

MVP: Pillsbury's Mona Dajani

By **Emily Lever**

Law360 (September 23, 2021, 4:29 PM EDT) -- Mona Dajani of Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP was part of a team that clinched a major renewable natural gas business combination, earning her a spot among Law360's 2021 Project Finance MVPs.

WHY SHE IS A RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT FINANCE ATTORNEY:

Dajani encountered renewable energy before she even became a lawyer. As an engineer at Enron, she worked on a wind turbine project near Palm Springs, California, in the early 2000s.

"It was very fringe 20 years ago, but I always loved renewable energy projects," she said. "I'm not anti-oil, but I love new technology, and of course it's saving our planet."

Working in project finance with a focus on renewable energy allows Dajani to combine her interests in engineering, finance, law and international matters.

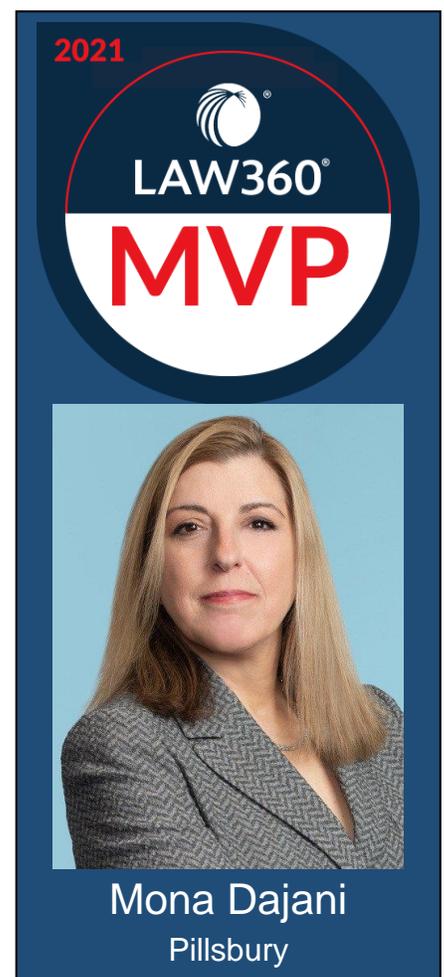
"With renewables, I'm often on the cutting edge. The project often has a new or unusual twist, whether tech-driven or market-driven," she told Law360.

With oil production declining even as energy demand is increasing — particularly in developing countries — and as it becomes increasingly necessary to reduce global carbon dioxide emissions, Dajani sees renewables as an area with a bright future, whether it's hydrogen fuel, onshore and offshore wind, solar power, or other sources of energy.

HER BIGGEST DEAL OF THE PAST YEAR:

Dajani co-led a team that steered Archaea Energy in a \$1.15 billion combination with Aria Energy LLC, led by special purpose acquisition company Rice Acquisition Corp.

Archaea develops what it calls renewable natural gas, touted as a less-polluting version of fracked natural gas that contains a portion of gas sourced from waste, landfills and biodegradable carbon sources, according to Dajani.



The resulting company, Archaea Energy, is now the world's largest renewable natural gas platform and intends to lead more developments in the renewable energy sector, she said.

"We really believe this is part of the worldwide clean energy supply chain," Dajani told Law360.

HER ADVICE TO JUNIOR ATTORNEYS:

The best project finance lawyers understand deals on many levels, not just their legal parameters, Dajani said.

"To be a good project finance lawyer, you need to be able to sift through huge amounts of data points and understand not only the documents but also the underlying assets from an engineering standpoint, from a real estate standpoint," she said. "Law school can help, but you need to be able to think creatively."

Beyond legal smarts, the job requires emotional intelligence to interact with different sides of the deal.

"You need to be a people person and be able to deal with strong personalities and different cultural sensitivities," Dajani said

She also encouraged women to enter this practice area, noting that many women are accustomed out of necessity to dealing with others' emotions and harmonizing different priorities.

"I'm also a mom, I have two kids and I juggle all of this on top of being a mom, which is my first job," Dajani said. "Women can really thrive at this: If you can juggle a family of kids, it's the same skill."

— *As told to Emily Lever. Editing by Adam LoBelia.*

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.