

MVP: Latham's Les Carnegie

By Elaine Briseño

Law360 (December 10, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- Latham & Watkins LLP partner Les Carnegie guided a healthcare business after it found trace amounts of a restricted material in one of its products and helped a biopharmaceutical corporation sell part of its operation to an Indian company, earning him a spot as one of the 2025 Law360 International Trade MVPs.

His biggest accomplishment this year:

Carnegie led the Latham team as it advised a life sciences company, which the firm did not disclose publicly, after the business discovered one of its "blockbuster" products had trace amounts of a material restricted by the Office of Foreign Assets Control. The presence of a restricted material can result in a shipper blocking or rejecting the product, and it could lead to penalties. On the line for clients, Carnegie said, were billions of dollars in revenue.

Carnegie collaborated with the company's legal team to submit an emergency request to OFAC.

"It was a big finding for the company," he said. "We worked quickly to get an expedited permission to allow the product to continue being used, which was important."

He worked closely with OFAC officials, he said, and helped the company prepare and submit a voluntary self-disclosure form followed by an internal review. The process resulted in the company receiving only a warning and no monetary penalty, which Carnegie said was the best possible outcome. He added that he also helped them develop an internal compliance system to avoid the scenario in the future.

His biggest challenge:

Carnegie said this year's biggest challenge was transitioning to a new administration with a "significant shift in priorities." Each new administration, he said, has different enforcement priorities and policy goals.

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"This is a very fast-paced administration," he said. "As a professional, it's also very exciting."

After taking office, President Donald Trump issued an executive order removing U.S. sanctions against Syria that were put in place by then-President George W. Bush in the early 2000s. Carnegie called the lifted sanctions a "pivotal moment" because the sanctions had closed the Syrian market to most U.S. trade.

"The lifting of the long-standing U.S. embargo against Syria may open humanitarian and commercial channels, but for most companies practical barriers remain, and the compliance risk is still significant," he said.

Carnegie has served as pro bono counsel to humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross and Save the Children, which are offering relief in Syria. They turned to him and his firm this year for advice on how to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape, he said. In the past, he has helped other humanitarian groups secure licenses from the U.S. Department of Commerce in order to travel to the country with laptops, cellphones and humanitarian supplies.

Every challenge also presents an opportunity, Carnegie said.

"The mantra [within our practice groups] at Latham is, 'We can do hard things,'" he added.

Other notable cases:

Carnegie led a large team at Latham steering Coherus BioSciences Inc. in its efforts to secure approval from the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States to sell a cancer-related drug to Indian multinational company Intas Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

The drug, Udenyca, reduces the risk of infection for patients undergoing chemotherapy. The divestiture was worth more than \$550 million for the company and represented a "milestone event" for Coherus. The transaction could not have taken place without CFIUS approval, he said.

He also steered the prominent Saudi conglomerate Mawarid Holding Co. in securing CFIUS approval to invest \$500 million in U.S. aerospace company Sceye, which specializes in high-altitude platform systems.

"That was a fun transaction," he said. "It kicked off with me and a Latham colleague traveling to Saudi Arabia, where we met with the client and sketched out the plan for securing the national security clearance."

His advice for junior attorneys:

"Maybe I give them too much advice if you ask them," Carnegie said.

Jokes aside, Carnegie said he does have some wisdom he likes to impart. Showing initiative, being curious and paying attention to detail are key for attorneys. He also reminds them that writing is their own personal brand, and they should take that seriously. Most people do not have enough time in their day, he stated.

"Write something clear and concise and put the answer up top," he said. "This distinguishes yourself as an attorney."

What motivates him:

Making Latham's team the best national security practice in the world is a great motivator, as is continuously adding new people to the team, Carnegie said. He added that he was looking forward to the firm's first national security retreat for its attorneys to learn from each other and compare notes.

"That team building and collaboration is quite motivating to me," he noted.

--As told to Elaine Briseño. Editing by Kristen Becker.

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