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TRAILBLAZERS

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PIONEER SPIRIT David O'Neil likes practicing law in Washington because "you can find such a variety in what you are able to work on." Judging from O'Neil's recent work, that's a vast understatement. O'Neil, who handles cases involving criminal law and public policy, won a taxation case at the U.S. Supreme Court, represented the House of Representatives in a dispute with the executive branch, and took part in the most consequential trial in recent history: the impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump.

TRAILS BLAZED The Supreme Court case involved North Carolina's attempt to tax income from out-of-state trusts. Justices unanimously upheld his argument that the tax scheme violated the trusts' due process rights by unjustly confiscating their property. O'Neil also has counseled social media companies during congressional inquiries into Russian interference in the 2016 election. When he joined the legal team for the House impeachment managers for Trump's Senate trial, he saw the case as a chance to "vindicate the rule of law and the separation of powers and to rein in what I thought were abuses of authority."

FUTURE EXPLORATIONS On behalf of the House, O'Neil is suing the Department of Justice — his former employer — and the Department of Commerce for refusing to comply with subpoenas for information about a proposed citizenship question on 2020 Census forms. It's another example of how "the breakdown in trust among different institutions in Washington has been really jarring and the relationships among people in institutions who, for the good of the country, need to get along have been really frayed. ... Institutions are always going to be in some kind of conflict. But they have developed ways to interact that allow them to function smoothly. I'm hoping that a lot of that returns over the next year or two."