

Rising Star: Paul Weiss' Roberto J. Gonzalez

By John Kennedy

Law360, New York (April 20, 2016, 8:58 PM ET) -- Still just 37, Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison LLP partner Roberto J. Gonzalez has already helped build the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and served as special assistant to the president, achievements that aided him in earning a spot on Law360's list of the top banking attorneys under the age of 40.

Gonzalez, who worked for three years at WilmerHale before signing on with the government in 2009, went back to private practice in September when he joined Paul Weiss as a litigation partner. One of five banking attorneys to make Law360's 2016 Rising Stars list, he now focuses on representing financial institutions and other clients in trial and appellate litigation, white collar and regulatory defense, internal investigations and congressional proceedings.

"Roberto is an extraordinary lawyer with deep knowledge of the broad range of complex issues facing financial institutions, including, specifically, in the areas of financial regulation, Dodd-Frank, economic sanctions, anti-money laundering and cybersecurity," Paul Weiss Chair Brad Karp told Law360. "Needless to say, Roberto's expertise is in high demand today."

Gonzalez entered public service in 2009 when he joined the White House with the election of President Barack Obama after becoming involved in Obama's campaign and says he was excited to work for the administration.

As an associate White House counsel and special assistant to Obama, Gonzalez advised on a wide variety of subjects, including financial regulation, criminal justice, homeland security and immigration policy. He also represented the White House during investigations by Congress and the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission.

In 2011, Gonzalez was hired by now-Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who had been tasked with setting up the CFPB after the passage of the Dodd-Frank Act. He joined the new agency at the ground floor and was eventually promoted to principal deputy general counsel, where he was second-in-charge of a legal

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Roberto Gonzalez
Paul Weiss

department comprised of more than 55 lawyers.

Gonzalez told Law360 that those involved in setting up the CFPB were working with a pretty clean slate as they sought to figure out what Title X of the Dodd-Frank Act would allow them to do with the agency. He said this involved ensuring that the legal positions were defensible and faithful to the law while not limiting the agency's authority.

Given that everything was being done during a time of great controversy, it was "a very high-pressure, stressful environment," Gonzalez said.

During his two years at the CFPB, Gonzalez oversaw the legal review of all rulemakings, enforcement actions and other supervisory matters while working as a leader regarding the bureau's mortgage rules that responded to the failings exposed by the 2008 financial crisis.

He left the CFPB in 2013 for the U.S. Department of the Treasury, where he supervised more than 100 lawyers as deputy general counsel and served as part of Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew's senior team of advisers.

While at the Treasury, the sanctions regimes involving Russia, Iran and Cuba saw significant developments, and there were landmark enforcement actions for both sanctions and anti-money laundering violations.

A significant focus of his last year at the Treasury was leading the defense against MetLife Inc.'s challenge to its Financial Stability Oversight Council designation as a systemically important financial institution. Since then, a federal judge freed MetLife from its designation, a ruling the Treasury has said it will appeal.

Gonzalez, a Stanford Law School graduate, has also long been committed to the Hispanic community and civil rights. As an associate at WilmerHale, he had a thriving pro bono practice, something that he says he'd like to continue at Paul Weiss.

This dedication continued after he joined the White House, where he also served as the day-to-day legal adviser to senior staff on immigration issues and worked with the Department of Homeland Security on enforcement policy reforms. He also worked with the administration as it challenged Arizona's anti-immigration legislation in court.

--Editing by Bruce Goldman.
