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Latham's New Litigation Chair is Hiring in NY and London

Last month, a changing of the guard took place at the global law firm Latham & Watkins as it re-shuffled its deck of practice leaders and executive committee members.

In New York, Jamie Wine, who counts Ernst & Young and Deutsche Bank as clients, was appointed chair of Latham's global litigation and trial department, succeeding Sean Berkowitz.

Among the other appointments: Los Angeles partner Jim Arnone succeeds Bob Wyman as global chair of the environmental land and resources department, while Washington-based white collar defense partner Alice Fisher and London corporate partner Martin Saywell were elected to the executive committee.

In a recent interview with Big Law Business, Wine, 45, explained that Latham is looking to build out its 610-lawyer litigation department in New York and London, and that the extensive process of bringing in a lateral typically takes meetings with around 50 current Latham partners.

The firm has recently made strides in those recruiting efforts:

In January, Latham hired Jonathan Lippman, chief judge of the New York Court of Appeals, as of counsel; and in February, it hired Douglas Yatter, chief trial attorney with the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission, and Serrin Turner, a top SDNY prosecutor who will focus on cybersecurity at the firm.

Last week, Wine spoke about her new role, insights she could provide into management at Latham, and trends she's seeing in the litigation market. Below is an edited transcript of our discussion.

Big Law Business: First of all, congrats on the recent appointment. Can you give us any insight into the process of how Latham chose you?

Wine: Bill Voge and the executive committee ultimately made the decision. They went out and canvassed all the litigation partners in the firm. They got a sense for who the different candidates should be. I am very honored and humbled that I was chosen. We have a world class team. There are so many people that could have done the job, but I did previously serve on the firm's executive committee and held a number of management positions in the firm.

I think all of that pro-vided me with the experience and perspective that will allow me to lead the department, which is quite large now. It's bigger than some of the largest AmLaw 50 firms, so it's a daunting task, but it's one that I feel well-equipped to do based on my prior experience.

The number is 610 attorneys assigned to the department.

Big Law Business: Will you continue to practice?

Wine: I am definitely going to be continuing my practice full time, as do all of the partners in our firm that hold management positions, other than the managing partner and the two vice chairs. Apart from three partners, every other partner who gets elected to the executive committee or top management roles, we do so with the willingness to continue practice full time. We are very much a working partnership. We have never been a partnership who has a management class or partners who can opt out of practice.

Big Law Business: It seems like a lot to juggle. How do you do it?

Wine: It is a lot. Take as an example my tenure as an executive committee member. I was in tenure when I was 40, so that coincided when I was a litigator during the critical years of my practice, when you're handling litigation on your own. It takes a lot of hard work and commitment and balancing and having an understanding and supportive family is helpful. I am lucky enough to have that. You have to be willing to work unusual hours after your kids go to bed and on the weekend when you can fit it in. Our client work always comes first. Management can never come in the way with that.

Right now, the two strategic areas for us to grow in the litigation practice are in New York and London.

Big Law Business: What will you be focusing on in your role?

Wine: One of the most important functions is to listen to everyone's views, but my role is also to set the strategy of the department and keep abreast of what's going on at Latham and in the market so that we can make the right decisions. That includes where we see growth, and decline, and what that means for our strategy and where we want to grow as a department. If we think we have an opportunity, we can take advantage of it.

Big Law Business: I've heard Latham's process for hiring laterals is pretty extensive. Can you talk about that?

Wine: I would say our process is robust. That is the word I like to use, and it is for a lot of good reasons. Latham had a lot of growth over the years. That happens organically and with a lot of internal promotions, and we have gone out to the lateral market. We do so pretty carefully. We want to make sure we are attracting the best lateral talent but also talent that is a strategic and cultural fit for the firm. There are many instances in the firm's history where a lateral is presented to us with a fantastic book of business that culturally might not fit. Right now, the two strategic areas for us to grow in the litigation practice are in New York and London. We will very much target our lateral search to fit with those strategic goals. Once we decide to go forward with a lateral, we do like them to meet a number of partners with whom they'll be practicing on a day to day basis. With the firm having gotten so big, we don't expect them to meet every partner, but they will meet about 50 partners before they join the firm. We think that's great for us and the lateral to make sure the move is the right fit. I wouldn't say they love the process, as they are going through it, but on Day One, they know the firm already and they know who to call and can hit the ground running in their practice. I think it's quite beneficial. We hear from laterals after they joined the firm that they are happy they went through that process.

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Big Law Business: How big is the litigation department?

Wine: Just in terms of number of attorneys, I think the number is 610 attorneys assigned to the department. If you count first and second year attorneys who are unassigned but trending toward litigation, it's 675 overall. We have litigators in 21 offices.

Big Law Business: You mentioned that one of your tasks is spotting market trends. We've seen the down-turn in financial crisis-related litigation affect a number of top law firms, and some have conducted layoffs. Where do you see litigation headed?

Wine: That work is definitely cycling down as we are getting away from the financial crisis and we are very fortunate that we have a diverse practice. In New York and outside as well, I don't think we have been impacted as much as other firms. We had a big share of it but we weren't so reliant. We are seeing that a lot of the transactional practice areas are slower than usual, and there is some choppiness in the capital markets. Whether or not that results in litigation six to twelve

months from now, we'll see. And we want to make sure we are positioned for that. We want to make sure that in London and New York, we are positioned well as we see increased enforcement activity. In London, I think you are seeing regulators get more active and coordinated. That is an area where we see more demand in the future. I coordinate a lot with our financial institutions group to make sure that I understand what's going on and a whole host of things that are impacting the banks and hedge funds and other businesses.

Big Law Business: Why London? What's going on there?

Wine: I just think that over the last few years they have become more active and more coordinated. Not just active with each other but with U.S. agencies, too. You saw that with the LIBOR cases. There was a lot more coordination between London and the U.S. than in the past. It just seems like there is starting to become more of a regulatory environment over there. I don't think you saw that in the past. Clients here that do business in the U.K. need to make sure they are prepared for regulatory inquiries over there.

There is usually a way in life where things work out. Big Law Business: What kind of advice would you give to more junior lawyers coming up through the ranks?

Wine: I would say to take advantage of as many opportunities as you can. Take on responsibility. That could mean serving on a committee or participating in an affinity group. Even though it takes additional time in what are already demanding schedules, it can be helpful if that person has aspirations to be in management someday.

Big Law Business: What would you say to younger women lawyers in particular?

Wine: I think sometimes female attorneys feel like they face more challenges and when they think about everything they have to do in the firm for client practice and management responsibility, and then one day try to think about having a partner or family or whatever form that takes on in their life... it can be easy to be daunted by that and think there is no way I can do all that and opt out before they have to. I often tell female attorneys that if they enjoy what they are doing, and they enjoy the firm... try to stick it out. There is usually a way in life where things work out.