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For Quinn Emanuel, Perennial Success Begins With Talent and Litigation Pedigree

By Andrew Maloney

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Even if you didn't pay any attention to the legal industry, chances are you'd still be familiar with the work Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan has taken up over the last couple years. Lawyers for the litigation-focused powerhouse have represented everyone from Alec Baldwin to crypto magnate Changpeng Zhao; from Harvard University to Kilmar Abrego Garcia.

That range was arguably underscored when President Donald Trump called for co-managing partner William Burck to be ousted from the role of outside ethics adviser for the Trump Organization earlier this year because of his position as counsel to Harvard, in its challenge to billions in federal funding cuts. But Burck told *The American Lawyer* this fall that, despite being politicized in 2025, Quinn Emanuel remains apolitical.

"We're not a political firm. We don't skew Democrat or Republican in the cases we take on," he said. "We've always believed the firm represents clients, and if the clients' position



Courtesy photo

(l-r) Quinn Emanuel's William (Bill) Burck, Global Co-Managing Partner, Partner Maaren Shah, Co-Managing Partners of the New York Office Jennifer Barrett and Andrew Rossman, Partner McKenzie Anderson, Aliki Sofis, Co-Managing Partner of the Boston Office, Partner Emily Kapur, and Patrick Curran, Co-Managing Partner of the Boston Office.

is one that has validity in the law, it's one that we'll take on so long as we don't have a conflict or some specific ethical reason."

When it does take on a case, the firm does it with everything it's got. It has no other choice. Unlike its peers in the top echelon of the Global 200, Quinn Emanuel works on litigation, and litigation only; all of its more than 1,200 lawyers focus on litigation. All of them

prepare as if each matter is going to trial, the firm stated in a submission, and none of them have to think about pulling punches to preserve a potential transactional partner down the road.

The headline cases, of course, are worth poring over. But in short, the firm won multiple victories, from district court to the U.S. Supreme Court, in pro bono work representing Garcia, who was removed by the government to a prison complex in El Salvador, in one of the first highly publicized clashes involving the Trump administration's aggressive immigration enforcement.

Last year, the firm also helped Baldwin, the Academy Award and Emmy-winning actor and producer, get charges dismissed for a shooting on the set of the movie "Rust," after it was determined that law enforcement withheld evidence.

Quinn Emanuel also continues to represent Harvard in ongoing lawsuits against the Trump administration, challenging its mandates surrounding "viewpoint diversity" in hiring and admissions and its decision to cut billions in federal grant money, as well as the administration's effort to prohibit international student enrollment.

And the firm helped Zhao, the recently pardoned former CEO of cryptocurrency exchange Binance, resolve an SEC lawsuit accusing his company of registration violations and misleading investors. The commission voluntarily ended the case, but Quinn Emanuel lawyers described the claims as "legal overreach," particularly as the commission was working

toward new regulations for digital assets.

Besides taking on high-profile clients, Quinn Emanuel has notched signature victories with pluck, creativity and talent, its lawyers say. Indeed, "the beginning and the end of our success in any market is talent," John Quinn, executive chair and founding partner of the firm, told *The American Lawyer*.

That was on display when the firm secured a victory for Desktop Metal, a 3D printer and maker of specialized parts for missile and satellite systems, in a bet-the-company case this spring. A separate company, Nano Dimension, had agreed to buy Desktop, but after a boardroom shake-up, the company stalled and ultimately was found to have tried to sink the deal. Among other things, a judge noted Quinn Emanuel's lawyers made "herculean" efforts to produce tens of thousands of discovery documents and take more than 20 depositions, taking less than three months to get from complaint to trial.

The \$300 million deal closed in April, with partner Christopher Kercher crediting the firm's bench in particular, calling the win "an all-hands-on-deck effort" that showed "the incredible talent and grit of Quinn Emanuel's next generation of up-and-coming litigators."

"I'm especially proud that we went to trial with a team primarily composed of partners elevated in the last few years and rising associate stars," he told *The Am Law Litigation Daily*.

The firm this year also showed its sophistication in an appeals court victory for video-sharing service Vimeo, which was sued way

back in 2009 by record labels and others alleging it should have to proactively monitor user content for copyright infringement. But in the long-running case that also served as a swan song for name partner Kathleen Sullivan, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit found digital platforms didn't have an affirmative duty to monitor all user content, and a decision to evaluate and remove certain content doesn't open platforms to a duty to monitor every user video for copyright infringement. The outcome reinforces the so-called "safe harbor" protections in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and benefits plenty of other digital platforms, the firm stated.

Quinn Emanuel lawyers also showed that noncompete clauses, while generally falling out of favor, can still be enforced when they aren't overly broad, and they protect important policies and trade secrets. The firm represented Ingersoll Rand after a \$2.3 billion acquisition of ILC Dover, which has made NASA's spacesuits since the Apollo program, in obtaining an order that prevented the former CEO of ILC Dover from jumping ship to a competitor just days after the acquisition, and after he'd signed a noncompete.

Although Colorado, where the case took place, has a law rendering most noncompetes presumptively void, the September 2024 decision showed there's "still an important role for noncompetes and other restrictive covenant agreements to play in protecting companies, particularly with high-level executives, as long as the agreements are not overreaching," Andrew Rossman, a partner at the firm, told *The Am Law Litigation Daily*. He noted he was speaking to the specifics of this case. But added that "[t]ailored and reasonable noncompete agreements advance important public policies, like protecting trade secrets and the value of a business, both of which are key incentives for investment."

More broadly, the firm has also continued growing on the business side, putting up double-digit gains in revenue, net income and profits per partner during 2023 and 2024, and adding personnel. "We increased head count, so we continue to grow the firm," co-managing partner Michael Carlinsky told *The American Lawyer* earlier this year. "We have more time keepers billing time, [and] the demand for our work, the hours of lawyers, was up."