the post-9/11 world, they are also called upon to help companies navigate the growing thicket of export controls,



economic sanctions, and national security reviews.

Still, all seem to retain a certain wonder for the far-flung locales and exotic goods that often go along with an international trade practice. As one leading lawyer put it, “The world is an endlessly fascinating place.”

# Leading LAWYERS

## Ten of the D.C. Area's Top International Trade Lawyers

### Valerie Slater

**AKIN GUMP STRAUSS HAUER & FELD**

"She's just exceptional." That's how one of her longtime clients sums up Valerie Slater.

"She really works hard to understand your industry and your place in the global marketplace," explains Rosemary O'Brien, vice president of public affairs for nitrogen and phosphate fertilizer maker CF Industries Inc., who has worked with Slater for 20 years. "It's her incredible technical ability that I think gives her the edge for her clients."

Whether bringing the first anti-dumping case against a Vietnamese product or establishing the precedent for trade remedies when the country at issue ceases to exist, Slater, 54, has been a go-to lawyer for some of the most complex trade disputes.

The Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld partner calls herself lucky: "My work has included some of the most interesting cases and clients and industries."

She has pursued one of her longest-running cases on behalf of domestic uranium mining. Around 1990, the Soviet Union, desperate for hard currency, raided its stockpile of natural uranium and flooded the U.S. market. The commodity is used to fuel nuclear power plants. In 1991, Slater filed an anti-dumping case against Soviet uranium.

It was "a bloody, bloody battle," she says, with the opposition spearheaded by a wealthy Denver entrepreneur poised to make a fortune trading uranium.

But only a few months into the investigation, the Soviet Union dissolved. The importers and the governments of the newly independent states demanded that the case be terminated. It was a new issue, notes Slater. "What happens when the country named in the petition no longer exists?"

In 1992, the U.S. Court of International Trade upheld the Commerce Department's ruling that anti-dumping cases apply to the geographic area where the goods are produced, regardless of political boundaries. (The issue resurfaced when Germany reunified and when Hong Kong reverted to China.)

In resolving the case, Slater helped craft the first agreement suspending an anti-dumping investigation under a special statutory provision for nonmarket economies. The original 1992 agreement with Russia was overhauled in 1994 to create a "matched sales" arrangement that permitted Russian uranium to be sold in the United States when linked with sales of newly produced U.S. uranium. Such an agreement, says Slater, has "never happened before, and it's never happened since." While two sunset reviews have left the deal in place, negotiations are now under way to amend it.

Sean Quinn is vice president of law and general counsel of Canada's

Cameco Corp., the parent company of the two largest U.S. uranium producers, Power Resources Inc. and Crow Butte Resources Inc. He says Slater has given them "absolutely top-notch counsel as we've worked our way through the thicket of the ongoing case." He praises her analytical ability, interpersonal skills, and network of contacts. "She provides us with insights we simply wouldn't get on our own," he says.

Another notable case for Slater focused on catfish imported from Vietnam. In 2002, on behalf of the Catfish Farmers of America, Slater filed the first anti-dumping case against that country. This triggered a requirement that the Commerce Department classify Vietnam as a market or nonmarket economy. The answer was the latter.

Again, this was a sensitive case—the United States had just concluded a bilateral trade agreement with Vietnam—and an unusual one—the imported "catfish" weren't even the same species as the U.S. fish.

The frozen fish fillets, which Slater says were sometimes labeled "Delta fresh" (complete with a picture of a catfish in a straw hat and overalls), were actually basa or tra fish. A key question was whether a U.S. industry could be injured by a product that was not identical to the domestic one. In 2003, the U.S. International Trade Commission said yes and put in place an anti-dumping order.

But imports soon shot back up, as importers began evading the order by mislabeling the fish as grouper or sole. Slater worked with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which began testing the imports. In 2006, a federal grand jury indicted several importers for fraud.

Slater is currently advising the U.S. catfish industry on imports from China but has not yet filed a case.

Her clients' Vietnam concerns don't end with fish. Slater is assisting Nike Inc. on issues related to the Commerce Department's new program monitoring textile imports from Vietnam.

"She has a very good political sense of what is doable and what is not," says Brad Figel, Nike's director of government affairs. "I've been impressed by her knowledge of trade laws, including their history and background and purpose."

Another client with an eye on Russia is the U.S. nitrogen fertilizer industry. Slater has filed successful cases on urea and ammonium nitrate imports and is assisting the domestic nitrogen industry in efforts to have Russia's natural gas pricing practices addressed as part of that country's accession to the World Trade Organization.

Slater earned her law degree from Catholic University's Columbus School of Law in 1977, then joined Steptoe & Johnson. She moved to the D.C. office of Akin Gump in 1984, working part time for several years when her children were young. She made partner in 1990 and was elevated to head of the 25-person trade practice in 2003. Other prominent lawyers in the group include Warren Connelly, Spencer Griffith, Lars-Erik Hjelm, Edward Rubinoff, and J. David Park.



Valerie Slater