

## Rising Star: Akin Gump's Richard Welsh

By **Brendan Pierson**

*Law360, New York (April 16, 2010)* -- Richard Welsh of Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP credits the skills he learned as an officer in an elite U.S. Army battalion for the long list of triumphs, including his successful representation of AES Corp. in a \$400 million environmental class action, that has landed him on Law360's list of 10 energy lawyers under 40 to watch.

Welsh, 38, said the case — in which a group of Alaska residents accused a number of major energy companies, also including Exxon Mobil Corp., of contributing to global warming — was interesting to work on because it represented “an overlap of constitutional, regulatory and common-law tort issues.”

After more than a year as lead counsel, AES and the other defendants won full dismissal of the case for lack of subject matter jurisdiction last September.

The case is currently on appeal in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Welsh is also representing AES as lead counsel in an insurance coverage dispute in an Arlington, Va., state court over whether general commercial liability policies cover property damage claims based on greenhouse gas-induced global warming.

Also for AES, Welsh won reversal of a \$75 million tax assessment by the city of Redondo Beach, Calif., after showing that the company's due process rights had been violated when the city passed a new rule for the purpose of winning the dispute.

Welsh represents a wide range of clients in the energy industry, from traditional coal and oil producers to newer renewable energy producers, he said.

He said the explosion of new forms of energy production was one of the reasons he focused about half his practice on energy, which he called “a great growth area for a lawyer.”

Welsh credited his time as a noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army's First Battalion 75th Airborne Ranger Regiment immediately after high school for forging the skills that have brought him his current success.

“I got a chance to develop leadership skills, and calm-under-fire tactical skills, before I went to college,” he said. “I think in terms of developing my practice, I have a leg up.”

“A lot of the strategies that apply in war also apply in litigation,” Welsh said. “There's a lot that goes into it that's similar to what you would do as a general.”

One of the most important of those strategies is to motivate subordinates and lead by example — something Welsh has always taken care to do as his practice has grown, he said. While many senior partners on a case might go home for the weekend while associates work, Welsh said he always made a point of working the same hours as the people under him.

As his practice develops, Welsh expects to take more of a managerial, leadership role and be less involved in the “nitty-gritty” work of drafting briefs, he said.

Welsh said the most important thing young attorneys could do to succeed was to serve their clients as well as possible.

“I would tell [young lawyers] to develop strong relationships with their current clients, provide prompt service and — the most important thing — to win,” he said.

Welsh earned his J.D. from the University of California at Berkeley School of Law and his B.A. from the University of California at Los Angeles.

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