



Christine Burns, co-founder of BurnsBarton, left, and James Goodnow of Fennemore Craig, right. Courtesy photos

Fennemore Craig Combines With Arizona Employment Firm BurnsBarton

Upon completion of the merger, the combined firm will have a headcount of 340 attorneys.

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Law Firm Mergers



By Jon Campisi

Business of Law Reporter

What You Need to Know

- Fennemore Craig has entered into a strategic combination with Arizona labor and employment firm BurnsBarton.
- BurnsBarton, in existence for 13 years, was looking to expand its practice area offerings for clients.
- Leaders at both firms say the combination made sense at this time given a larger number of consolidations throughout the legal industry.

Second Hundred firm Fennemore Craig on Tuesday announced that it has combined with Arizona-based labor and employment firm BurnsBarton, a move that the firm says will nearly double the number of Phoenix-based lawyers in its employment and labor practice.

The combination will go into effect on June 2 and will give BurnsBarton's clients access to Fennemore's broader platform, which includes attorneys specializing in areas such as real estate, business, finance and trusts and estates.

The idea for the combination was born out of a coffee meet up between Fennemore CEO James Goodnow and BurnsBarton co-founder Christine Burns.

"It was a great conversation where we talked about priorities for the practice, our philosophy on client service, where we see the industry going," Goodnow said in an interview. "The conversation went in lots of different directions, but at least from my perspective, I walked away from that coffee meeting feeling like this could be a really good, potential fit. And I saw a lot of alignment in terms of how we see the world."

David Barton, BurnsBarton's other co-founder, said in a statement that the decision to combine the two firms was about "momentum and culture."

"We could have chosen any number of paths, but we chose Fennemore for its growth and financial strength, innovative approach to the practice of law, focus on technology, and track record of investing in its people," Barton said in his statement. "This combination is a springboard to help us do what we do best, at a bigger scale and with greater reach."

Burns, in an interview, said by joining forces with Fennemore, her firm would be able to provide clients with “resources and access to other practice groups that we don’t currently provide.”

Burns said her 5-attorney firm had been approached throughout the years by several other firms exploring potential combinations or mergers, but a perfect fit was never found in the 13 years of the labor firm’s existence. But as artificial intelligence use began expanding within the legal industry, a picture emerged of greater consolidation within the legal market.

“We decided that this year we would at least engage and potentially explore some of those conversations with some firms,” she said. “And we know, not only did Fennemore have an incredible reputation, and always has in terms of one of the leaders in the legal industry in Arizona, but we also were very aware that Fennemore has grown very strategically over the last several years, and also has invested heavily in technology, and had a very impressive, forward thinking leadership team.”

It was then that Burns realized the culture of the two firms meshed well, saying that “how employees are treated at Fennemore was very much aligned with our values.”

“So, that’s when we really started to develop deeper conversations,” she said.

Goodnow said one of the benefits of the combination is that it will help Fennemore offer more support to its labor and employment attorneys by giving them “that additional expertise in horsepower” that is offered

through BurnsBarton's specialized platform.

"By coming together, it really is that classic win-win, where we can offer our clients more in ways that we couldn't previously," Goodnow said.

Goodnow said he envisions the combination offering legal professionals at both firms a "platform where they can thrive, they can have fulfilling careers, and advancement."

Burns said while some of BurnsBarton's lawyers are licensed in multiple states, there still can be challenges when trying to practice in states outside of Arizona, and she believes the partnership with Fennemore will provide her team more resources for clients by offering "boots on the ground in their own states."

More labor and employment laws are cropping up on the local level, be it state or municipal, creating a need for more attorneys specialized in this practice area, and the combination will mean that more attorneys will be able to develop greater expertise while also remaining local to their respective locales.

The two firms plan to share office space at Fennemore's Phoenix office, but will also continue to offer remote and hybrid options to employees.

"For as long as its been in existence, [BurnsBarton] has really followed that same philosophy of trying to provide flexible work environments for our lawyers and our staff," Burns said. "We've always had laptops pre-COVID. That was just our model."

Burns said when her firm was looking to combine with another firm, one of the priorities was to identify a firm that offered flexibility, since that

often translates into high employee retention and high attorney and legal professional job satisfaction.

Goodnow said after the combination, the attorney head count will be around 340. Fennemore will also continue to operate out of offices in six states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, Texas and Washington. In addition to the brick-and-mortar mountain and West Coast presence, Fennemore will continue to offer its Fennemore Forward program, a remote workforce platform that has helped the firm secure legal talent nationwide, thereby offering Fennemore a chance to expand its geographic footprint.

“We are absolutely thrilled about this combination,” Goodnow said. “We think this is going to be a real home run for our clients and for our lawyers, and it’s going to make a splash in the community. We can’t wait to get started.”

The combination with BurnsBarton follows another strategic partnership announced this past October in which Fennemore combined with Spokane, Washington-based tech boutique Lucent Law in a move designed in part to beef up Fennemore’s AI capabilities.

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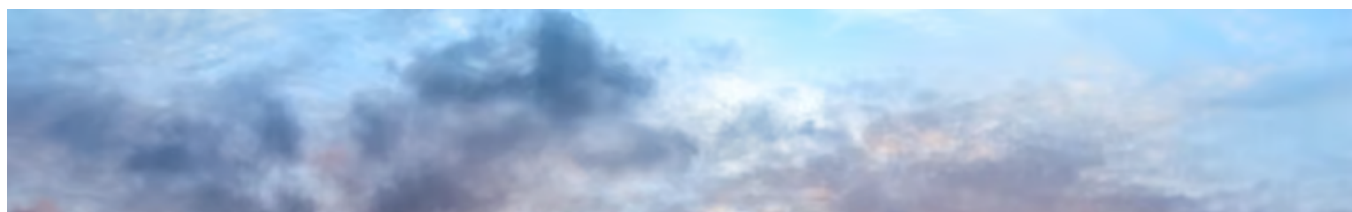


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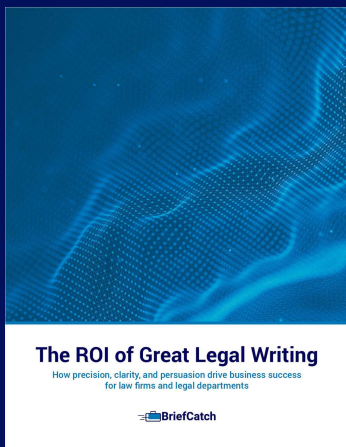




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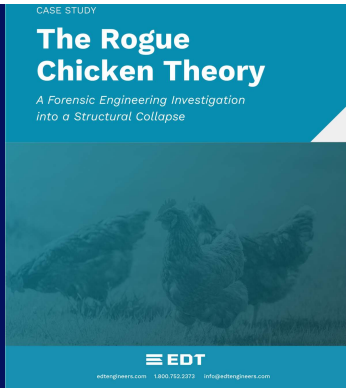


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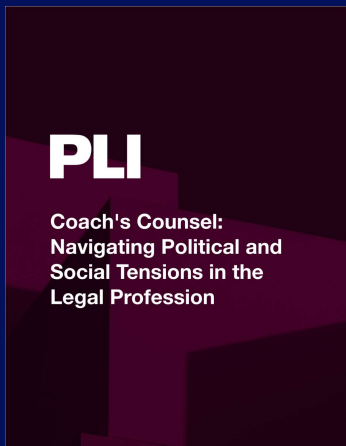




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