

## Rising Star: Latham's Dean W. Baxtresser

By Jennifer Doherty

*Law360 (August 11, 2020, 3:17 PM EDT)* -- Dean W. Baxtresser of Latham & Watkins LLP has advised clients on several multibillion-dollar government contracts, including a \$10 billion upgrade for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' health records, earning him a spot among the government contract law practitioners under age 40 honored as Law360 Rising Stars.

### **THE BIGGEST CASE OF HIS CAREER:**

In 2017, Baxtresser helped Cerner Corp. land one of the largest information technology contracts the government has ever awarded, overhauling the VA's electronic health records. In the years since, he has helped Cerner successfully navigate multiple challenges to the award.

"The contract was awarded using the public interest exception to competition, which is not a very heavily litigated exception to competition. It's not like other exceptions that you have a ton of case law on," Baxtresser told Law360, adding that novel questions of law are part of what he enjoys about government contracts.

A year after Cerner won the contract, the Federal Circuit dismissed a competitor's protest on the basis of standing, a successful result for his client.

"It certainly was precedent-setting for bid protest standing purposes, and we cite to it often. I see it quite commonly in cases and briefs now," Baxtresser said.

Baxtresser and his Latham & Watkins teammates fended off another protest on the VA contract in January, this time in a "totally successful defense" before the U.S. Government Accountability Office.

"The entire effort was meaningful to me because of the importance of modernizing the VA's health records systems and



**Dean W. Baxtresser**  
Latham & Watkins

Age: 35  
 Home base: Washington, D.C.  
 Position: Counsel  
 Law school: University of Michigan Law School  
 First job after law school: Procurement attorney for U.S. Marine Corps

being able to help defend that approach that the government had selected," he said.

***HIS PROUDEST MOMENT:***

Baxtresser has much to be proud of from his work on the Cerner litigation, as well as contributions to major cases for American Airlines and Microsoft and advising on more than 100 mergers and acquisitions transactions, to name a few of his accomplishments.

All of that aside, he said, he's found satisfaction in helping clients through the trials of doing business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The [Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security] Act was passed and we were getting an email from a colleague or a client every minute," he said. "I lost track of the number of all-nighters we pulled just to make sure all the clients that needed help, all the companies that were looking for guidance, were getting what they needed."

Time was of the essence for Latham's clients, who were relying on the firm's advice to apply for small business loans and the Paycheck Protection Program before funding ran out.

"We were uniquely suited to do it because of our experience interpreting these small business rules and guiding government contract clients related to them. So we were able to do that, to navigate sort of in real time, as the questions came out," Baxtresser said.

That effort continues, Baxtresser said, even as he took a step back from his leadership role in June to go on paternity leave.

***WHAT MOTIVATES HIM:***

Baxtresser said the same features that initially drew him to government contracts in law school keep him engaged with his work today, specifically the variety and high-stakes nature of the cases, which are of a piece with current events.

Another factor that keeps him pressing forward is teamwork, something he's valued since his undergraduate days at Rice University, where he played oboe in the orchestra.

"The most rewarding experiences I had there were playing with others, working with others to perform, and that carries through to now," Baxtresser said.

Working at Latham has allowed him to work on big cases with colleagues he calls "the best at what they do."

"Being on those teams and now starting to lead teams like that is really rewarding," he said.

***WHAT'S NEXT FOR GOVERNMENT CONTRACT LAW:***

"Six months ago I would have had a very different answer for you," Baxtresser said, pausing to reflect on how his work has already changed in 2020.

With the shift to remote work, technology is on his mind. Baxtresser foresees a push from the government to harness the agility of private-sector tech firms to develop systemwide approaches to keeping agencies up-to-date in the years ahead.

"The pace of innovation is so fast that in order to capture that same innovation and obtain the updates — and even the security — that the government needs, being able to adopt more commercial solutions rather than kind of bespoke government solutions is going to become more common."

— *As told to Jennifer Doherty*

*Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2020 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,300 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2020, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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