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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

Nichols Liu Hires Jenner & Block Gov't Contracts Partner

By Jack Rodgers

Law360 (May 16, 2024, 8:02 AM EDT) -- Nichols Liu, a boutique government contracts firm based in Washington, D.C., has added a longtime Jenner & Block LLP attorney as a partner to continue representing clients in bid protests and a range of government contracts matters.

Carla Weiss is joining Nichols Liu and will continue helping clients navigate contracts and False Claims Act matters and advise them on a range of mandatory disclosure issues surrounding those deals. Weiss spent the last eight years with Jenner & Block.

In an interview with Law360 Pulse, Weiss said she wanted to move her practice to Nichols Liu because its platform was focused on providing excellent service to clients and allowed for meaningful engagement with them.



Carla Weiss

Boutique firms like Nichols Liu also don't incur the large overhead expenses some big law firms do, which makes the platform nimbler and gives it a greater ability to be creative, "partner with clients, and have innovative approaches to client service," she said.

"Nichols Liu is doing something very interesting and refreshing within the government contracts marketplace," Weiss said.

Robert Nichols, one of the firm's name partners, told Law360 Pulse that adding Weiss' practice gives the firm an expert partner to help represent clients taking disputes before the U.S. Government Accountability Office and at other venues.

Nichols also noted that he thought Weiss would fit the firm's dynamic and entrepreneurial platform, which allows lawyers with that mindset to build up their own practices and focus on matters they are interested in.

"We're here to support that growth, not just plunk somebody in as a cog on a bigger machine," Nichols said. "And that type of ability to design your own path, what would ideally make you happy, we have the flexibility to do that here, and we're dedicated to supporting that."

A University of Chicago Law School graduate, Weiss started her legal career with WilmerHale, where she was a member of the defense, national security and government contracts group.

In 2021, Law360 **named** Weiss a Rising Star among contract lawyers under 40, for helping reshape the contracting landscape for veteran-owned companies and **helping them gain** preferential access to billions in contract opportunities. Weiss told Law360 Pulse at the time that she had fallen into the work "purely by accident," after balking at another opportunity as a litigator.

She spent a little over four and a half years with WilmerHale before joining Jenner & Block in 2016 as a special counsel. She was made partner at Jenner & Block last January.

Weiss told Law360 Pulse that although she didn't always know she wanted to work with government

contracts, she did always know that she wanted to work in the district and with the government.

"I wanted to be a Washington, D.C., lawyer, although I will admit, I don't even know if I knew what that meant," Weiss said. "But I knew I wanted somehow, my practice, to involve dealings with the government."

For Weiss, working on the sometimes existential questions government contracts present, is rewarding — but the people aspect of those contracts is constantly at the front of her mind, she said. Matters that Weiss focuses on have direct consequences, she said, and can be the difference between retaining a workforce, or telling them to find new jobs.

"It's not just legal questions, there are real people whose lives are affected by this," Weiss said. "And you often think about that in terms of criminal law where you've got a person who is going to jail or not, but with what we do, there are people. There are large staffs who, if this company doesn't keep that work, it goes to another firm and those people have to find new jobs."

Nichols described the work as "essentially playing chess with consequences."

"The matters that we work on are regularly in the billions of dollars and may make the difference between a company living and dying," he said.

For Weiss, it was important to be honest with clients, finding them the best options and explaining why some legal avenues might not be in their best interest.

"I think it's important that all of our clients know when you ask our opinion, we're going to give it to you whether or not it's the financially lucrative opinion, because we want to make sure you understand we're looking out for your interests more broadly," Weiss said.

Andy Liu, a name partner at Nichols Liu, told Law360 Pulse in a statement that the firm was looking forward to continuing to expand its capabilities with the addition of attorneys like Weiss.

"We have worked hard to build a platform that features top talent, sophisticated clients, transparent compensation, and a diverse and positive work environment," Liu said in a statement. "We are happy to be able to attract exceptional lawyers like Carla."

Nichols told Law360 Pulse that the firm's attorneys are juggling about a dozen bid protest matters, about four to five False Claims Act litigation cases and also are working on about two or three suspension and disbarment matters. The team also worked on a range of claims cases at various stages, he said.

"I think we have the profile that we want: young, aggressive litigators who solve problems," Nichols said.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.