

## FTC Competition Bureau Chief Joins Latham & Watkins

By **Bryan Koenig**

*Law360 (March 1, 2021, 8:30 PM EST)* -- Former Federal Trade Commission Competition Bureau chief Ian Conner joined Latham & Watkins LLP on Monday in the firm's most high-profile hiring in several years of a recent antitrust agency senior official, as the bar gears up for a potentially major realignment of U.S. enforcement.

Latham global antitrust & competition practice chair Amanda Reeves told Law360 that Conner's hiring, as a Washington, D.C.-based partner in the litigation & trial department and the antitrust practice, comes as lawmakers, enforcers and the broader public hit "an inflection point in antitrust law." Conner joins Latham as the firm tries to adapt with that inflection, after heading up the FTC's Bureau of Competition from December 2019 to February 2021.

Conner said in an interview that he hopes to bring to Latham "an understanding of the risks and the challenges and the focuses of the regulators presently."

"Because I think what's most important now is being able to give frank and detailed advice to clients on antitrust risk," said Conner, who asserted that his primary contribution to Latham will be in his understanding of the turbulent changes currently rocking the antitrust world.

Conner spent more than three years at the FTC, having first joined as Competition Bureau deputy in September 2017 after a six year stint at Kirkland & Ellis LLP.

"He's just been in the thick of it for the last three years," said Reeves, who described Conner's experience as "invaluable."

The hiring at Latham represents Conner's second time joining private practice, having started his legal career as a trial attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice Antitrust Division following graduation from William & Mary Law School.

Latham said Monday that Conner will use "his unique skillset and knowledge base" to guide multinational corporations through an array of antitrust issues. Conner told Law360 that his focus has always been on the merger side of antitrust enforcement but he also expects to spend a fair amount of time working on conduct probes and class action lawsuits.

Exactly where he will go, Conner said, will depend on the matters that come up. But it'll be Latham that

takes him there.

"They have an incredible M&A practice and an already robust merger clearance practice," Conner said.

In announcing the hire, Reeves' statement focused on Latham's ability "to deploy the right team with the exact set of capabilities and experience anywhere in the world," as the antitrust bar generally responds to "a notable uptick in activity among competition agencies around the world."

"Bringing Ian onboard further enhances our elite team and enables us to apply up-to-date enforcement thinking gained directly in the field to the complex global challenges our clients face today, as well as to help companies see around corners. He's a wonderful addition and we're thrilled to continue to invest and extend our top global capabilities in antitrust," Reeves said.

In an interview, Reeves said further that Conner brings with him FTC experience in two crucial areas. The first is on the snowballing scrutiny of and pushback against the power of technology companies — most prominently, the FTC and state attorneys general are currently pursuing landmark cases against Facebook, running roughly parallel to DOJ and state enforcer cases against Google.

Conner, Reeves said, oversaw the creation of what is now the FTC's technology enforcement division.

"We have a large base of technology clients and they are under unique scrutiny right now," she said.

The second area for Reeves is the growing enforcer emphasis on vertical mergers connecting companies that don't compete directly but instead work at different stages of a given supply chain. Conner helped fashion the first new vertical enforcement guidelines in decades.

Conner said he was drawn by Latham's strong, global antitrust presence, which he said in an interview would serve as "an excellent platform" to build his private practice.

Conner also described his time at the FTC as the highlight of his career, having overseen the busiest period of agency enforcement in years. Last year, the FTC counted the initiation of nine merger challenges, plus 12 settlements and 10 deals abandoned in the face of an agency investigation. Conner said he's particularly proud of the transition to telework and remote merger filings at the beginning of the pandemic.

"That was the foundation on which we built what was ultimately the most prolific enforcement year the bureau had seen" in years, Conner said.

--Editing by Emily Kokoll.