

Mayer Brown Eyes The Opportunities In Post-Election Change

By **Aebra Coe**

Law360 (October 28, 2024, 9:50 AM EDT) -- Mayer Brown Chair Jon Van Gorp has been focused on growing his law firm's regulatory and enforcement capabilities and sees the impending changes to leadership at the top of government with the U.S. presidential election as an opportunity to continue doing that.

According to Van Gorp, the firm's regulatory and enforcement capabilities are an ever-present benefit to clients who engage the law firm in other areas of law, with pitch teams on litigation or corporate matters often including a lawyer with deep experience in government who can provide perspective on potential regulatory impacts.

That, he says, is not only a selling point with clients, but also means additional high-level government officials view Mayer Brown as a good place to land because they know they will be included on matter teams and integrated into the firm in a way that allows them to succeed.

"We're of course supportive of lawyers coming from government developing their own practices, and many have developed fabulous practices on their own for the expertise they have. But the way the firm hunts in packs and the way we work together is what creates the integration," Van Gorp said.

A few recent partner additions Mayer Brown has made from the federal government include Arun Rao, former deputy assistant attorney general in the Department of Justice's Civil Division; Sonali Patel, former assistant chief of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act unit of the DOJ; Kimberly Hamm, former chief counsel to the Securities and Exchange Commission chairman; and Adam Hickey, former deputy assistant attorney general in the DOJ's National Security Division.

Here is more from Van Gorp on the law firm's strategy around adding and retaining partners from the government and his thoughts on how the election may impact the firm's efforts.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What approach does the firm take when it comes to integrating government officials, and how is that different from many peers?

To answer that I need to take a bit of a step back and talk about our approach to hiring from the government so that the integration answer makes more sense.



Jon Van Gorp

For us, our regulatory expertise, our ability to represent clients in front of the government, is a go-to-market strategy that lines up well with other things we do in the firm. So we present a layered expertise of the regulatory approach, lined up with a finance practice or a corporate practice or a litigation practice as value delivered. We look at it as a joint venture between the government lawyer coming into the firm and the lawyers in those other areas with client relationships who see that as a distinguishing factor.

That really informs the integration. We see this as the essential way that we market ourselves and approach clients. We think it's a distinguishing selling point.

So it's not the case that we are bringing these people into active matters when we need them to do something and not making them part of the initial pitch team. We're bringing them out to the clients with everybody else who is pitching for the work, and that joint work is the best way to integrate.

A couple of other points on that, though. We have a pretty active client team program, covering some of our best client opportunities in the firm, and the leaders of those teams are held accountable for their efforts to integrate new laterals into their teams. So they're looking for opportunities to put new lateral partners, including those from government, in front of clients. It's a great opportunity for us with clients because people who have just come from government have excellent insights into what is happening from a regulatory and enforcement perspective that clients want to hear about.

So bringing them out when they come to the firm to our clients in our client team program is something we've done for a long time to good effect, and then they're able to graft into those established relationships and be a part of them from the very start.

What are some of the challenges for attorneys leaving government and entering or reentering private practice? Can it be hard to hit the ground running on building a book of business?

There are different muscle groups you need as a lawyer in private practice versus working for the government. We have lots of different clients with lots of different expectations. They are sometimes preferring to be approached in unique ways and you kind of have to craft your pitch to how they want to hear it. So understanding how to do that is part of the transition from government to private practice, because we are competing with other firms with very high quality lawyers and we're trying to create a distinguishing point as to why you'd want to hire our team as opposed to another team. That part of the selling of the work is not something that's part of the lawyer's work in the government.

But we have supports here for people that they can use in order to accelerate the development of those skill sets. We also have a lot of successful people here who have joined from the government and found success, so they're able to mentor and sponsor those hires in a really effective way.

Why is it important to your firm to be a welcoming and attractive place for government lawyers?

We want to operate at the top of the market, so we want to help clients with their most important and complex matters. And a lot of times those are involving novel and unique regulatory and enforcement issues that are not easy to answer. Without the people on the inside — the people who have been involved with developing the regulations or developing the enforcement approach — it's really hard to give clients an insight into how to handle the matter. So we really find that delivering that practical advice from people who have been in the government working on the other side of these challenges is

incredibly appealing to clients and allows us to solve some of those most complex and difficult challenges they bring to us because we have different insights.

As we near the election, how is the landscape for adding former government lawyers shifting, and what are some of the potential opportunities or changes that could result from the election?

No matter who wins we're going to see potential changes in regulatory enforcement stances at the government, and that change creates opportunity for us. There will be new proposals our clients will want to evaluate. There will be new enforcement stances that they'll ask us to give them insights on. From our perspective, change is a good thing because our clients are going to rely on us to navigate that change. However this comes out, I think for us, we have a pretty good system of contacts with the government that will allow us to understand the changes being proposed and deliver practical advice to clients to prepare their businesses to respond effectively to those changes.

Are there also opportunities related to a change in administration when it comes to recruiting lawyers from the government?

When government turns over, some of those jobs do turn over and some of the more senior government jobs aren't jobs forever. So we do see that. We see that in people whose jobs are evaporating with a change in leadership and who want to join private practice. There's also potentially people who are not in those kinds of jobs, but they see with leadership changing a different stance or different position of the department they work in, and they're interested at that point in exploring other options because it's not the same as it used to be when leadership changes at the top. I know several government lawyers who made the move to private practice who could have stayed, but a leadership change changed the way the department was run and what its role was going to be, and they felt at that time it was a good point to make a change. So, elections always create great opportunities for recruitment.

--Editing by Robert Rudinger.