

Top Labor Dept. Atty Decamps For Morgan Lewis in DC

By Vin Gurrieri

Law360 (October 16, 2018, 8:41 PM EDT) -- A high-level attorney for the U.S. Department of Labor who oversaw legal work done for numerous national department programs has left the agency to join Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP, the firm announced Tuesday.

Susan Harthill will join Morgan Lewis as a partner in its Washington, D.C., office after about four years as the DOL's deputy solicitor of labor for national operations, one of the highest career positions within the agency's Office of the Solicitor. Her practice at Morgan Lewis will include advising employers on compliance issues and on matters involving government regulators as well as some litigation work.



Susan Harthill

Harthill told Law360 Tuesday that the time was right for her to jump back into a private practice after having served under two presidential administrations. She ultimately chose Morgan Lewis because it offered her a chance to have a broad-based practice that lines up with her previous work in government, academia and private practice.

"I've covered pretty much every aspect of employment law, and I really enjoy being able to pivot from one area of the law to another. I've never really wanted to specialize," Harthill said. "When I talked to the folks at Morgan Lewis, it became apparent that this was a good fit for me because they seemed to have a need for somebody with my background that has that big-picture broad experience."

"I met with folks [at Morgan Lewis] who I think are visionaries and shared the same vision [as to] how I fit into the firm as what my vision was, and so I'm really looking forward to implementing that," she added.

As the career deputy for national operations, Harthill oversaw legal work done for department programs in various national office divisions, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Division and the Division of Fair Labor Standards. The focus of her work was on appellate cases, amicus filings in cases of interest, and regulatory matters as well as on providing legal advice pertaining to national policy, according to Harthill.

She was also tasked with overseeing the agency's Division of Management and Administrative Legal Services within the Office of the Solicitor, which provides the DOL with legal advice and functions as an administrative arm of the solicitor's office, according to Morgan Lewis.

Harthill said the laws that the agency is tasked with enforcing don't get amended often, so the agency's work enforcing those laws and in providing legal advice remain largely consistent across administrations.

"We don't change our legal advice depending on the administration, so there's a lot of consistency, at least from the solicitor's office perspective," she said. "What we strove to do is make sure we were responsive to the administrations' priorities and any initiatives and making sure that we gave stellar, top-notch legal advice."

Before joining the Department of Labor, Harthill spent the better part of a decade teaching law at Florida Coastal School of Law after about 11 years as a management-side attorney at Steptoe & Johnson LLP.

Morgan Lewis chair Jami McKeon praised Harthill for her "extraordinary understanding of the laws, regulations, and legal precedents governing the workplace," saying in a statement that those attributes will be helpful for businesses "navigating the ever-changing landscape for employers."

"As someone who oversaw the entirety of the DOL's legal activities, [Harthill] is in a unique position to advise companies throughout the United States on the full range of workplace statutes and their administration," McKeon said.

--Editing by Jay Jackson Jr.