



Gearing up for a chaotic year

By Alex Gangitano

2020 is set to be a politically chaotic year, but no one has to tell that to Karishma Shah Page, the new co-leader of K&L Gates's policy practice.

Page, 39, is in a unique position on K Street as the industry works to increase its diversity and elevate more women. The Michigan native is a first-generation American whose parents immigrated from India and a mother to a nearly 2-year-old son.

"One of the things that's been really exciting is when I see a young female associate or a young associate of color coming by and are like, 'It's really great to see you in this role. This means that I can do it, too.' That is really meaningful," Page told *The Hill* in a recent interview.

She specializes in hot-button issues — health care, financial services and taxes — which means she'll have a busy year as the country gears up for Election Day.

"I think we have a sense that, just given that it is an election year, there's going to be a lot of debate about the role of health care policy," she said. "These are very important questions about not only access but what does it mean for employer sponsor — also what it means for how our health care system is making capital investments, and what the role of the provider is."

On taxes, Page said there is an appetite for a bigger appropriations package with more tax provisions included in it compared with the \$1.4 trillion bipartisan spending legislation that President Trump signed last month.

"Beyond that, we're certainly seeing it on the debate stage with the Democratic presidential candidates, about the role of taxes in paying for [priorities].

We're going to see that, I think, ramp up as well," she said.

With Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) at the helm of the House Financial Services Committee, Page sees environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues being at the forefront of lawmakers' agendas in the new year.

"ESG and the questions of what is the role of business, what is the role of an institutional investor, what is the role of diversity?" she said.

One of Page's colleagues said that both November's elections and Trump's upcoming Senate impeachment trial will lead to a legislative crunch on Capitol Hill.

"You're going to have a six-month period of what I would say is robust activity, a slow-down and then likely a lame duck as they head into the election year," said Darrell Conner, government affairs counselor of K&L Gates's policy practice. "As we think about positioning client issues, there's a window at the beginning of the year [in which] we really will be pretty aggressive."

Page, who worked as a summer associate at K&L Gates while at Georgetown Law School, joined the firm full time in 2008.

"When I started my career, we were working on Dodd-Frank, we then worked on the 2009 stimulus, and then worked on [ObamaCare]. Those were such formative changes to the law and such tremendous learning experiences that it really created a significant platform that built my career after that. I was then able to take those skills and continue to develop them over time," Page said.

Unlike many lobbyists, she has never worked in government — and has used that to her advantage.

"My reputation on the Hill is to be substantively expert in the areas that I work on and to be an



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honest broker and to maintain that relationship in a bipartisan, bicameral way," she said.

Page, who has worked her way up over more than a decade at K&L Gates, sits on its diversity and professional women committees, and says nearly 50 percent of the firm's policy practice is made up of minority and female professionals.

"There was just always such a tremendous support system here and real opportunities and investments in my growth. So, even though there may have been opportunities that popped up, it was never really anything but here, and that trajectory was locked in from the beginning, unbeknownst to me," she said.

Page said that just within the past year, there has been an uptick in diversity on K Street, a goal of many lobbying firms following the 2018 election of the most diverse Congress yet.

"I think there is a change in who you see on the Hill in terms of the lobbyists. I personally see that there is a little bit more

diversity, which is fantastic because we're getting a broader set of voices," she said. "I think you also get an interesting reception when you fit the demographic because we do have a shared experience."

Page has a poster on the door of her office from *The New York Times*'s portraits of the women of the 116th Congress.

"It's so exciting to see these women that have had tremendous experiences — law enforcement, military, they have served their countries, they have served their communities, they've had families, they balanced it all. Here they are bringing that experience to the policy discussions that frame what we're thinking about as a nation," she said.

"I, as a recent mom, was super excited as they were talking about what does it mean to have maternity rooms on the Hill. It's a shift," Page added. "It's so important for us to be thinking about how the world is changing."