

Creating a 'Mirror of the LA Community': Thompson Coburn's First LGBTQ Office MP on Architecting the Future

By Jessie Yount

What You Need to Know

- Thompson Coburn's first openly gay office managing partner, Jennifer Post, is leading the way on DEI initiatives.

- A top priority is recruiting, retaining and promoting diverse talent at all levels of the organization.

- Post believes firms will increasingly need to navigate their stance on social and political issues with clients.

Thompson Coburn has a new look in Los Angeles.

The Am Law 200 firm recently signed a 10-year lease for a new space in Century City, which opened in June with the aim to “reflect the next generation of Thompson Coburn in Los Angeles,” Jennifer Post, managing partner of the Los Angeles office, said in an interview.

The office itself “is light, forward-looking and if there is such a thing as the opposite of stuffy, it is that,” Post said. It touts a natural color palette that reflects the local environment, and has office spaces that depart from what Post called a “hierarchical model” and are uniform in size.

The firm continues to offer flexible working arrangements across its seven offices and has delayed its previous return date, which had been just after Labor Day, for the time being.

Still, “we hope to be back as soon as we can, so we can visually show people it is a vibrant and collaborative place for our people and for laterals, clients and the community in general,” Post said.

The makeover is more than aesthetically pleasing. The new office embodies a commitment to the community of Los Angeles and its diverse set of lawyers and professionals, as well as the various types of transactions and business matters it handles, Post said.

“That is part of what I’m doing here, promoting the firm’s Los Angeles office as a mirror of the Los Angeles community,” Post said. “That means we have to attract, retain and promote diverse talent at all levels.”

Post, an openly gay lawyer, is a partner in the firm’s corporate and securities group. She joined Thompson Coburn’s 14-person management team and became the first LGBTQ person to serve as an office managing partner at



Jennifer Post, managing partner with Thompson Coburn.

Courtesy photo

the firm when she was appointed in 2019, shortly before the pandemic set in.

Unique Challenges

Post began practicing corporate law in 1990. She described the Boston-based firm where she started as “fairly progressive,” as the firm was home to other young, ambitious attorneys looking to move up the career ladder.

Still, she noticed at the time, unconscious biases had a way of sliding in and holding back people from underrepresented groups, as has often been the case throughout the legal industry.

While the partners with the most interesting books of business wanted smart, outgoing lawyers, they also wanted to work with enjoyable people who were

easy to be around, Post said. “By a matter of affinity, that tends to be people you have things in common with,” Post continued.

Her then-firm was focused on congratulating people on getting married and having children. And it was not easy at the time to get a domestic partner covered by health insurance, Post said.

“I had to stand up for health benefits for unmarried couples. Knowing how hard to persist, through what channels, and to who, was an important skill set to have,” she said.

That meant constantly weighing her actions—standing up for herself, protecting her own career, and speaking up to progress the overall firm, she said.

While room for much improvement remains, the legal industry has taken significant steps to address diversity, inclusion and equity shortfalls in recent years. Numerous Big Law firms have named chief diversity officers and adopted programs such as Diversity Lab’s The Mansfield Rule, which has been **shown** to increase the racial and ethnic diversity in firm’s management committees by a factor of 30.

Thompson Coburn is one of 65 law firms that achieved the Mansfield Rule 3.0 Certified Plus status for reaching over 30% diverse lawyer representation in leadership roles in 2020. Furthermore, the firm said 60% of new attorney hires and 50%

of new partner promotions were women in 2020.

Post attributed Thompson Coburn’s DEI progress, in part, to a “critical mass” of passionate and dedicated leaders within the firm, who aren’t merely spectators, but active participants in moving the needle forward.

“We have influential client relationships and we work with centers of influence within our cities,” Post said of the leadership team. “That personal commitment and passion to the people in the communities we serve, that makes a difference.”

Additionally, Post noted that from a generational point of view, the number of diverse candidates and colleagues in the legal industry is greater than ever before. “People have grown up with a greater sensitivity and motivation to deal with these issues,” Post said.

Economic Motivation

Yet, there’s a question of whether recent DEI actions will lead to advancement or lose momentum amid what some DEI professionals have called **diversity fatigue**. Post said there is bound to be a degree of relaxation on DEI initiatives as firms rely on “lip service” and “statistics,” rather than advocating for real change.

While law firm leaders play a critical role in the equation, clients also have a responsibility to continue advocating for change and provide an economic motivation for law firms, Post said.

Many legal department leaders have been outspoken advocates for diversity in the legal profession. But **recent data show** that while tracking outside counsel diversity at large companies is very common, it hasn’t gained as much traction at smaller businesses.

“Clients have to insist on it, and they have to insist it be genuine,” she said.

Thompson Coburn has encountered large corporate clients looking to allocate work to law firms with truly diverse legal teams, Post said. Others, including DLA Piper and its chief diversity officer Fenimore Fisher, have also noted a growing demand for DEI representation from clients.

It’s a circumstance that presents unique challenges as firms must balance service and performance with cultural and even political priorities, Post said.

“I think there will continue to be a revelation around firms saying we believe this, and then, ‘oops!’ that a firm represents clients with a very different position on that issue,” Post said. “The industry has to straddle the notion of taking a position on an issue, and then being true to that with their client base. It’s hard to have a test around ‘Does this client meet our ethos?’”

She continued, “Inevitably it means either not taking a stance on social or political issues, or being willing to part ways with clients who may not agree with a firm’s public position.”