

Former Federal Prosecutor and MD Anderson Senior Legal Officer Jumps to McKool Smith

By Brooks Igo

(Sept. 4) – McKool Smith announced Tuesday that trial lawyer Anthony “Tony” Phillips has joined the firm as a principal in Houston. He will also practice out of the firm’s Washington, D.C. office.

Phillips was most recently a partner at Houston litigation boutique Smyser Kaplan & Veselka. He is a former federal prosecutor and senior legal officer of corporate ethics and compliance at MD Anderson Cancer Center who is well-versed in white collar defense and compliance matters.

Phillips says he was drawn to McKool Smith’s bench of experienced trial lawyers and resources.

“McKool has a boutique mentality, but at the same time we have a national footprint,” he says. “This is valuable especially in Houston, where lots of great litigation is happening at boutiques but clients need the resources of a larger firm.”

After graduating from Harvard Law School in 2004, Phillips began his career as an Air Force JAG Officer. He then jumped to private practice at Convington & Burling in Washington, D.C. before joining the U.S. Department of Justice as a trial attorney in its Public Integrity Section in September 2011.

At the DOJ, Phillips investigated and prosecuted violations of federal law, primarily involving bribery, fraud, conspiracy, obstruction and ethics offenses. He received a Commendation from former FBI Director Robert Mueller for his courtroom achievements in a high-profile public corruption case in Alabama.

Phillips left the DOJ and moved to Houston in August 2014 to join Vinson & Elkins, where he practiced for one year before leaving for an in-house position at MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Phillips says his experiences as a JAG attorney, federal prosecutor and in-house lawyer helped forge his identity as an anti-corruption attorney.

“Where I sit now [in private practice], I have an appreciation for what is driving government lawyers and an appreciation for what a client’s needs and stresses are,” he says.

Two developments he is observing in FCPA enforcement are increased cooperation between the SEC and DOJ and a heightened level of scrutiny for foreign companies with US operations.

One area of work that is busy in Houston, Phillips notes, is construction arbitration.

Outside of his law practice, Phillips, an Eagle Scout, dedicates time to serving on the boards of the Sam Houston Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America and the Lone Star Veterans Association.