

The New York Times

City Room

Blogging From the Five Boroughs

FEBRUARY 4, 2011, 5:01 PM

2010 Was a Year for Law Firm Partners to Stay Put

By JOHN ELIGON

Far fewer partners switched law firms last year than in 2009, according to an article in *The American Lawyer* this week.

In the 12-month period ending in September, 2,014 partners left or joined firms in *The American Lawyer's* Top 200, a 27 percent decrease from the 2,775 moves a year earlier, according to the article.

So what does this mean for the legal profession?

As the article points out, the change could be a result of the high number of firms that folded in 2009, which naturally led partners to change firms.

Some law firm managers said the statistics could be an indication of the economic instability in the legal world over the past few years.

Some partners were reluctant to go to new firms where they did not know what the economic outlook was, said Kenneth A. Lefkowitz, the deputy chairman at Hughes Hubbard & Reed.

"When markets are uncertain you'd rather be the devil you know than the devil you don't know," Mr. Lefkowitz said.

Firms were also wary of giving lucrative offers because of the economic climate, he said.

But his firm, like some others, was actually able to lure some partners because of the bad economy, Mr. Lefkowitz said. That's because some firms put moratoriums on promoting associates to partners. In at least one case, he said, Hughes Hubbard was able to lure a senior associate from a firm with a promise of partnership.

Many partners probably also felt that they were not in a position to get good offers from other firms because their own practices had struggled during the downturn, said Barton J. Winokur, the chairman of Dechert.

"There's a culture of partners wanting to move when they think they have good numbers to move," Mr. Winokur said, adding that partners have not been able to boast that they brought in big business – like \$10 million or \$20 million – in the down economic years.

Confirmation hearing

Republican members of Congress are paving a difficult path for Caitlin J. Halligan to win appointment to a seat on the federal appeals court in Washington, according to an article in the New York Law Journal.

Ms. Halligan, currently the general counsel for Cyrus R. Vance Jr., the Manhattan district attorney, was grilled during her confirmation hearing Thursday, according to the Law Journal.

“This committee has multiple precedents establishing a heightened level of scrutiny given to nominees for the Court of Appeals of the D.C. Circuit,” Senator Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said at the beginning of the hearing, according to the article.

He explained that two of George W. Bush’s six nominees for that bench were not confirmed.

Ms. Halligan, who joined the district attorney’s office last year when Mr. Vance came in, would be President Obama’s first appointment to the appeals court in Washington.

When the president nominated Ms. Halligan last September, Mr. Vance said in a statement that she was “an extraordinary attorney who brings strong legal expertise, exceptional intellect, and common sense judgment to all aspects of our work within the D.A.’s office and with other government agencies.”

The committee on Capitol Hill asked Ms. Halligan about her name being listed on a 185-page New York City Bar report that was critical of Mr. Bush’s policy of indefinite detention of terrorism suspects, according to the Law Journal.

Ms. Halligan said she did not agree with many of the views listed in the report and would be more careful in the future when deciding whether to serve on a committee, according to the article.

Ms. Halligan was formerly the New York State solicitor general and head of the appellate practice at Weil, Gotshal & Manges.

More appointments?

Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, this week recommended Katherine B. Forrest and Edgardo Ramos for seats as judges on the Federal District Court in Manhattan.

Ms. Forrest works in the antitrust division for the Justice Department in Washington. She was formerly a partner at Cravath, Swaine & Moore, where she specialized in antitrust and intellectual property cases.

Mr. Ramos is a partner at Day Pitney and was a former federal prosecutor in Brooklyn.

John Eligon and other court reporters for The New York Times take you inside the city’s

*halls of law every Friday. Have a tip? Send an e-mail message to
CourthouseConfidential@nytimes.com.*

Copyright 2011 The New York Times Company | Privacy Policy | NYTimes.com 620 Eighth Avenue New York, NY 10018