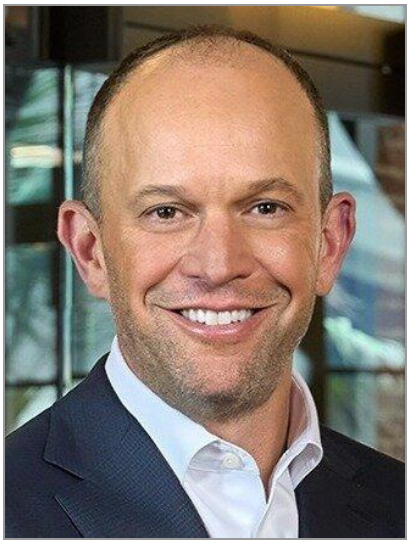
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# New Keker Leader On Firm Culture For 'High Stakes Litigation'

By **Emma Cueto**

Law360 (June 4, 2026, 4:35 PM EDT) -- The new managing partner of San Francisco trial boutique Keker Van Nest & Peters LLP said he is looking to preserve what makes the firm unique while supporting continued growth and finding ways to use artificial intelligence to the firm's advantage.



R. James Slaughter

R. James Slaughter, who **takes over as managing partner** after 25 years at the firm, is succeeding former managing partner Laurie Carr Mims, who held the position for three years and remains with the firm. He spoke to Law360 Pulse about AI, culture and the future of litigation work.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

## Having just been named the new managing partner for Keker, how do you feel as you step into the role?

I'm very excited. Keker is in a terrific spot. It's a terrific firm with a tremendous legacy and future, so I'm very excited.

## What are some of your plans here at the outset?

My plan is to preserve what makes Keker terrific and distinctive while making sure that we are positioned for the next era of high-stakes litigation. That means continued lean teams, training elite trial lawyers, giving our lawyers early responsibility, continuing to emphasize a culture of deep collaboration and having the courage to take on hard fights.

This is not a firm that needs to be reinvented.

I really do see my job as preserving what makes it special. The firm is changing leadership, not identity.

## The firm has been growing in recent years; do you plan to continue adding headcount?

With respect to growth, we have and will continue to grow, but we have never chased scale and we won't chase scale. Our growth has been disciplined and organic. We were 40 lawyers when I started 25 years ago. We are 140 now. That's real growth, but it's disciplined. We hire excellent attorneys, young attorneys. We give them real responsibility and hope that they will become our partners.

## To go back to what you were saying about Keker being a special firm, what are some of the things that you personally value most about the firm?

We are an elite trial firm based in San Francisco, although we obviously take cases across the country. We've got one office and one practice, which is high-stakes litigation. That one office model

matters for us. It means people know each other, trust each other, and work across cases in a way that's hard to replicate when you have multiple offices across the country.

Our culture has been built from the start around cooperation, rather than internal competition, and at a time when a lot of elite litigation firms are getting bigger and bigger, our answer is not going to be to build a giant machine; it's going to be to continue to put really talented lawyers in small, focused teams and trust them with responsibility. That's been the Keker culture: excellent lawyers, lean teams, responsibility and an informal, unpretentious culture.

That's really what I want to steward and protect.

We've got a really remarkable variety of litigation. We're at the forefront right now of **copyright litigation and AI**, trade secrets, competition, patent cases, and privacy. What ties our cases together is that none is routine. They often involve new technology, high stakes, public scrutiny or all three. My goal is to continue having Keker be the go-to firm to address clients' hardest problems.

## Are there particular challenges or opportunities you see for the firm on the horizon?

All law firms — and all businesses, for that matter — are addressing how AI will impact their business. We see AI as a powerful tool, one that's going to change parts of how litigation gets done. But we see ourselves as remarkably well-situated to take advantage of the change AI is bringing.

We don't see AI as a substitute for what clients come to Keker for: judgment, strategy, credibility, and, of course, the ability to persuade a judge or a jury. So I think AI will be an opportunity going forward, and we're excited about it.

## More generally, how do you see the landscape for litigation firms right now?

I think the demand for litigation work is strong. The problems clients are facing are increasingly technical, novel, public, and high stakes. Whether that's copyright, AI or privacy, clients are confronting problems that the law is often still developing, and so the reputational and business consequences can be significant. That places judgment, experience and the ability to tell a story in a really powerful way at the heart of what our clients need.

I think the demand for elite trial work is going to continue, and I think for those kinds of cases and those kinds of problems, we're really well-positioned.

--Editing by Drashti Mehta.

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