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## Locke Lord Loses Two Top Energy Dealmakers to Winston

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Winston & Strawn announced big news on Friday, saying it was bringing on Locke Lord global capital markets co-chairs Michael Blankenship and Eric Johnson in Houston to help further expand its Texas practice.

In an interview with The Texas Lawbook, the pair said they had been talking for months about how they could better serve their clients – and liked Winston’s plans to become one of the five or six “go-to” firms for energy capital markets and M&A work in Houston (a list that would include Kirkland & Ellis, Vinson & Elkins, Latham & Watkins, Sidley Austin and Gibson Dunn & Crutcher).



Michael  
Blankenship

“Looking at Winston & Strawn and the growth they want in Texas – up to 250 lawyers – we wanted to work with them,” Blankenship said. “We just needed a platform that Winston provides that would allow us to truly be on top.”

Blankenship said he first met with Houston partner Jimmy Vallee this past summer about the possibility of making the jump. Vallee joined Winston in April of last year from Paul Hastings, where the two both worked for a short period.

The 38-year-old Blankenship was a partner at Locke Lord for almost three years after working as a senior associate at V&E for nearly three years and an associate at Paul Hastings for a little over a year.

The 48-year-old Johnson – who spent 21 years at Locke – echoed Blankenship’s comments, saying that the two had been talking about how to improve client service – “provide more tools in the tool box” – given the opportunities in the oil and gas marketplace for consolidation and joint ventures.

“We ultimately wanted to be at a place that had

the full suite of legal services and a national platform and could serve all public companies and the PE [private equity] shops,” he said.

Some of Blankenship’s recent deals include advising Comstock Resources on its purchase of Denham Capital-backed Covey Park last year for \$2.2 billion; counseling EnCap Flatrock Midstream on Lotus Midstream’s and Moda Midstream’s \$2.6 billion acquisition of assets from Occidental Petroleum in 2018 (Vallee aided Lotus); and representing USA Compression Holdings on its purchase of Energy Transfer Partners’ compression unit CDM Resource Management for \$1.8 billion, also in 2018.



Eric  
Johnson

In an in-depth analysis in July 2018 of attorneys who had jumped firms, The Texas Lawbook found that Blankenship had worked on eight deals worth \$13 billion since the beginning of 2017, ranking him fourth in deal value in the period after Gibson Dunn partners Hillary Holmes and Mike Darden and Kirkland partner Sean Wheeler, who had recently moved from Latham.

Johnson’s work has included leading the Locke Lord team counseling National Oilwell Varco Inc. on a \$500 million public offering of 3.60% senior unsecured notes last year; and ION Geophysical on a \$47.5 million public offering in 2018 (with Blankenship).

Winston’s talent grab follows the firm’s raid of Locke Lord when it opened its Dallas office in 2017, including tax law partner Andrew Betaque; partners Billie Ellis, Todd Thorson and Matt Stockstill, who specialized in representing private equity firms on transactions; corporate finance partner Kenneth Betts; and corporate transactional partner David Lange.