

Former top government lawyers are jumping into the Big Law fight against Trump

Some of the nation's former solicitors general are working to defend law firms targeted by the Trump administration.



Two prior solicitors general — Donald Verrilli and Paul Clement — have been instrumental in challenging Trump's orders in court. Verrilli, appointed by former President Barack Obama, represents the firm Susman Godfrey and Clement, appointed by former President George W. Bush, represents the firm WilmerHale. Both firms are fighting Trump's orders that cut them off from government contracts, strip their lawyers of security clearances and bar firm employees from interacting with government officials or entering government buildings.

As Trump targets major law firms for employing attorneys who have investigated him or for taking on cases he views as opposed to his personal and political interests, nine firms, [including some of the most profitable in the world](#), have opted to strike deals with the president [instead of challenging him](#) in court. But for firms who have chosen to fight the president's actions, there may be no greater advocates than those who previously spoke for the federal government at the highest level.

“You would think the first in line to defend the rule of law would be solicitors general,” said a former solicitor general granted anonymity to speak candidly. “Every single former living solicitor general should be out in front of this.”

The solicitor general is the Justice Department's top lawyer and is responsible for representing the executive branch before the Supreme Court. The position is sometimes known as the “tenth justice” for how frequently they appear before the court and their influential role in shaping its docket.

Verrilli has been especially active on the Trump matter, filing amicus briefs on behalf of hundreds of law firms who sought to take a public stand against his orders, calling the president's moves an "unprecedented threat" to the rule of law.

The president's orders are "one of the most brazenly unconstitutional exercises of executive power in the history of this nation" and a "direct assault on Article III courts and the independence of the judiciary," Verrilli said during a Tuesday hearing where a judge granted his motion to temporarily block most of the sanctions against Susman Godfrey. (Susman Godfrey lawyers subject to the executive order wouldn't even be able to go to the post office to mail a letter, Verrilli said.)