

WilmerHale's Next Leader On Value Of Diverse Representation

By Tracey Read

Law360 (June 16, 2023, 2:27 PM EDT) -- When Anjan Sahni was an 8-year-old child in New Delhi, his family immigrated to the United States in search of a better life.

On Jan. 1, Sahni, a longtime white collar litigator and strategic adviser, will become WilmerHale's next managing partner.

Sahni will succeed co-managing partners Susan Murley, who is based in Boston, and Robert Novick, who is based in Washington. The pair have led the firm since 2012.



Anjan Sahni

Sahni advises companies, boards and senior executives in internal and government investigations, litigation and crisis management. He first joined the New York office of the firm more than 20 years ago. He left in 2005 to become an assistant U.S. attorney in the Southern District of New York, and then rejoined WilmerHale eight years ago.

He spoke with Law360 Pulse Friday about his upcoming role. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

You'll be the first to take on the managing partner role solo since Hale and Dorr LLP and Wilmer Cutler Pickering LLP combined in 2004 to form WilmerHale. How will you tackle the challenge of leading the firm on your own?

Well, it's a weighty job, but one that I'm very excited to do. I think going from two managing partners to one is just an evolution in where the firm is, but we as a firm are incredibly fortunate to have very strong leadership at different levels. We have a very strong and active management committee. We have incredibly talented department chairs, and we're blessed to have an incredibly strong administrative staff as well. And so I don't view this as doing the job solo. I feel like I have a ton of support and help from my colleagues at every level.

What are your business goals for 2024?

I would say my overall goal is to ensure that the firm remains a preeminent law firm that is called upon to handle our clients' most complicated and challenging problems. And to do so while preserving and maintaining what I think is an incredibly strong firm culture that is very cohesive and collaborative. I very

much hope to build upon the legacy of core values that the firm has had of real excellence in the craft, practicing with integrity and a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Speaking of diversity, do you have any specific DEI goals in mind?

This is an area where the firm has historically been very deeply committed to, and I very much want to continue in that tradition. Bill Lee, who was the co-managing partner of the firm starting in 2004, was one of the first Asian American leaders of an AmLaw 50 firm. Susan Murley was one of the first women co-managing partners of a firm in the AmLaw 50. We have five departments, and three of the departments are chaired by women. Our largest department, our litigation department, is led by Ron Machen, who is African American and one of the most prominent and well-known attorneys in the country. He is a former U.S. attorney in Washington.

And then my taking on this role, having come to this country when I was almost 9 and being of Sikh background, is meaningful in terms of demonstrating the importance of representation. I'm certainly very proud of my background and my own immigration journey here. And I'm excited to take on this role, knowing that there aren't many — or perhaps any — Sikhs who have held a role like this in the past.

I immigrated with my parents and sister, first in New York. I lived here for a couple of months and then quickly moved to Atlanta, and I grew up in Atlanta. I then moved north to law school at Yale. And then in 2001 after law school, I came to New York for a clerkship here five weeks before 9/11 and wound up just staying here.

Why did you become a lawyer?

I spent a lot of time in high school and college doing debate, for four years in high school and for four years in college, and I found that there were a lot of folks in the debate community who pursued legal careers, perhaps for obvious reasons. Through talking to them and understanding how speech and persuasion could be useful as a vocation, I explored the possibility of legal practice and really liked the idea.

Initially, I chose to specialize in criminal practice. I was a prosecutor for a number of years. And when I came back to the firm in 2015, I tried to develop a white collar and investigations of crisis management practice. And it just so happened that many of the clients I was working with were in those sectors — technology, life sciences and financial services.

What are some of the more memorable cases you've had as a prosecutor in the Southern District and then at WilmerHale?

I was lucky enough to serve in the Southern District for about 10 and a half years, and had the opportunity to do a lot of diverse things for the last few years I was there. I led the securities and commodities fraud unit, which oversees investigations into insider trading, Ponzi schemes like the Madoff fraud or accounting frauds. Prior to that, I led the terrorism and international narcotics unit. And one of the cases I remember most fondly from my time in that unit was the prosecution of Viktor Bout, the Russian arms dealer we had investigated and then charged for various terrorism offenses. He was extradited from Thailand in 2010. We tried him in front of the jury, and he was convicted. He was recently traded for Brittney Griner. That was one of the more memorable cases that I've worked on.

One of the most meaningful cases I have had [at WilmerHale] was representing, who is now a friend, Rohan Ramchandani, who was a trader at Citibank who had been charged with criminal antitrust violations. He was a man of great integrity and courage. He waived extradition from England, came here to face charges, felt very strongly about his innocence, went to trial, and was acquitted. And that was the first trial I'd had on the defense side after being a prosecutor, and the responsibility of defending someone in that circumstance who felt so strongly about his innocence and should not have been charged was particularly meaningful.

What are the firm's busiest practices?

We have a number of very strong practices. I think our litigation and trial practices remain incredibly active. We've been involved in some very significant trials this year already for clients like Apple, Gilead, Dropbox. Our government-facing practices with the SEC and DOJ remain exceptionally active. And overall, our controversy practices — which cover our litigation, our securities and our regulatory departments — do remain all quite busy. And we're very fortunate to have an extremely strong transactional department. It's an area that I intend to focus on and make sure that we continue to invest in and grow. We have a very talented and well-regarded group of transactional partners who are focused on life cycle practice — M&A, capital markets, private equity-related work.

What do you do for fun?

My wife and I have two children. We live in Brooklyn, and so I enjoy trying different coffee places within Brooklyn, and wandering about Brooklyn with our two girls. One is 13 going on 30, and the other is almost 9.

--Editing by Karin Roberts.