

Gibson Dunn's \$2 Billion Litigation Arm Just Got a Big Boost

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Gibson Dunn's hire of Bill Savitt adds a crucial puzzle piece to the firm's yearslong growth campaign, building an army of go-to litigators for a broad range of court fights.

Savitt, who until this week was the co-leader of powerful corporate firm Wachtell Lipton, brings expertise in high-stakes disputes in Delaware's Chancery court. He joins a firm long known for its litigation chops, which is winning more work on the kinds of deals that often wind up before the country's top business court.

He also adds to Gibson Dunn's haul of first-chair litigators such as Jeffrey Wall, the former acting solicitor general who brought a team of appeals lawyers from Sullivan & Cromwell in April, white collar defense attorney Barry Berke and Texas trial lawyer Trey Cox. They have all joined the firm in the past six years, bringing heft to a group that already features veteran trial lawyers Ted Boutrous and Orin Snyder.

"There is no firm with this breadth and depth of litigation talent," Snyder, co-chair of Gibson Dunn's trial practice group, said in an interview. "And that was before we hired the elite M&A and Delaware practice in the country, which is Bill and his group."

The firm has kept its eye on litigation as Big Law rivals spent the last decade feverishly building corporate practices. Litigation work accounted for more than \$2 billion of Gibson Dunn's record \$4.2 billion in gross revenue in 2025, according to the firm.

Snyder was instrumental in bringing over Savitt's team, as well as Berke from Kramer Levin in New York in 2024. The firm can offer corporate clients a suite of top litigators providing expertise across different types of disputes and jurisdictions, said Managing Partner Barbara Becker.

The hiring tear bucks the trend in Big Law, where corporate and transactional practices fueled exponential growth among the nation's top law firms. Litigation practices have been viewed by some as

loss-leaders when compared to the enormous sums of money coming in from humming private equity and M&A practices.

Becker, an M&A lawyer who has led the firm since 2021, has a vision. She can already see Wall's appellate group "going to market with Bill and his team who are trial lawyers as a combination to deliver that full service for our clients."

'Value of the Practice'

Savitt's resume dovetails with Gibson Dunn's rise among top corporate transactions firms. The firm has made gains this year on work for Elon Musk's SpaceX, including steering its massive IPO and its acquisition of artificial intelligence startup xAI.

Savitt is perhaps best known for taking on Musk in court, first to force him to follow through on a plan to buy Twitter and later successfully defending OpenAI CEO Sam Altman against a Musk suit challenging the company's shift to a for-profit business. He has also been handling litigation matters for Warner Bros. Discovery Inc. in its \$110 billion proposed sale to Paramount Skydance.

"There is a synergistic relationship between competing for and winning some of the highest stakes deals with having a really high-profile litigation practice," said Todd Merkin, a New York-based recruiter and the executive director of Wegman Partners. "To have an elite M&A practice, it helps to have a really elite litigation team," he said.

The combination also spoke to Wall, who joined with four Sullivan & Cromwell lawyers in a shakeup for the Supreme Court bar.

"While other firms are backing away from or not growing litigation, Gibson Dunn's growing it across the board," Wall said. "Everyone understands the value of the practice."

“Appellate lawyers are involved very early in matters, even at the pitch stage,” he said.

“Right at the beginning, when the matter comes in, there’s typically an appellate lawyer who is part of the team,” he said. “That is something that other firms are just starting to do but still have trouble with because they don’t have a big, developed practice.”

Some rivals have already started bulking up their litigation and appeals rosters. Kirkland & Ellis, which grew its litigation practice into a \$3 billion business, has recently focused on adding scores of mass tort defense lawyers. The country’s top-grossing law firm this year also poached Christopher Michel, co-chair of Quinn Emanuel’s national appellate practice. Wall Street’s Davis Polk & Wardwell snagged appellate star Kannon Shanmugam days after Wall’s move to Gibson Dunn and Cooley LLP tapped Elizabeth Prelogar, the former solicitor general, to lead its Supreme Court and appellate practice.

But the moves by Gibson Dunn, and a shift by Paul Weiss to focus on transactions work, sets the firm apart from many of its competitors. “This arguably puts Gibson in a rarefied air where they are essentially the top dog,” Merkin said.

Wall, who served in President Donald Trump’s first administration, and his team recently secured a win for Boeing. The US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit this month shot down a securities class action against the aerospace giant, a ruling that makes it harder for shareholders to achieve class status.

Morgan Ratner, who jumped to Gibson Dunn with Wall, last month notched a victory for Exxon Mobil Corp. in the US Supreme Court. The case stems from a dispute with Cuba’s state-owned Corporación CIMEX SA over the use of confiscated oil and gas assets.

The firm’s appellate group—one of the first in Big Law—has more than 100 partners, according to Becker. It is “one of our preeminent practices,” she said.

The practice was founded by veteran Supreme Court advocate Ted Olson in the mid 1980s. Olson, who argued 64 cases in front of the nation’s high court, died in 2024. Wall, who has argued more than 30 cases before the Supreme Court, has taken the mantle from his longtime friend.

“There’s a history here of the appellate practice mattering within the firm, mattering within the larger

DC appellate bar, and the opportunity to help carry that forward was an important part of it for me,” said Wall.

First Chairs

Gibson Dunn’s continued investment in litigation “speaks to their strengths overall historically and it’s something where the market says it is worth the investment” as advances in technology will cause disputes and growth in high-stakes, high-dollar bet-the-company litigation matters, said Washington-based legal recruiter Justine Donahue.

California-based Boutros and Snyder scored a victory last year for OpenAI in a first-of-its-kind defamation case stemming from an AI hallucination. Boutros also successfully represented National Public Radio (NPR) in a major First Amendment lawsuit against the Trump administration.

“Part of what drives a significant litigation practice is having the first-chair trial teams that you can present,” Berke said.

Berke, who jumped to Gibson Dunn in 2024 with a team of white collar defense lawyers from Kramer Levin, secured the dismissal of an \$840 million supplier dispute against Amazon Inc. earlier this month in New York. He served as lead counsel for the US House in Trump’s Senate impeachment before joining the firm and defended Bill Hwang, the Archegos Capital Management founder convicted on fraud charges.

Over in Texas, Cox joined the firm in Dallas in 2020 from prominent litigation shop Lynn Pinker. He led a trial team that successfully represented Energy Transfer in a long-running dispute over 2016 Dakota Access Pipeline protests.

The firm is also grooming a new crop of top litigators among the teams that have joined and homegrown lawyers rising up the ranks, according to Berke. That is key in a world where top partners are more willing to jump firms than even before.

“Some of the largest, most significant Am Law 100 firms never developed their next generation of first-chair trial lawyers, thinking that their loyal client base would continue to bring their top litigation there, but the market has changed,” Berke said.