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Dan Gelber launches new firm with duo from Stearns Weaver

After practicing solo since his failed bid for Florida attorney general in 2010, Dan Gelber has formed a new firm with Adam Schachter and Gerald Greenberg from Stearns Weaver, specializing in complex civil litigation and white-collar criminal defense.

Julie Kay

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Former state Senator Dan Gelber, who lost a bid for Florida attorney general in 2010, has formed a new firm with Adam Schachter and Gerald Greenberg from Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson.

The firm, which will specialize in complex civil litigation and white-collar criminal defense, opened for business Tuesday in downtown Miami.

"I've done the big firm thing, and I enjoyed it, but I really look forward to practicing in a collegial setting with people I respect and love to work with," Gelber said. "I looked at medium firms and large firms but ultimately decided I wanted to work in a small setting."

Schachter and Greenberg said they decided to leave Stearns Weaver not out of dissatisfaction but out of a desire to start their own law firm.

"We always had an interest in starting our own firm and practice law in a lean, close-knit environment," said Greenberg, son of former Miami-Dade County Attorney Murray Greenberg and brother of Assistant U.S. Attorney Ben Greenberg.

Schachter said, "It was a tough decision, but it's been incredibly gratifying to take control of our careers."

Some clients followed the two, but not BankAtlantic Bancorp. Schachter helped argue for the bank in a shareholder class action against the Fort Lauderdale-based bank holding company. BankAtlantic lost a jury verdict, which was set aside by U.S. District Judge Ursula Ungaro.

They hope to get referrals from their former law firm.

The lawyers are the latest in a recent string of partners at large law firms who are leaving to start their own firms in South Florida. Three lawyers recently left White & Case's Miami office to launch their own firm.

Gelber, a Democrat, was at Akerman Senterfitt from 2005 to 2010 and left after the Daily Business Review raised questions about whether his position raised a conflict in his run for attorney general after BP PLC hired Akerman to represent it in oil spill claims.

Gelber was a Miami federal prosecutor for a decade, handling cases involving public corruption, economic and environmental crimes, civil rights, health-care fraud and government fraud. He rose to become a top deputy in an office with more than 200 lawyers.

In 1994, Gelber was tapped by former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia as chief counsel and staff director of the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. He led a team of prosecutors and federal agents investigating international terrorism, cybersecurity issues and fraud, waste and abuse in government programs.

For a decade, Gelber served as a state senator and state representative and was elected House minority leader in 2006. In private practice, Gelber also worked for Holland & Knight and Zuckerman Spaeder where he represented companies in government and internal investigations, white-collar matters and complex litigation.

Since the attorney general's race, Gelber has been a solo practitioner. He interviewed with small, midsized and large firms before deciding to partner with two friends.

The three lawyers are all Democrats and expect to do some political work. They represent a coalition of state and national advocacy groups and people who filed a challenge to the state Senate redistricting plan Wednesday.

"But we don't want to be known as the Democratic law firm," Greenberg said.

Roberto Martinez, a former Republican appointee as U.S. attorney and Gelber's former boss, called the new firm "a great combination of experience and talent. I think any client or co-counsel would be lucky to get them."

Joe Ankus, a longtime legal headhunter with Ankus Consulting in Weston, agreed. "That's a powerful firm. Any firm with Dan Gelber in it is going to be impressive."

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