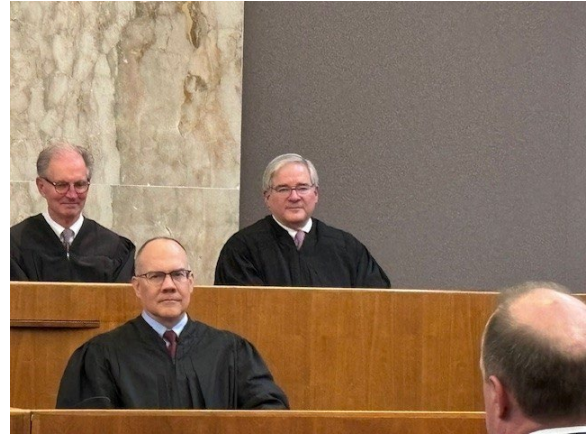


Spotlight on the Bench: The Honorable Alfredo R. Pérez

By: Alexander Perez; Senior Attorney; Munsch Hardt Kopf & Harr, P.C.



On July 16, 2024, Judge Alfredo R. Pérez was sworn in as the newest judge for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Texas. After being out of power for a week in the wake of Hurricane Beryl, his oath coincided with the relief of having power restored just the day before at his Houston home. Judge Pérez's investiture ceremony was held on October 17, 2024, with many fellow members of the Federal bench, family, friends, former colleagues from private practice, and members of the restructuring community in attendance. In accepting his appointment, Judge Pérez came out of a well-deserved, albeit brief, retirement—lasting exactly 197 days for anyone counting.

Upon taking the bench, Judge Pérez was assigned over 500 matters, including consumer cases and adversary proceedings. Judge Pérez currently receives all cases in the Galveston Division and is being assigned percentages of the consumer and non-consumer cases in the Houston Division. He also immediately stepped onto the district's Complex Case panel replacing Judge Marvin Isgur, and has already been assigned notable cases such as *In re Conn's Inc.* and *In re Rhodium Encore LLC*.

Personal Background and Education

Judge Pérez was born in the coastal city of Antilla in the eastern part of Cuba in 1955. On September 20, 1961, he, his mother, and nine-month-old brother boarded a Pan Am flight and immigrated to the United States. He arrived on his Cuban passport issued in 1958 that listed his height at 2'8". Despite the many disturbances in the wake of the Cuban revolution, it was the Cuban government's closure of the private Catholic schools of the Marist order that caused the family's departure that fall. Judge Pérez's father remained in Cuba an additional six months until the government nationalized the family's business interests. His family established itself in Miami, FL, and was a tight knit group with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all living in close proximity in Miami's Hialeah neighborhood. In forging a new pathway for their family, Judge Pérez's parents were forward-looking and worldly, and it is obvious that their outlook has influenced Judge Pérez.

Judge Pérez graduated from Christopher Columbus High School, an elite preparatory school in the Marist tradition, just as his family had sought for him. Initially interested in medicine as a profession, Judge

Pérez obtained his undergraduate degree in chemistry from Haverford College in 1977. However, he ultimately decided that a legal education was more fitting and enrolled at the University of Chicago Law School. Given his quantitative and science-filled background, Judge Pérez was interested and thrived in the “code” based classes, such as tax and bankruptcy. His bankruptcy class with legendary professor Walter Blum was taught from a pamphlet, as the Bankruptcy Code had not yet been formally codified. While in law school, Judge Pérez met his future wife, Kathy, a fellow law student, in the law school dormitories in 1978. In the summer of 1979, he clerked in Houston for Bracewell & Patterson, which would become his home for the first half of his career, and graduated from law school in the spring of 1980.

Private Practice

On June 1, 1980, Judge Perez packed his car and drove to Houston to sit for the Texas bar and to begin work at Bracewell in the litigation section that fall. Judge Pérez recalls his billing rate as a first year attorney as being \$35/hour. He tried three cases to a jury with his first few years of practice and picked up an increasing amount of bankruptcy and restructuring work for bank and creditor clients. As Judge Pérez put it, bankruptcy practice came to him. In 1984, Kathy (who after practicing corporate law at Dechert in Philadelphia, PA), moved to Houston after she and Judge Pérez were married. Judge Pérez made partner at Bracewell in 1987, which is the same year that he handled what he considers the standout case of his career—*In re TransAmerican Natural Gas Corp.*—as it was the first national, billion dollar case in which he was the lead on the engagement.

Judge Pérez transitioned to debtor practice in the late 1990’s, handling restructuring matters for a shipyard and real

estate projects. In early 2001, Harry Perrin, in his unmistakable voice emphasizing each syllable of Al-fre-do, reached out to see if Judge Pérez would have interest in a move to Weil, Gotshal & Manges, LLP. It was indeed a match, and Judge Pérez spent 10-11 months just to clear conflicts and ultimately just over half of his career in private practice at Weil. Judge Pérez was the only restructuring attorney at Weil not to bill even a tenth of an hour to the Enron bankruptcy case, as he was completely screened off from it due to prior representation of Enron. Judge Pérez did work on some of the largest and most sophisticated bankruptcy cases in history, including *In re WorldCom Inc.*, *In re Lehman Brothers Holdings, Inc.*, and *In re City of Detroit, Michigan*. In 2013, Judge Pérez was selected to lead Weil’s Houston office as its managing partner, a role that he held until his retirement at the end of 2023. In August 2023, Judge Pérez was a contributing author to a new chapter in the Collier Bankruptcy Practice Guide entitled *Bankruptcy Cases Involving Oil and Gas Companies*. Judge Pérez is also a fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy and a past chair of the Bankruptcy Section of the Houston Bar Association.

New Role on the Bench

Judge Pérez is excited to be on the bench and is looking forward to all of the new challenges that the role will bring. In particular, he is excited to be reunited with his longtime colleague at Weil and fellow member of the Complex Panel, United States Bankruptcy Judge Christopher M. Lopez. He is also eager to work with and mentor young attorneys, including his two current term clerks, and looks forward to opinion writing. Judge’s Perez’s philosophy and approach on the bench will be in his words to let the lawyers argue their cases. He looks forward

to all of the creative arguments that he will be hearing from the advocates before him.

Off the bench, Judge Pérez enjoys traveling with Kathy, including to the family beach house in New Jersey. When visiting the east coast, he enjoys spending time with his son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. Please join me in giving Judge Pérez a very warm welcome to the bench.

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