

On the Rise: Joshua B. Belinfante

R. Robin McDonald

Richard L. Robbins, the founding partner of the **Robbins Firm** in Atlanta, says he took a risk last year when he offered a job to Gov. Sonny Perdue's executive counsel, **Joshua B. Belinfante**.

Belinfante, 33, had worked on some of the governor's key—and most controversial—initiatives, but he had no clients to bring to the table. Nearly a year after his hire, Belinfante "is doing even better than we hoped," Robbins says. "He has developed a client base and profile like nobody I have seen at this age."

For Belinfante, Robbins says, "The sky's the limit." The firm is expanding, in part because of the business Belinfante is pulling in. He is slated to be named a partner Jan. 1. And, Robbins says, "I think we'll have a team of lawyers built around him."

Robbins says only two other lawyers that he has known have exhibited the dynamic star quality that Belinfante has so early in their careers—Teresa Wynn Roseborough, former deputy assistant attorney general, now in-house at MetLife, and Allegra J. Lawrence-Hardy at Sutherland, where Robbins was a partner for 20 years. "Josh is in that kind of category," Robbins says, adding that it was a coup to get him. "He has more business and political contacts than anyone I know."

Robbins says that Belinfante, whose specialty is health care issues, is currently co-lead counsel for the state in federal litigation springing from a Justice Department's investigation of the state's underfunded, understaffed mental hospitals where several patients have died.

Belinfante also has been appointed by the governor as a special assistant attorney general after he volunteered to represent—pro bono—the state in a federal suit initiated by Florida's attorney general challenging President Barack Obama's comprehensive health care reform legislation that became law last spring.

Troutman Sanders partner Mark H. Cohen, who is working with Belinfante on the state hospital litigation, says that Belinfante impressed him when he was the governor's executive counsel. "Josh always had a good grasp of issues," Cohen says. "Since I have been working closely with him on this case, that opinion has only strengthened. He is a very good lawyer. He understands issues; he works very hard. He's got some good litigation sense for someone as young as he is. He has combined both the knowledge of what it is to be a practicing lawyer with a political savvy you develop when you are in the governor's office."

Belinfante grew up in Sandy Springs. He earned his undergraduate degree at the University of Pennsylvania before returning to Georgia, where he earned his law degree at the University of Georgia in 2003. At UGA, he served as president of the Student Bar Association, president of the Federalist Society, and stirred controversy in 2003 when he helped arrange for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to speak at the

law school graduation.

After law school, Belinfante spent 10 months at Alston & Bird before accepting a one-year clerkship for Judge J.L. Edmondson at the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. He was hired by Balch & Bingham's Atlanta office in 2005 and, while there, served as legal counsel to the House judiciary committee at the Georgia General Assembly. In January 2007, he joined Perdue's executive staff as deputy executive counsel. He was promoted to executive counsel in 2008. In those roles, he helped shepherd legislation through the General Assembly, testified at legislative hearings and often drafted the bills.

He became the executive point person for legislation proposed by the governor to limit state hospital regulations that require state-issued certificates of need and govern where outpatient health care and diagnostic facilities may operate.

He advised Perdue during the Justice Department's mental hospital investigation and served on the executive task force that reorganized the Georgia Department of Human Resources and created the new Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

Belinfante advised the governor on challenges to Perdue's 2005 tort reform package and worked to pass a second round of tort changes proposed by the governor that would have created a "loser pays" requirement for civil suits and barred product liability suits against pharmaceutical and health care firms with "a major presence" in Georgia if their products had received approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Perdue lost both initiatives.

A third provision would have exempted from liability private farms and plantations where people picked their own fruits and vegetables or hunted for a fee. While the Legislature rejected a blanket exemption, it did raise the bar so that no discovery can occur until after a judge has ruled on a defendant's motion to dismiss.

Belinfante also worked on legislation that instituted a fee on hospitals to provide the state with additional Medicare and Medicaid funds. He also advised Perdue on his judiciary picks and on the growing crisis revolving around indigent defense and the Georgia Public Defender Standards Council.

Belinfante remains a member of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce Law & Judiciary Committee. He worked as the chamber's lobbyist in securing the passage of legislation that will govern the implementation, should it pass this fall, of a constitutional amendment to allow the courts to modify rather than invalidate non-compete agreements in employment contracts if any portion of the agreement is found to be overly broad or otherwise flawed.

Thomas P. Bishop, Georgia Power's general counsel and the chairman of the chamber committee, describes Belinfante as "incredibly bright, energetic and capable."

Having played a key role in so many major legislative issues, "He's learned well," Bishop says. "He has a good sense of how to go get things done."