

Veteran Media Attorney Joins Ballard Spahr In New York

By Clarice Silber

Law360 (May 7, 2021, 4:01 PM EDT) -- Former First Look Media and The New Yorker general counsel Lynn Oberlander will join Ballard Spahr LLP's New York office as of counsel, according to the law firm.

Oberlander, who will provide the firm broad media law counsel, told Law360 Pulse on Friday that she is excited to join Ballard Spahr's media practice group, which is spread across several offices throughout the country.

Ballard Spahr said Oberlander's work will include general counsel services, prebroadcast and prepublication review, fair use review and analysis, newsgathering and newsroom policies, among other areas. The law firm said Oberlander will also serve on its team of defense counsel in defamation and privacy litigation for newsrooms.

Oberlander said newsrooms have seen an increase in defamation lawsuits brought against them in the last several years, often by groups with a lot of financial resources, which leaves them with a difficult and expensive path to defend against those cases. She said the rise of misinformation has also had a large impact on the media industry.

"The rise of quote-unquote fake news has really led to kind of widespread doubt and loss of respect and reputation for as much as the mainstream media are doing really phenomenal work," Oberlander said. "But I think we've seen a real decline in public understanding of the role of the press in our democracy and I think we really have to work to rebuild our reputation."

Oberlander said the Trump administration was very vocal about its anti-media stance, and former President Donald Trump "spent a lot of time talking about the fake news media and calling for the opening of the libel laws, generally creating an atmosphere of distrust toward major and mainstream media."

"But I will say that it's been reported that the Obama administration was not a great administration for journalists either ... and we don't really know yet what the Biden administration's relationship to the media is going to be," Oberlander said. "The temperature has certainly come down considerably, so that's a good thing ... but generally ... it is the media's role, I think, to cast a bright light on all of government's doings."

Oberlander said that even if the Biden administration speaks more kindly about the media, those in the industry should not "be letting up our guard, the media really still needs to be pursuing its role as a watchdog."

Oberlander said the advancement of digital journalism has allowed journalists and media companies to provide backup to their stories using hyperlinks, along with making updates or corrections to fast-moving stories in a way that is not possible in traditional print or broadcast media.

Oberlander served two years as chief news counsel for Univision Communications Inc. and nearly two and a half years as executive vice president and general counsel for Gizmodo Media Group, according to her LinkedIn profile. Prior to her stint at First Look Media, Oberlander worked as general counsel to The New Yorker for seven years. She has also held senior in-house roles at Forbes Magazine and NBC.

Oberlander, a graduate of Columbia University School of Law, worked as an associate for Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison at the beginning of her career.

Charles Tobin, Ballard Spahr's media and entertainment law group practice leader, said in a statement that Oberlander is a leader of the media law community nationwide and well-respected in the New York bar.

--Editing by Marygrace Murphy.



Lynn Oberlander