

Conner heads to Latham & Watkins

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Ian Conner, the former director of the Federal Trade Commission's competition bureau, has joined Latham & Watkins as a partner in Washington, DC.

Conner, 42, [spent](#) the past three and a half years at the FTC, first serving as deputy director of the competition bureau from September 2017 to December 2019 and then as director.

He left the FTC on 12 February and formally joined Latham & Watkins today.

As director of the competition bureau, Conner oversaw nearly 300 lawyers and staff in bringing merger and civil non-merger cases during fiscal year 2020, the agency's [most active](#) enforcement year since 2000. When the covid-19 pandemic began last March, he was tasked with running the bureau remotely.

Understanding how the federal antitrust agencies work and the difficulties transactions may face in the current regulatory environment will be helpful to clients, Conner said, noting that in some cases, would-be buyers or sellers will need to receive “an incredibly frank assessment” of the antitrust challenges facing their proposed transaction.

Working at the FTC “allows you to credibly give that frank advice when necessary”, Conner said.

Just in the past six months, the FTC [brought](#) a much-anticipated monopolisation lawsuit against Facebook. It also [won](#) its suit to block the joint venture between Peabody Energy and Arch Coal, while launching several other merger challenges, including against Procter & Gamble's [acquisition](#) of women's razor startup Billie and to Hackensack Meridian Health's [purchase](#) of Englewood Healthcare Foundation.

Procter & Gamble and Billie [abandoned](#) their proposed tie-up in January, but the *Hackensack Meridian* matter remains ongoing.

Conner said serving at the FTC has been the highlight of his career, adding that he is “incredibly grateful” for the opportunity to have worked under FTC chair Joseph Simons and has “great admiration and esteem” for the agency's staff.

He said he was drawn to Latham & Watkins because of its global strength across multiple jurisdictions, which is an important asset given the international nature of many antitrust matters.

“This is a powerful tool as I look to build my practice,” which will mostly be geared toward merger investigations but also conduct and class action cases, Conner said.

Conner said he is sure there will be challenges in joining a new firm during a global pandemic, but he expects there will be far fewer difficulties than last March when the FTC moved “nearly 300 attorneys and staff over to teleworking”.

Amanda Reeves, global chair of Latham & Watkins’ antitrust practice, noted that it is a “unique time in history” for competition policy, explaining that there has been a notable uptick in activity among antitrust enforcers around the world over the past few years.

Reeves said the US agencies have also been increasing their focus on vertical mergers and nascent competition cases, dabbling in new theories of harm.

“For us to get someone who has been in the thick of it” on the enforcement side is a “big value-add” for the firm, she said.

Prior to joining the FTC, Conner was a partner at Kirkland & Ellis, which he [joined](#) in 2011 from Hunton & Williams. He also served as an adjunct professor at William & Mary’s Marshall-Wythe School of Law from 2008 to 2010.

In 2003, Conner began his career as a trial attorney at the Department of Justice, where he worked for four years in the transportation, energy and agriculture section of the Antitrust Division.

With the addition of Conner, Latham & Watkins now has 11 partners in Washington, DC, who spend more than 50% of their time on antitrust matters.