

Thompson Hine Opens Energy Practice With 4-Atty Team

By **Daniel Moritz-Rabson**

Law360 (July 22, 2026, 7:01 AM EDT) -- Thompson Hine LLP on Wednesday announced the opening of an energy practice with a four-lawyer team split between the East and West coasts.

The new practice, based in offices in California, New York and Washington, D.C., will be led by veteran energy lawyer Robert L. Nelson Jr. out of the firm's Silicon Valley branch. Thompson Hine has also added Peter Bekker as a partner in New York, where he will serve as the firm's head of energy disputes. Terrel Ferguson and Chelsea Gunter will be joining as senior counsel to round out the new practice group.

"Right now, the energy industry faces a key inflection point — with greater promise, but also greater challenges, than ever before," Nelson said in comments emailed to Law360 Pulse, pointing to data centers as a key driver for growth in the sector.

Nelson noted he is excited to build a team with "a national, coast-to-coast firm that has a strong track record of giving lawyers who have built practices at global firms the perfect platform that promotes future growth while continuing to deliver for clients."

Bekker added that climate change is altering "the entire value chain" of the energy sector and generating new challenges that demand complicated legal guidance.

"The energy industry, in the United States and beyond, has a key role to play in addressing these new challenges, including through a proactive approach to avoiding climate-related claims or accusations of greenwashing," he told Law360 Pulse in emailed comments. "Energy investments are particularly vulnerable to geopolitical developments of the kind we have witnessed recently in the Middle East, and it is therefore important to provide sophisticated legal advice through the kind of integrated team approach that Thompson Hine offers through these new additions."

Against this backdrop of geopolitical flux affecting the energy sector and rising client demand, Thompson Hine managing partner Tony White told Law360 Pulse that the firm had been interested in opening an energy practice and had been looking for the right person to lead that new venture.

"Establishing this practice has been a priority for some time, and we needed the right person to lead and grow it. Bob Nelson was that person, and the fact that he is based in Silicon Valley works well for us, since it lets us build out the practice in a market with substantial energy and technology investment," White said in comments emailed to Law360 Pulse.

The firm described the opening of an energy practice as a continuation and expansion of work already underway, noting that the firm has advised energy clients for years and that the new practice would combine the skill sets of attorneys with a range of expertise, including tax specialists, environmental experts and project finance authorities.

Nelson has decades of experience at a range of major law firms, Thompson Hine said. Over a career spanning more than 40 years, he has worked on the development and financing of more than 175 energy and infrastructure projects across the globe. Nelson brings expertise in project finance and has knowledge in topics of growing importance, such as the development of data centers and renewable battery energy storage systems.

Bekker brings deep understanding of international law and arbitration to Thompson Hine, the firm said. He has worked at a range of top law firms, including White & Case LLP and most recently Dentons US LLP. Over the course of his career, he has participated in a range of advisory proceedings and cases in front of the International Court of Justice. His international law practice has included working on nuclear disarmament matters, participating in a landmark fisheries case and being involved in reparations claims brought by Saudi Aramco following the Gulf War.

Gunter joins the firm's Washington, D.C., office after stints at the firm then known as Shearman & Sterling LLP, Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP's energy and infrastructure group, and as assistant general counsel for the IndoPacific at the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, according to her LinkedIn profile.

Ferguson is joining Thompson Hine's Los Angeles office after nearly four years at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP. After earning his law degree from UCLA School of Law in 2019, Ferguson joined White & Case LLP before moving to Pillsbury, where he focused on project development and finance in the energy sector.

The firm framed its decision to launch its energy practice in two California offices as a demonstration of the firm's commitment to the state. The firm opened a Los Angeles branch in 2024. In January, the firm expanded its footprint by adding a Silicon Valley office via a combination with intellectual property litigation boutique Turner Boyd Seraphine LLP.

"These moves reflect the firm's growth in California and its ability to attract top talent," White said via email.

—Additional reporting by James Mills. Editing by Amy French.