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Amid 'Golden Age of AGs,' Wilmer Adds State AG Co-Chair From Cozen O'Connor

By Sarah Tincher-Numbers

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As state attorneys general ramp up enforcement, Paul Connell has joined Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr as a partner co-chair of the firm's state attorneys general practice.

Connell joined the firm Monday in Washington, D.C., from Cozen O'Connor, where he spent roughly two years after a two-year stint at Reed Smith. From 2015-2019, he served as deputy attorney general and senior counsel at the Wisconsin Department of Justice.

The move comes on the heels of numerous state AG hires in Big Law, as firms anticipate a rise in demand in the state AG space and attorneys general move their attention toward more public-facing issues—what Connell branded the “golden age of AGs.”

Earlier this month, Cozen O'Connor added former Virginia deputy attorney general Stephen Cobb to its state AG practice, while Hogan Lovells hired former D.C. AG Karl Racine in January, and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld announced in December that



Paul Connell, partner with Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr.

Courtesy photo

it had brought on former Virginia AG Mark Herring.

“AGs are completely unbound now to traditional issues that people would associate” with that role, he said, as the focus of state AGs has shifted away from law enforcement and leaned further into issues that impact society, such as how health care is delivered and its cost, fair lending, privacy, and

mass torts/mass disaster, like the opioid epidemic.

“Any issue that is important to the federal government seems to be an important issue to the state AGs,” Connell said, citing ESG, AI, health care and lending as top areas of interest currently, with Republicans leading the charge.

Now, as federal agencies like the Federal Trade Commission and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau continue to ramp up enforcement, state AGs are following suit.

“Whatever the current president and his administration are interested in, that tends to line up on the 50-yard line with Republicans against all of that and the Democrats all for it. And then it flips whenever the presidency flips,” Connell said.

Connell, a Republican, also aims to balance out his Democratic counterpart, practice co-chair Brian Mahanna, of New York. Regulatory and government affairs chair Jamie Gorelick said Connell adds “an important element of bipartisanship” to the practice.

“A state AG is a combination of a law enforcement officer and a political figure, which makes a state AG very different from a federal attorney general, for example,” Gorelick explained.

“In recent years, Republican AGs have been much more aggressive, and we need to meet them where they are,” she said. “We need to be able to speak to them with credibility. And certainly, our state AG litigators can do that, but Paul’s arrival will give us extra insight and a skill set that we don’t have.”

Connell said he was attracted to Wilmer’s positioning in the market and expertise in enforcement activity. Plus, it’s a “homecoming” for Connell, who began his private practice at Wilmer as an associate.

“[Wilmer is] really uniquely positioned to take advantage of what’s going on with state attorneys general ... given the firm’s brand position in Washington, D.C.,” he said.

The practice has counseled major clients such as T-Mobile in its merger with Sprint, which was challenged by 14 attorneys general; Comcast in a consumer protection lawsuit brought by the Washington state attorney general; and Intuit in reaching a 50-state settlement with state AGs concerning its marketing of free products.

A request for comment from Cozen O’Connor regarding Connell’s departure was not returned.