

A Multidisciplinary Approach

An Interview with Jeannie Rhee, Managing Partner, Washington, D.C. Office,
Co-Chair, Investigations Practice and Cybersecurity & Data Protection Group,
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP

EDITORS' NOTE *Managing Partner of the firm's 125-lawyer Washington, D.C. office and Co-Chair of the firm's Investigations Practice and Cybersecurity & Data Protection Group, Jeannie Rhee is an experienced crisis manager and litigator and former federal prosecutor who has helped numerous Fortune 100 clients safely navigate their most significant civil, white collar and regulatory exposure. She has also devoted herself throughout her career to upholding the principles of the rule of law and transforming the profession through diversity and inclusion efforts.*



Jeannie Rhee

FIRM BRIEF *Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP (paulweiss.com) is a premier firm of more than 1,000 lawyers with diverse backgrounds, personalities, ideas and interests who provide innovative and effective solutions to their clients' most complex legal and business challenges. The firm represents many of the world's largest and most important public and private corporations, asset managers and financial institutions, and clients in need of pro bono assistance.*

Will you discuss your career journey?

I literally planned to be a lawyer since fourth grade, when my teacher assigned me to play a prosecutor in a mock trial of candy over the charge of causing tooth decay. At law school, though I initially leaned toward an academic career, that changed when I clerked for the late Judge Stanley Sporkin in the District of Columbia. In his courtroom I had the chance

to witness some of the era's greatest trial lawyers on high-profile cases, and I was hooked. From there, I became an assistant U.S. attorney in the D.C. U.S. Attorney's Office, trying more than 30 cases. In 2009, I was appointed as Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel; subsequently, I went into private practice. More recently, I returned to government to lead teams investigating cyber and social media interference in U.S. affairs by foreign actors.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Paul, Weiss, and what made you feel it was the right fit?

During my time in government, I came into contact with hundreds of represented parties and their counsel. The lawyers I met from Paul, Weiss stood out; they demonstrated a collaborative, cross-disciplinary, and solutions-oriented approach to their work that I admired. When I was getting ready to leave government after my most recent stint, I knew I wanted to work across my diverse areas of expertise and team up with my talented partners rather than be siloed. Paul, Weiss encouraged that. Also, the caliber of Paul, Weiss's clients was and is so stellar; I would have the opportunity to help leading global businesses facing enterprise-threatening situations. So, I reached out directly to Paul, Weiss chairman Brad Karp and asked to meet. I made my case to him and the rest is history.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

As Co-Chair of the Investigations Practice and as a senior member of our Litigation

Department, I handle a very wide range of critical matters, including major investigations and litigations. What characterizes all of my matters is that they are mission-critical, high-stakes, and sensitive, and resolving them requires a multidisciplinary approach. My biggest strength is as a strategist and crisis manager, whether I'm leading the defense of a company at trial, helping my client respond to regulatory inquiries, or leading internal investigations. My practice is very forward-looking; even as I am developing a defense case or investigating an incident or allegation, I am always working to understand my client's objective, and how we can achieve that objective and mitigate future risks.

Internally, as Managing Partner of our Washington, D.C. office, I'm focused on recruiting the absolute best talent to our ranks in Washington, and on strengthening diversity and inclusion at all levels. I'm also focused on making sure that all our lawyers and business professionals feel supported in their careers just as I have felt supported and acknowledged.

How do you describe Paul, Weiss' culture and values?

The professional culture here is one of supporting people and daring them to be their very best selves. It is a meritocratic environment and excellence in client service is a given. But it's also incredibly supportive – I've always worked hard, but here I feel acknowledged, challenged, supported, and rewarded in my practice. To take my own experience, I came to the firm from government with no clients of my own, but my partners rapidly roped me into new and significant matters. Today, I am leading several high-stakes, threatening litigations and

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investigations matters on behalf of some of the firm’s most important clients. In 2023, I was promoted to lead the Washington, D.C. office, and this past year, together with my colleagues Harris Fischman and John Carlin, we launched a formalized Investigations Practice. This fall, I co-led the defense of our client Google in a major antitrust trial by the government.

What have been the keys to the strength of Paul, Weiss’ Investigations Practice?

More than ever before, our clients face overlapping scrutiny by multiple federal, state and foreign law enforcement agencies, as well as by Congressional committees. As governmental bodies around the globe increasingly coordinate their approach, we saw the need to do the same, moving away from hyper-specialization to leverage a 360-degree perspective. Our highly integrated cross-disciplinary approach differentiates us in the market.

Investigations are rarely standalone matters; they occur against the backdrop of a host of other legal and reputational challenges. Although all of us do a lot of work in the congressional investigations space, none of us devotes ourselves to it exclusively; for instance, I regularly try cases. Moreover, the Investigations Practice is integrated within the larger Litigation Department, with its deep bench of leading trial lawyers and specialists in all the key substantive areas. If an investigation leads to bet-the-company litigation, we aren’t afraid to take the case to trial. This is an incredible advantage for our clients.

Last, our Investigations team includes numerous lawyers who served at high levels in state and federal law enforcement agencies, on Capitol Hill, and in the White House. They know the culture, protocol, and investigative

staff at key congressional committees and the priorities of government regulators. So, we’re able to craft strategies with the political climate and media and other strategic concerns in mind.

Paul, Weiss is a firm that is deeply committed to pro bono work. Will you speak about your own experience and views on this?

I believe that fighting for justice and safeguarding the rule of law are an essential part of my ethical responsibilities as an attorney, and taking on high-impact pro bono litigation was a big draw for me when I joined in 2019, and it’s been an important part of my experience here. My main focus has been on groundbreaking cases seeking to hold hate groups financially accountable for racist and extremist violence. I represented Washington’s historical Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, where we won a landmark \$2.8 million judgment against the extremist group the Proud Boys over their racist attack targeting the church over its public support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Alongside the Anti-Defamation League and co-counsel, I’m also representing the D.C. Attorney General in the District’s related ongoing suit against the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers for their role in planning and carrying out the deadly January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. These cases resonate personally with me as an immigrant of color; while I have been embraced by this country and have built a successful career here, I’m deeply troubled by the national surge in hate-driven violence.

I’m incredibly proud that Paul, Weiss has the courage to back these cases, and I’m honored to be involved personally. Last May, Paul, Weiss launched the Center to Combat

Hate, deepening its investment in impact litigation to hold hate groups financially accountable for their actions, and I’m a founding member.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the legal profession?

Women in the law continue to face a number of societal and structural obstacles to grow and lead; let’s never sugar-coat how hard it can be for women in the workforce. But at the same time, there are myriad opportunities for women to succeed in the legal profession if they work hard, find work environments where their contributions are valued, and above all, believe in themselves.

In my own career, both in government and private practice, I have been fortunate that my talent and achievements have been recognized and rewarded. And today, I am surrounded by successful women leaders at my firm – many of our practice leaders and office heads are women. In particular, I’m proud of the resources Paul, Weiss devotes to training, developing, and promoting women attorneys.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in law?

To succeed in a career in law, as in any high-performance professional career, you have to be your own best advocate and believe in yourself; don’t just sit around and wait for others to pick you out. Find the people who are willing to invest in you, but always recognize that mentorship is a two-way street; you still have to put in the hard work and deliver to the best of your abilities without cutting corners. You will only get back what you put into the effort. ●

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