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Keevican Weiss Attorney Believes Congress Has to Have Hart

The Legal Intelligencer

By Daniel Casciato

August 29, 2007

Only a few weeks after returning to work at her former law firm, Keevican Weiss Bauerle & Hirsch, former U.S. Congresswoman Melissa Hart has announced that she is seeking the seat she lost last year to Democrat Jason Altmire.

"My decision to run again doesn't mean I don't like being a lawyer," said Hart, who was the first Republican woman ever to represent Pennsylvania in either house of Congress. "It just means that my call to public service is still strong."

Hart said she wants to return to the U.S. House of Representatives because she has always enjoyed working in public service.

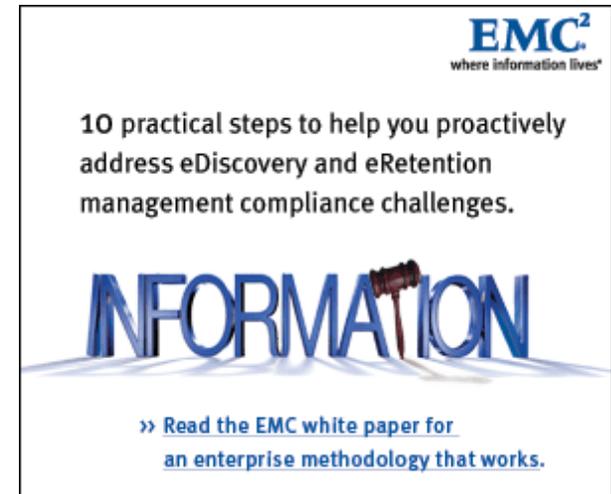
"It's always gratifying to help solve problems," she said. "You get to meet many people and deal with their problems personally and try to solve them. And because I'm a team player and work well with members of a team, I built great relationships with members on both sides of the political aisle. I also worked locally with both parties. We were able to accomplish a lot when I was in office."

Hart was of counsel to Keevican Weiss for several years before her three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, which began in January 2001 and ended in January of this year.

She began her political career in 1991, after winning a seat in the Pennsylvania state Senate in the 40th District. She served in the state Senate for 10 years where she chaired the Finance Committee. Her jurisdiction included oversight of the state Department of Revenue, treasurer, public pension systems and the lottery. During this time, she also practiced law part time.

As a member of the U.S. House, Hart served on the House Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over taxes, trade, welfare

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programs, health issues and Social Security. She also served on the Financial Services, Judiciary, Science and Ethics committees.

Since congressional rules require attorneys to stop practicing law if they are elected, Hart went inactive until this year. She joined Keevican Weiss in 1997 and focused on real estate transactions.

Since her return, Hart has also been working with the subsidiaries of the firm - FiCap Strategic Partners LLC and Renaissance Partners LLC.

FiCap works exclusively with management and boards of directors of midrange financial institutions to help guide them through turbulent times and optimize shareholder wealth. Renaissance Partners provide business and financial assessments to organizations that may be in financial trouble or looking to sell or merge.

"It's similar in many ways to the things that I did as an elected official," she said. "It gives me the opportunity to stay involved in that growth oriented community service, job-creation/preservation area that I worked in as a member of Congress and the state Senate."

Coming back to work to the firm this summer wasn't an easy transition for Hart.

"It's not because of the firm," she explained. "It's just a different kind of mindset, working in an office every day and billing hours. I'm not in constant motion like I was before. As a member of the U.S. House and the state Senate, I was either traveling to meetings throughout the six-county district, or in another city - Washington or Harrisburg - almost every week."

Some local attorneys weren't surprised to hear Hart is planning on running again.

"She has been an incredibly responsive representative in the district whose members appreciated her 24/7 attention and dedication to the district," said attorney Heather Heidelbaugh, a shareholder at Babst Calland Clements & Zomnir. "I think it's great that she is running again. Because of her legal background, she brings to the table a true understanding of what works and what doesn't in the lawmaking process."

Hart also has the support of her firm's management.

"As my former congresswoman, I would very much love to have her back as my congresswoman going forward next November," said Lee Keevican, managing director of Keevican Weiss. "So first and foremost, she represented me. I'm ecstatic about her running again. In both her three terms in the state Senate and in Congress, Melissa has an exemplary record. In particular, we are a business law firm and she has advanced the cause of business tremendously. I think western Pennsylvania misses her and I would love to see her back because of what she has done for businesses and western Pennsylvania. We are delighted to have her here, but she can do more for western Pennsylvania back in Congress."

Given her background and experience, Keevican said Hart was a natural to bring back to the firm.

"She's an outstanding lawyer and has an extraordinary blend of legal, political and business judgment that you rarely find," said Keevican. "She has been extraordinary helpful to us and our clients in dealing and working with state government."

As she prepares herself to challenge Altmire to regain her seat, Hart said that she has learned a lot since the last election.

"What I learned the most is what people's expectations of those in office are," she said. "Unfortunately, I also learned that many people are very cynical - and for good reason, especially after they saw some of the commercials that ran last year that were exaggerated garbage. They made it look like everyone who wants to run for office is a bad person. I would say more often than not the people who want to be in public office just want to do public service."

While she won't offer any prediction, Hart does like her chances.

"Congress is running around in circles now," she said. "If you look at the accomplishments this year, there really hasn't been anything. Being home now, I get a chance to hear on a daily basis what people are thinking about and what they truly want to see in government. So,



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