

Winston Nabs Locke Lord's Capital Markets Group Leaders

By **Elise Hansen**

Law360 (January 24, 2020, 8:57 PM EST) -- Winston & Strawn said Friday it has brought onboard the co-chairs of Locke Lord's global capital markets group for its corporate practice in Houston, where the firm has been rapidly expanding.

Michael J. Blankenship and J. Eric Johnson joined Winston & Strawn LLP earlier this month, adding to the firm's growth in Texas. Winston has more than doubled its footprint in the state over the last three years, adding close to 100 attorneys in Houston and Dallas during that time, the announcement said.

The firm's commitment to growing its Texas presence was a key factor in the decision to make the move, Johnson said.

"Real boots on the ground was really important to [Blankenship and me]," Johnson told Law360 on Friday. "A significant presence, so that you could actually be a true player in the market."

Winston also offered a sophisticated group of attorneys and had cultivated a practice poised to take advantage of conditions in the energy industry, Johnson said.

"These are interesting times in the energy industry," Johnson said. "There's opportunities for consolidation; there's opportunities to move into new technologies or new areas. [Blankenship and I] started looking around, thinking about our clients: Were we on the best platform to ensure that we were doing our clients the best level of service?" he said.

"We didn't think Locke had everything we needed and so we started looking around and Winston really checked all the boxes on the things that we were looking for," Johnson said. "From the legal, technical side, it was elite practitioners: breadth and depth," he said. "And the other part was really just culture and vision. We feel like the Winston culture really fits well with Houston — and Texas in general — and the energy industry."

Johnson spent over 21 years at Locke Lord LLP, according to his LinkedIn profile. In addition to helping lead the capital markets team, he steered a range of corporate transactions for energy companies, particularly midstream and oil field services companies.

His clients have included Marathon Oil Corp., for whom he helped steer a nearly \$1.3 billion stock offering, among other transactions; National Oilwell Varco Inc., which Johnson guided through a spinoff

of its distribution business; and NOW Inc., for whom he steered numerous acquisitions.

Blankenship arrives at Winston after nearly three years at Locke Lord, where he also helped lead the firm's fintech group and developed a specialty working on blockchain and cryptocurrency matters.

He has worked with energy companies on a range of transactions, including tubing services company Motley Services LLC in its \$148 million acquisition by oilfield services business KLX Energy Services Holdings Inc., and Cox Oil in its roughly \$322 million acquisition of Energy XXI Gulf Coast Inc.

Blankenship also emphasized the importance of Winston's expertise and scale.

"We have a platform now where we're able to provide additional, excellent lawyers with a lot of experience," he told Law360 on Friday. "And a global footprint. That's important for clients even here in Houston. That was pretty critical."

Winston's culture was also a draw, and its dedication to Texas markets was crucial, Blankenship said. "It's a very Midwestern culture and I think it fits really well with [me and Johnson] and our client base," he said. "I think the critical piece for me personally was [Winston's] growth: really seeing Texas as its own market."

Blankenship said he and Johnson are enthusiastic about the firm's present and its future. "We believe in the vision; we believe in what they're doing," he said.

--Additional reporting by Chelsea Naso. Editing by Bruce Goldman.