

## Rising Star: Vinson & Elkins' Margaret Peloso

By Juan Carlos Rodriguez

*Law360 (September 12, 2019, 4:00 PM EDT)* -- Over the past year, Vinson & Elkins LLP's Margaret Peloso has led a team helping Citigroup draft a climate disclosure report, defended a coal plant in a \$1 billion property damage lawsuit and helped turn back proposed financial assurance regulations for the hardrock mining industry, earning her a spot as one of five environmental law practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

### **THE BIGGEST CASES OF HER CAREER:**

Citigroup's report, titled "Finance for a Climate-Resilient Future," is the company's first that includes climate scenario analysis, which evaluates the potential business impacts of future events. Peloso's team combed through data and spoke with Citi employees to develop the report.

And the coal plant case is important because the lawsuit, which features claims under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, Clean Water Act, and Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act over alleged coal ash pollution, could serve as a model for similar litigation in the future.

Additionally, Peloso said working on the team that opposed the Obama-era financial assurance rule for the hardrock mining industry is something she is very proud of.

"Our client and then the industry more broadly came in with quite a lot of evidence about preexisting state programs that EPA had not considered in the rulemaking, the effectiveness of those programs and what current practices in the mining industry look like as compared to what they looked like historically," she said. "It was fun to be part of a team that accomplished a really important result for our client."

### **WHAT MOTIVATES HER:**

Peloso, a scientist with a doctoral-level education in climate-related science, said integrating scientific concepts into the legal context can be challenging, but it's some of the work she likes best.

**RISING**  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
**STAR**



**Margaret Peloso**  
**Vinson & Elkins**

**Age:** 35

**Home base:** Washington, D.C.

**Position:** Partner

**Law school:** Stanford Law School

**First job after law school:** Associate at Vinson & Elkins

"I am very motivated by the idea of being able to do a lot to both help my clients and make a positive impact on the environment by being somebody who can help to use science to inform decision making, to use science to inform litigation strategy and help to get good quality information to those processes," she said.

***WHY SHE'S AN ENVIRONMENTAL ATTORNEY:***

Peloso said she was always interested in natural sciences and biology, and really fell in love with marine biology in her undergraduate years. As she worked on a master's degree, she took a couple of law classes and saw how the two worlds could merge.

"I went to law school knowing that if I was going to practice at all it was going to be in environmental, as opposed to coming to environment law during my career not knowing it was something I wanted to do before," she said.

***HOW HER PRACTICE AREA WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS:***

Peloso said it "would be difficult to overstate" the role of changing investor expectations in terms of climate and the environment, which she's already involved in.

"I do a lot of work with energy companies in helping them to think about what their climate risks are and how to manage them and how to respond either directly to investor inquiries about climate risk for sustainability, or to respond to the marketplace and how the norms around disclosure are changing and think about where they want to fit in that space," she said.

She noted these concerns are relatively recent, and that it has only been since 2017 or so that shareholders have approved climate disclosure-related proposals that companies have opposed. Since then, Peloso noted, there have been changes in some of the disclosure rules, particularly in Europe.

"So even though we've been in a period of time where there's perhaps been some environmental regulatory rollbacks, because investors are expecting so much more, it's really changing the nature of the way our clients are having to approach some of those issues, particularly around thinking about climate and sustainability and disclosure, and that's an area that I think will continue to grow and change very rapidly," she said.

— *As told to Juan Carlos Rodriguez*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2019 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 years old as of April 30, 2019, in order to be considered for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.*