

Latham & Watkins 'Armed' for Antitrust With FTC Enforcer Hire

By Elizabeth Olson

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- Ian Conner, former FTC competition bureau chief, joins firm
 - Latham says its 'armed' to navigate antitrust after activity uptick
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Latham & Watkins has hired Ian Conner, former director of the Federal Trade Commission's competition bureau, for its antitrust practice as the Biden administration likely prepares to step up enforcement.

Conner will advise companies on issues including mergers and investigations. His experience includes technology, oil and gas, retail, telecommunications, transportation, and healthcare.

"The last few years have seen a notable uptick in activity among competition agencies," said Amanda Reeves, global chair of Latham's antitrust & competition practice. "Latham is armed with a highly experienced team to navigate this new antitrust era."

Firms have been beefing up their antitrust practices in anticipation of more vigorous enforcement by the new Justice Department leadership under President Joe Biden.

"With a focus on Big Tech and the GameStop trading debacle from across the political spectrum, there is strong bipartisan momentum to ramp up antitrust and securities enforcement," WilmerHale partner Ronald Machen wrote in Bloomberg Law last month.

Latham has been luring antitrust talent from enforcement agencies both in the U.S. and overseas.

Alan Devlin joined Latham after serving as acting deputy director of the FTC's Bureau of Competition. Reeves worked with Devlin at the FTC when they both served as attorney advisers.

Four other Latham lawyers, Lawrence Buterman, Niall Lynch, Elizabeth Prewitt and Daniel Wall, worked in the Justice Department's antitrust division prior to joining the firm.

Conner will be a partner in Latham's litigation and trial department and be a member of the antitrust and competition practice.

He joined the FTC's Bureau of Competition as deputy director in 2017, then became director in December 2019. He oversaw nearly 300 lawyers and staff that brought enforcement matters.

The FTC and New York sued Vyera Pharmaceuticals LLC's Martin Shkreli in January of last year for allegedly violating antitrust law by jacking up the price of a drug. The FTC in December sued Facebook Inc., accusing the company of anticompetitive conduct.

Other commission actions included challenging Procter & Gamble Co.'s move to acquire razor startup Billie, and filing to unwind Altria Group Inc.'s \$12.8 billion investment in competitor JUUL Labs in violation of antitrust laws.

"Antitrust issues are typically make-or-break issues for companies," Conner said in a statement. By working with Latham, "I will be able to create new opportunities and develop innovative legal approaches to address clients' stickiest antitrust issues."

Prior to joining the FTC, Conner had been a partner at Kirkland & Ellis for more than six years, where his clients included healthcare companies. He also worked as a trial attorney in several sections of Justice's antitrust division.

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