

Daily Journal

SEPTEMBER 4, 2024



Honoring the Top Performing Attorneys in California



Melinda Haag

Paul, Weiss, Rifkind,
Wharton & Garrison
San Francisco

Melinda Haag has been practicing law for more than 35 years, with about a third of that time spent as a federal prosecutor. She began her career as an assistant U.S. attorney in Los Angeles before joining a criminal law-focused private practice in San Francisco.

Later, she was invited to join the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California, where she was appointed as U.S. Attorney for the district in 2010. In 2016, she returned to private practice and joined Paul, Weiss in January 2021 to help launch the firm's San Francisco office and

co-lead their white collar and regulatory defense group.

Interestingly, Haag did not have any lawyers in her family and had never considered becoming a lawyer while growing up. Her interest in law was sparked during college when she worked as an assistant to a criminal defense lawyer and witnessed the impressive courtroom performance of a co-defendant's counsel, Elisabeth Semel.

"I was mesmerized. There were very few young women criminal defense lawyers in 1981, and Elisabeth – who is now co-director of Berkeley Law's Death Penalty Clinic – was brilliant, dynamic and extremely effective in defending her client," Haag said. "After three weeks of watching her in court, I decided I wanted to work in criminal law and never looked back."

Much of Haag's work is confidential, but she has achieved notable successes. Recently, she resolved two major matters for Invitation Homes, a leading owner and operator of single-family rental homes.

"In March 2024, we secured final approval of a very favorable settlement for our client in the California Attorney General's investigation into the company's eviction and rent increase practices during the COVID-19 pandemic for properties it owns in California," Haag said. "Eviction and rental increase practices by corporate landlords like Invitation Homes during the pandemic has been the subject of significant

regulatory scrutiny, including by the U.S. Congress."

In July, her team at Paul, Weiss reached a favorable settlement in a California False Claims Act lawsuit brought on behalf of 35 California municipalities. The plaintiff-relator had alleged that Invitation Homes performed renovations without obtaining the required permits, but Haag's team negotiated the settlement down to about 10% of the amount originally sought.

Haag said she has observed that under the current administration, there has been a continued DOJ focus on individual accountability, with a push for corporations to self-disclose and enhance their cooperation by identifying individual misconduct. The DOJ has also emphasized rewarding voluntary self-disclosure and compensation clawback policies as markers of healthy compliance policies and good corporate governance.

"In California specifically, we've seen an increase in DOJ antitrust enforcement actions against tech companies, as well as increased coordination between state attorneys general in bringing actions against these tech companies," Haag said. "We've also been closely following California's recently enacted Unfair Competition Law, which gives city enforcement bodies new subpoena powers and enables them to act independently of state regulators or district attorneys."