

4 Clare Locke Partners Leave To Launch DC Defamation Firm

By **Alison Knezevich**

Law360 (August 4, 2023, 3:51 PM EDT) -- Four partners from Clare Locke LLP, the small law firm that represented Dominion Voting Systems in its massive settlement with Fox Corp., are striking out on their own to start a Washington, D.C., firm focused on high-profile defamation litigation.

Meier Watkins Phillips Pusch LLP will be "devoted to reputation management and fighting misinformation," according to an announcement Thursday. Its founding partners are Megan L. Meier, Daniel P. Watkins, Andy Phillips and Dustin Pusch.

In addition to litigating defamation cases, the new firm will work "with elite public relations firms and in-house counsel to secure accurate media coverage for clients," its announcement said.

Phillips told Law360 Pulse on Friday that the four partners felt the timing was right to launch their own business.

He and Meier had been with Clare Locke since 2014, when it was founded by Tom Clare and Libby Locke. Both were previously with Kirkland & Ellis LLP, as were Clare and Locke.

"We got to be part of the process of watching them build" the firm, "and have a lot of respect for what they did," said Phillips, whose experience includes serving as co-lead trial counsel in University of Virginia administrator Nicole Eramo's defamation lawsuit against Rolling Stone magazine.

The partners starting the new firm "felt that the time was right for us to do the same," Phillips said.

Watkins had been with Clare Locke since 2016, and Pusch since 2015, according to profiles on their former firm's website.

Clare Locke, based in Alexandria, Virginia, represents clients facing "high-profile reputational attacks," including cases against major media outlets.

Along with Susman Godfrey LLP and Farnan LLP, the firm represented Dominion in obtaining a **\$787.5 million settlement** this year to resolve the voting machine company's \$1.6 billion defamation suit against Fox. Clare, Meier, Pusch and Watkins **made up the Clare Locke team** on the case.

In a Thursday email to Clare Locke staff that the firm shared with Law360 Pulse, firm leaders wished the former partners well and said their team "is well positioned for an orderly transition," with plans "to continue adding attorneys to serve our rapidly growing client base."



Megan L. Meier



Daniel P. Watkins



Andy Phillips

"We would be remiss if we did not say, from the bottom of our hearts, that we wish our colleagues much continued success in the defamation bar, where smaller firms are needed to take on matters of significant importance for clients of all resources," the email from Clare Locke and partner Joe Oliveri said. "An expanded plaintiff-side defamation bar with the ability to hold the press accountable benefits society as a whole."

Phillips told Law360 Pulse that there is growing demand for attorneys who handle defamation work.

"I think there is plenty of business to support multiple firms in this space," he said.

--Additional reporting by Leslie A. Pappas, Jeff Montgomery and Kevin Penton. Editing by John C. Davenport.



Dustin Pusch