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Former Bush aide will lead law firm's cleantech group

BY FORD GUNTER
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A former U.S. Department of Energy employee from the Bush administration has come to Houston to launch a Texas law firm's cleantech practice group.

Dallas-based Haynes and Boone, LLP has built its 26-attorney Houston cleantech group around Paul Dickerson, former head of the office of energy efficiency and renewable energy at the DOE. The practice group is designed to help energy companies bridge the gap from product or process design to development to deployment.



Dickerson

"The goal is to represent the operating companies and the venture capitalists and private equity companies that finance them," Dickerson says.

The toughest challenges in government work are recruiting and retaining talent and getting allocated money to its correct target, Dickerson says.

One of the first moves in office made by Steven Chu, President Barack Obama's newly appointed secretary of energy, was to appoint a task force to address this very issue within the DOE.

And while tapping funding and support for a revolving door of innovations during a recession is difficult, there are factors working for cleantech as well.

For one, Chu comes from a cleantech re-

search background. Second, Obama's vocal support of alternative and renewable energy could mean big things for businesses in that sector — and possibly for the law firms that represent them.

So far for Dickerson, the results have been positive. Dickerson, who is on his second go-round with Haynes and Boone, brought on seven new clients in the first 10 days, and nine in the first two weeks.

Dickerson chose Haynes and Boone in part for its presence in Silicon Valley and Los Angeles, to which he also credits the ease at which he has attracted clients.

Dickerson, a native Houstonian, left Haynes & Boone in 2005 to take a job as the chief of staff for the United States and foreign commercial service at the U.S. Department of Commerce. From there, he moved on to the DOE, where he oversaw a \$1.8 billion budget and a staff of 1,000.

This time around, his staff will certainly be smaller, but only slightly less diverse.

"It was important to me to have diversity based on seniority — partners, of counsels, associates — in different types of practice: IP; transaction; litigation; securities," Dickerson says. "Many, if not all, have worked on cleantech deals. Haynes and Boone has been playing in this space for a long time."

Houston-based partner Chris Wolfe will co-chair the cleantech practice group, which spans 10 offices.

"Nobody knows more than Paul about the pressing needs of the global energy market and the available real-world solutions," Wolfe said in a statement.

Dickerson's first year on the job will be a virtual road show of sorts (he bought his Midtown townhouse sight-unseen), traveling throughout the U.S. and the world to promote the firm's cleantech efforts.

"For a Houston-based group to be attracting clients in Boston, New York, Chicago, California, Minnesota — it's pretty exciting," he says. "The world is flat; we have solar companies doing deals in Japan, Spanish companies doing wind deals ..."

For a Bush administration veteran, Dickerson has so far accepted — if not embraced — Obama's efforts and the potential they provide for clean energy down the road.

"We're excited," he says. "A large part (of the stimulus plan) involves the cleantech space: Investment in infrastructure for biofuel, for solar; making federal, county, state and local government buildings more efficient; and buying American products to do so. I see the stimulus program for cleantech doing exactly what it set out to do, which is stimulate the economy through spending and job creation here at home."

As for Texas, which Dickerson warns could be soon left in the dust by California in the cleantech space, the time is now.

"The combination of the stimulus bill, the current state of the economy and the overall recognition that cleantech is a profitable venture has made Texas, Houston and energy companies much more excited," he says. "They have connected the dots to profitability in the cleantech space."

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