

Bartlit's New Post: Chief Counsel to Presidential Commission Investigating BP Disaster

By Ross Todd

Fred Bartlit Jr. was so eager to take the post as the top lawyer to President Obama's commission investigating the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster that he didn't even ask the official who hired him if it's a paying gig. "That's not why I took the job anyway," said the founding partner of Bartlit, Beck, Herman, Palenchar & Scott, who still hadn't pinned down whether the chief counsel post comes with a salary when the Lit Daily spoke with him by phone Friday afternoon. "I took the job because I wanted to show that a U.S. government presidential commission can effectively and timely do a really good analysis of a complicated question like this," he said.

On Wednesday Bartlit was named chief counsel of the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, the seven-person group of politicians, environmentalists and academics that is charged with making recommendations on how to prevent and mitigate the impact of any future offshore drilling spills. The commission is co-chaired by Bob Graham, a former two-term governor of Florida and U.S. Senator, and William Reilly who was the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency under former President George H. W. Bush. The commission was

formed in May by an executive order and held its first public meeting in New Orleans earlier this month.

This is not the first time Bartlit has been involved in an investigation of a high-profile offshore oil disaster. Bartlit was trial counsel for Allison Gas Turbine during a year of hearings in Aberdeen, Scotland, springing from the 1988 explosion of the Piper Alpha North Sea Oil Platform, which killed 167 workers. The two-volume Cullen Report that resulted from the inquiry led to widespread changes in drilling practices in the North Sea.

"This is an extraordinary appointment," said the commission's executive director Richard Lazarus in a statement. "Fred Bartlit is the quintessential 'lawyer's lawyer.' The commission, and the nation, are fortunate to have someone of his stature in the legal profession agree to undertake this important public service."

Bartlit said Friday that before he left Kirkland & Ellis in 1993 to start Bartlit, Beck, he represented Amoco, which was later acquired by BP. Although he's represented many oil companies such as Shell, Phillips, and Conoco in past matters, Bartlit said there are no conflicts that prevent him from taking this assignment.