

Gov. Perdue taps Peterson as new executive counsel

Gov. Sonny Perdue has announced that he has promoted Nels S.D. Peterson to be his new executive counsel, following **Joshua B. Belinfante's** departure for private practice last week.

Peterson has been deputy executive counsel to the governor since July 2008. He previously worked as a litigation associate at King & Spalding and a clerk for Judge William H. Pryor Jr. of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. "His work on water, education and other major policy issues has been valuable to my office and our state," Perdue said in a press release.

Perdue's office also announced the appointment of **W. Ryan Teague** to replace Peterson in the deputy post. Teague, who has clerked for 11th Circuit Judge J.L. Edmondson and worked as an associate at McKenna Long & Aldridge, most recently served as general counsel to Freedom's Watch, a Washington-based issue-advocacy organization. Kevin O. Clark, who also serves as deputy chief operating officer for the governor's office, will continue to serve as the other deputy executive counsel.

Perdue spokesman Bert Brantley said Belinfante would have been welcome to stay until the end of Perdue's term in office next year. "He has worked on really the most important issues that we face," said Brantley, noting Belinfante's work on changes to the state's certificate of need laws as one example.

Belinfante, who had been on the governor's staff since January 2007, has joined **RobbinsLaw**, the Atlanta firm that former Sutherland Asbill & Brennan partner **Richard L. Robbins** launched in May 2008. Belinfante said the timing for his departure was right because Perdue's office started its budget process last week and needed continuity on that issue through next year's legislative session.

"There's some opportunities that are lining up that I just needed to be back in the private sector to take advantage of," Belinfante continued. "I did it certainly with a heavy heart." Belinfante said he might be interested in elected office in the future but doesn't have plans to run for anything in 2010.

Belinfante previously had worked at much bigger firms, Balch & Bingham and Alston & Bird, but he said Robbins' now-six-lawyer firm was attractive because it offers flexibility both with respect to client conflicts and billing arrangements. Belinfante, who joins the firm as counsel, said he plans to focus on litigation, health care regulation and appellate and administrative law.

Robbins said the firm had been talking to Belinfante about joining the firm essentially since its opening last year, noting that Belinfante is a longtime friend of another RobbinsLaw lawyer, fellow Pace Academy alumnus and Federalist Society member **Jason Alloy**. Robbins said he found it amusing that the conservative ranks of his firm are growing, given his own involvement in Democratic politics.

“[Belinfante has] become prominent already in Republican circles, but that's fine,” said Robbins. “I just want him to focus on practicing law for a few years.”