

US Attorney For Colorado Resigns From Post

By **Thy Vo**

Law360 (May 15, 2024, 1:28 PM EDT) -- U.S. Attorney for the District of Colorado Cole Finegan announced Wednesday that he will step down at the end of May to return to the private sector, after serving for more than two years in the role.

Finegan, who was appointed by President Joe Biden and took office in December 2021, said in a news release that he was "forever grateful" for the opportunity to work as the district's chief federal prosecutor.

"I am equally thankful to the career attorneys and professional staff who work every day to help keep our citizens safe, to make sure that the rule of law is applied equally, and to protect the civil rights of every citizen," Finegan said. "We are fortunate to have these outstanding public servants in our state. Serving the people of Colorado alongside them will always remain one of the most significant experiences of my life."

Finegan was the managing partner of Hogan Lovells' Denver office for 14 years before his appointment. The release did not include further detail about his plans after resigning, and a spokesperson for the U.S. attorney's office in Denver declined to comment Wednesday about Finegan's plans or the office's interim leadership following his departure.

Before he joined Hogan Lovells, Finegan had served in a number of public roles. He was the chief of staff to then-Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and Denver city attorney in the 2000s, positions he held concurrently for four years. Finegan also served as chief legislative assistant and later chief of staff to U.S. Rep. James R. Jones, a Democrat from Oklahoma.

Former U.S. Attorney Jason Dunn, who served the District of Colorado from 2018 to 2021, responded to Finegan's announcement on the social platform X.

"Congrats and thank you to Cole Finegan for a great run as U.S. Attorney. Job well done," wrote Dunn, now a shareholder at Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck LLP.

Andrea Surratt, a Crowell & Moring LLP partner and former criminal prosecutor for the District of Colorado, said Finegan is known for both trusting his attorneys and a willingness to dig into the issues of a case.

"If you had an issue that needed the attention of the U.S. attorney, the attitude you would get from Cole

is, 'How can I help?' And that's how he approached the job," said Surratt, who worked at the U.S. attorney's office in Denver from 2017 until earlier this year. She also worked as a prosecutor for the Southern District of New York.

"He was also a giant in the Denver legal community before he came to the USAO. So I'm sure whatever he [does next], we haven't seen the last of him," she said.

A Colorado federal judge last month sentenced a former National Security Agency employee to 22 years in prison for trying to sell classified information to someone he believed to be a Russian agent, which Finegan called a "just sentence" at a press conference outside the courthouse in Denver.

Under Finegan's watch, the office also secured the conviction of a dentist who murdered his wife while on a hunting trip in Zambia, partnered with local law enforcement in prosecuting fentanyl dealers, and prosecuted the shooter who killed five and injured 19 others at a Colorado Springs LGBTQ+ bar in 2022, according to the news release. The shooter pled guilty to charges of federal hate crimes.

The office's statement also touted its work going after civil fraud and other misconduct, including a False Claims Act case in which two southeast Colorado farmers agreed to pay more than \$6.5 million over claims they defrauded federal crop insurance programs.

In March 2022, federal prosecutors also inked a \$20 million settlement between the federal government and Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad over damages caused by a 2018 wildland fire that damaged more than 54,000 acres of federal lands in the San Juan National Forest.

The office also focused on investigating fraud related to federal funds distributed during the coronavirus pandemic under Finegan's tenure, according to the release.

Federal prosecutors seized more than \$1 billion in stolen Economic Injury Disaster Loans and more than \$25 million in misused Colorado unemployment insurance funds, the U.S. attorney's office said.

--Editing by Daniel King.