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## Trade Policy Whiplash Drives Firm Hiring Spree In DC

By **Alison Knezevich**

Law360 (June 5, 2025, 4:47 PM EDT) -- As President Donald Trump's tariffs and other policy changes fuel client demand, law firms are on pace for a nearly 60% increase in international trade hiring in the greater Washington, D.C., legal market this year, according to new data.

Figures provided to Law360 Pulse by the legal data company Firm Prospects LLC show that firms have hired 71 international trade lawyers in Washington, D.C., Maryland and northern Virginia through the end of May. Last year, firms hired 108 in the region, which was an increase of 20% over the prior year.

With trade practices fielding a surge in questions from clients, firms are snapping up attorneys and advisers specializing in international trade, and several in the nation's capital have recently hired lawyers with government experience they say will help companies navigate the unsettled trade policy environment.

"The demand right now is huge," said Ron Oleynik, who co-chairs the international trade practice at Holland & Knight LLP. For clients, "there's complete uncertainty."

After issuing sweeping tariffs on major trading partners in early April, Trump later announced a 90-day pause that ends in July. Then in May, the U.S. and China agreed to temporarily lower tariffs for 90 days. Last week, the U.S. Court of International Trade **struck down** Trump's tariffs only to see the Federal Circuit **temporarily reinstate them** the next day. And this week, Trump doubled steel and aluminum tariffs to 50%.

Clients "want to know all the information possible in this uncertain world so they can make the best decisions they can," said Lee Smith, leader of the international trade and national security practice at Baker Donelson Bearman Caldwell & Berkowitz PC.

Smith joined Baker Donelson in 2021, after serving as acting assistant secretary for export enforcement in the Bureau of Industry and Security at the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In recent weeks, several law firms have brought on other former government officials to trade practices in D.C.

This week, White & Case LLP brought on Liz Abraham, who previously was director of the International Policy Office at the Bureau of Industry and Security.

And in mid-May, Holland & Knight announced it had **added** Patrick Childress, a former assistant general counsel in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Oleynik said Childress' insights from the government will help the firm and its clients "look at that cloudy crystal ball and see where things are going."

Meanwhile, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP hired **Matthew Borman and Eileen Albanese**, two former senior officials with the Bureau of Industry and Security. They are among other members of the trade practice with federal government experience, including people who have worked at agencies such as the U.S. Department of Justice and the Office of Foreign Assets Control.

"What we think that brings to clients is a deep understanding of the policy implications behind regulatory changes, as well as a sense of how regulations may develop in the future," said Jonathan Poling, the head of Akin's international trade practice.

Akin's public policy group last month also **brought on** Kelly Ann Shaw, who was a senior trade official during Trump's first term and served as a lead trade negotiator. Shaw joined Akin from Hogan Lovells, where she was co-leader of the geopolitical risk and national security program.

A range of firms have shown high interest in trade lawyers, particularly those with experience in government, according to D.C.-based recruiters.

"I think everybody knew that this was going to be a big part of Trump's agenda and there would be changes in regulations, and uncertainty — and this was an area that would not slow down," said Lauren Drake, a partner with Macrae.

Steve Nelson, an executive consultant at The McCormick Group Inc., said he anticipates continued demand, "given the fact that we don't know where these tariffs are going."

"Trump is dedicated to this concept" of tariffs, but has also shown a willingness to change or back down from certain policies, he said, adding that hiring was already picking up in this practice area the past few years. "So everything keeps changing, and when things keep changing, it's good for lawyers."

In the past month, firms that have announced D.C.-based trade law hires include Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, Covington & Burling LLP, DLA Piper and ArentFox Schiff LLP.

And in April, Polsinelli PC said it **hired** Dominic L. Bianchi, the former longtime general counsel of the U.S. International Trade Commission to bolster its practice group that advises clients about ITC rules and procedures. The month before, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP **announced** it added a 14-member team, including three partners, from Curtis Mallet-Prevost Colt & Mosle LLP to its international trade practice.

Beyond D.C., Akin **brought on** former export enforcement official Gregory Dunlap in Los Angeles. Holland & Knight recently **hired** Connecticut-based international trade partners Tahlia Townsend and Daniel Goren from Wiggin and Dana LLP. The firm also has formalized a tariff task force that includes attorneys from its international trade, public policy and litigation groups.

Oleynik, Holland & Knight's international trade practice co-leader, said he personally has had dozens of new matters, some from new clients and others from existing ones, since Trump's second term began.

"This is the most disruptive period I've experienced," Oleynik told Law360 Pulse.

And more work is expected.

Many companies are "waiting to see when the dust settles" with tariff policy before making major decisions, Poling of Akin said.

"If they're going to make big investments or change supply chains around, they want to have some certainty as to what the rules look like, what the tariffs are going to be," before they spend capital, Poling said.

Once there is more certainty, companies will likely move forward with major decisions for which they will need legal advice, he said.

"My expectation is that as busy as we are, there is a wave of even more work coming," Poling said.

--Additional reporting by Jack Rodgers, Rose Krebs, James Mills, Lauren Berg and Natalie Olivo.  
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