

Firms Gear Up For Expected Surge In Congressional Probes

By Alison Knezevich

Law360 (October 8, 2026, 4:55 PM EDT) -- Law firms in Washington, D.C., have been bulking up their congressional investigations practices this year as attorneys anticipate a rise in probes in 2027 if Democrats regain power on Capitol Hill after next month's midterm elections.

Baker McKenzie, Cooley LLP and O'Melveny & Myers LLP are among the latest to announce additions to their congressional investigations teams. With Democrats potentially taking at least one chamber of Congress, firms have been adding lawyers with relationships on the Hill and firsthand experience in congressional investigations as clients look to prepare.

Firms "are seeing the current political winds and the way D.C. is impacting business in ways that it had not" previously, said Brandon Rios, a leader of DLA Piper's new congressional investigations practice, which launched this summer.

Firms have sought "to position themselves as leaders in congressional investigations before the midterms," said Garrison recruiter Amy Savage, who added there's been an increase in demand for congressional investigations partner candidates. "They want to be ready for what they're forecasting as being an incredibly active period of congressional investigations in 2027."

The investment in these practices comes as attorneys say clients face wide-ranging risks from congressional investigations, from reputational damage if a CEO's blunder during a hearing goes viral on social media, to further scrutiny if a Hill investigation sparks other probes.

A divided government typically spurs a higher volume of investigations, because lawmakers turn to oversight when they can't pass bills, attorneys said.

If Congress is split, "it's going to be harder to legislate," said Giancarlo Pellegrini, who leads the congressional investigations practice at Squire Patton Boggs LLP. "So a [committee] chairperson's thinking, 'OK, am I spending my time this week on a bill that's going to go nowhere and never get signed? Or, do I bring somebody in here for a deposition, go in there with the members, ask some tough questions, and be able to present that as a productive week?' They're going to choose that second one more often in a divided government."

Pellegrini **joined** Squire Patton in July after serving as senior counsel for the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. He led investigations on behalf of ranking member Rep. Robert Garcia, D-Calif., including Democrats' probe of Jeffrey Epstein.

Clients benefit from attorneys with specialized knowledge in congressional investigations, because they differ from other government probes in their rules and procedures, Pellegrini and others told Law360 Pulse. Understanding Washington is especially important, because "politics are so heavily infused into these investigations," he said.

Attorneys told Law360 Pulse that in addition to probing the Trump administration, Democrats are likely to scrutinize numerous topics in the private sector, including government contracts, emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, prediction markets, and an array of consumer issues related to affordability.

"I can't think of any industry right now that won't come under some form of scrutiny from Congress if Democrats were to win one or both chambers," said Marcus Childress, a leader of the congressional investigations practice at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP.

Childress, a former Jenner & Block LLP partner, joined Akin in March after serving as senior adviser to the House Judiciary Committee's ranking Democrat Jamie Raskin of Maryland. He heads Akin's practice with Abby Kohlman, a former chief of staff and special counsel for the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Legislative Affairs.

Akin brought on Childress after the firm's previous congressional investigations leaders left for Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP.

With broad scrutiny of private companies expected, clients have been preparing ahead of time, lawyers said.

This year, there's been an increase in clients seeking strategic advice on congressional oversight, "because people know what's coming," said Jeannie Rhee, managing partner of the boutique firm Dunn Isaacson Rhee LLP.

Dunn Isaacson specializes in crisis management, and its hires this year have **included** partners Danielle Conley, a former deputy White House counsel, and Jude Volek, a former senior associate White House counsel who served in the Biden administration and joined from Latham & Watkins LLP.

A congressional hearing can take a bad turn quickly for clients, and lawyers need a deep understanding of the client's business and their vulnerabilities to help them communicate clearly, Rhee said.

"Effective communications and straightforward answers are incredibly important in this space," Rhee added. "Your words matter, and how you deliver them matters."

An answer may be legally correct, but land "very, very badly" in a public hearing, she said.

"There's always the danger of over-lawyering," Rhee said.

That's why helping clients navigate congressional probes takes a blend of lawyering, political savvy and understanding of the media, practitioners say.

Not only is a lawyer handling the traditional legal work of an investigation, "but you're having to deal with the public opinion of that investigation in real time," Childress said. That is different from other

types of government investigations, which typically take place outside the public eye.

"I find that effective congressional lawyers are not only good at the legal aspects of making arguments to Congress and advocating on behalf of a client to Congress, but thinking about how that will play out in the kitchens and living rooms of Americans across the country as well," Childress said.

Another challenge is that, in the congressional context, there is no neutral arbiter, said Susanne Sachsman Grooms, who leads Cooley's congressional investigations practice.

"The chair is in charge of everything, and so that is a different situation to navigate than if you are able to go to a neutral third party," she said. "That often becomes very complicated and difficult for clients, and we work through a whole host of issues related to that."

Grooms, a former chief counsel to the Oversight Committee under Democrats, launched Cooley's practice in 2024 and has been growing it since then. The firm in September brought on Jessica Donlon, a Republican Hill veteran who most recently was general counsel to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce under Chairman Brett Guthrie, R-Ky.

More firms have established congressional investigations practices or brought on new leaders this year.

This week, Baker McKenzie **announced** it added former Kirkland partner Allison Murphy as co-head of its practice. Crowell & Moring LLP in July **hired** James Bair, Google's former regulatory affairs counsel for global legislative oversight, to lead its congressional investigations work.

The same month, DLA Piper announced its new congressional investigations practice. It's led by Rios, who worked in the White House during the Biden administration and as counsel to Democrats on the House Oversight Committee, and Jake Greenberg, who was general counsel and chief investigations counsel for Republicans on the committee.

Greenberg recently led House Republican probes, including the investigation into President Joe Biden's alleged mental decline.

Rios said clients now need to take a proactive approach to managing risks from congressional oversight.

"If you're coming up with your strategy – comms, government affairs, and legal strategy – after you get a subpoena, it's way too late," Rios said.

Having the ability to guide clients through congressional scrutiny has become vital in today's political environment, he and Greenberg said.

Firms "are starting to realize that it's no longer adequate to just dabble in congressional investigations," Greenberg said. "This is a growing and a serious area for exposure for clients, and I think what we're seeing is firms adapting to that reality."

Savage, the Garrison recruiter, said congressional investigations practices can be financially successful for some, because "the preeminent firms can charge the highest rates, and will also see the volume, because they are frequently known for handling the most sensitive or highest visibility matters."

But firms "should not jump into a congressional investigations practice blindly in terms of hiring," she

said. They should consider "whether they have the bench to attract that work at the highest levels, so that they can assess the financial case or the business case for adding a team."

"Not every congressional investigations team is going to get work," she said. "They still have to be exceptional practitioners to capture the matters that people are anticipating over the next two years."

--Additional reporting by Jack Rodgers, Tracey Read and Andrea Keckley. Editing by Nicole Bleier.