

Nicholas J. Secco

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Overview

Nick is a nationally recognized trial lawyer whose practice revolves around complex commercial matters, toxic tort cases, environmental claims, and high-exposure employment actions. He is often retained on the eve of trial to prepare cases for presentation to juries, judges, and arbitrators around the country.

Chambers recognizes him as a preeminent litigator who is “adept at handling high-stakes disputes,” describing him as “great in the courtroom,” a “talented orator,” a “fantastic oral advocate,” “brilliant in litigation,” and a “tremendous lawyer” (2025, 2026). Benchmark Litigation has ranked him as a 2024-2027 National Litigation Star, based upon client reviews and feedback from peers who have seen him perform in court. Thomson Reuters named him a national Stand-Out Lawyer based on client nominations. The Legal 500 identified him as a leader in the field of Mass Tort and Product Liability Defense, calling him a “trial expert.”

Nick has conducted trials covered by *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times* , *Variety*, *The American Lawyer*, *Law360*, *National Law Journal*, *Crain's Chicago Business* and various other media outlets.

Nick's notable matters have included the following:

Significant Trials

- Eight-figure federal bench trial (October 2025 - February 2026). Represented a primary defendant in the damages phase of an environmental trial, where the government sought to recoup more than $60 million in historical costs. Conducted openings and closings on behalf of all defendants, cross-examined key experts, presented critical expert direct examinations. To prevail, defendants needed to demonstrate that the government's clean-up was "arbitrary and capricious," a high burden. Nonetheless, during closings, the presiding judge noted that Benesch had presented "weighty" arguments that a significant portion of the remediation was, in fact, capricious. After closings, the government stipulated to a reduction of its damages claim of more than fifty percent.
- Nine-figure bench trial (September 2025). Represented a professional sports league with a $180 million claim against Dr. Phil McGraw and his media platform in federal bankruptcy court. After a bench trial, the court held that the bankruptcy had been filed in bad faith and that Dr. Phil had intentionally destroyed key evidence. Among other things, Nick cross-examined Dr. Phil, examined critical fact witnesses, and conducted openings and closings. The victory was widely reported in the press, including articles in The Wall Street Journal, Variety, and The Hollywood Reporter. In honor of the win, Nick and the Benesch trial team were recognized in The American Lawyer's Litigator of the Week Runners-Up and Shout-Outs. Case ongoing.
- Eight figure arbitration trial (March 2024). Defended large industrial concern against breach of contract claims.
- Nine-figure federal bench trial (June 2023 and August 2023). Nick was lead trial counsel for an owner/operator in a CERCLA case where the government sought more than $130 million in damages. Two phases of trial occurred on an expedited basis in the summer of 2023, separated by only two months. Nick gave opening statements and closing arguments, performed direct examination of key experts, and cross-examined experts advanced by the government and other defendants. As a consequence of these two trials, the Court found that Nick's client was not responsible for clean-up costs in a half-mile industrial band surrounding the facility in question.
- Federal jury trial revolving around the validity of a patent (July 2023). Case settled after trial.
- Billion-dollar federal bench trial in the Central District of California (May 2022). Nick represented a primary defendant in a complex environmental case where the government sought nearly a billion dollars in remediation costs allegedly arising out of the operation of a secondary smelter ($136 million in historical expenditures and up to $700 million in future costs). Nick cross-examined key government experts, examined defense experts, and gave the oral closing argument on behalf of all defendants. Following trial, the Court issued a verdict in favor of defendants. In recognition of this victory, The American Lawyer selected Nick as Runner-Up for national Litigator of the Week.

- Eight-figure jury trial (May 2021). Nick represented an international entertainment and sports conglomerate against claims of breach of fiduciary duty brought by a professional athlete. After nearly a month of evidence, the jury deliberated only three hours before finding in favor of Nick's client on all counts;
- Eight-figure international arbitration trial for a national consumer goods company arising out of an alleged breach of contract. Following trial, the three-member tribunal completely rejected Claimants' causes of action and awarded Nick's client the full value of its counterclaim;
- Seven-figure arbitration trial for a large energy concern stemming from an alleged breach of contract. After trial, the three-member panel awarded Nick's client the full value of its claims;
- Seven-figure arbitration trial for a manufacturing company. After trial, the sole arbitrator awarded Nick's client the full value of its claims for breach of contract;
- Nine-figure bench trial in the Northern District of Illinois for a global manufacturing enterprise. Following the hearing, the Court dismissed the nine-figure claims of Nick's adversary;
- Trade secret misappropriation jury trial in the Middle District of Florida. Case settled in the middle of trial;
- Complete defense verdict after a four-month jury trial in which the healthcare industry claimed that the costs of treating indigent patients should be borne by a consumer product company;
- Two product liability jury trials in Missouri;
- Nine-figure trade secret misappropriation arbitration trial on behalf of a Silicon Valley company. Settled on the eve of trial;

Significant Pre-Trial Victories and Other Matters

- Retained to defend a consumer products and healthcare company against a high-profile $200 million reverse discrimination claim pursuant to Section 1981. Replaced incumbent counsel during discovery. Case settled on very favorable terms. (October 2026)
- Retained on the eve of two jury trials to represent defendants accused of employment discrimination. In both instances, the cases settled on favorable terms after motions in limine, submission of jury instructions, and pre-trial hearings. (November 2025)
- Defended large consumer services company against allegations of trade secret misappropriation in Washington federal court. Replaced prior counsel in the middle of discovery. Following Nick's oral argument, plaintiff's expert report was stricken as being untimely. Subsequently, all plaintiff's remaining expert opinions were excluded under Daubert. Plaintiff's claims were disposed of on summary judgment. (June 2025)
- Defended a cryptocurrency company in an eight-figure arbitration alleging breach of contract and violations of securities laws. State securities law claims were dismissed on a dispositive motion. The remainder of the case settled on confidential terms after submission of opening statements (May 2024).
- Defended international consumer products company against Lanham Act and RICO claims alleging false advertising. Plaintiffs sought tens of millions of dollars in damages. Following Nick's oral argument, the federal district court dismissed all claims on legal grounds. (November 2023)

- Defended Fortune 500 company in a multimillion-dollar breach of contract action in the Southern District of New York. After briefing and argument, the Court dismissed all claims against Nick's client with prejudice. Nick argued the resulting appeal before the Second Circuit, which completely affirmed the trial court's ruling;
- Eight-figure federal breach of contract action for a national paint company. Following briefing and oral argument, all of Plaintiff's claims against Nick's client were dismissed with prejudice by the Western District of Texas. Victory affirmed by the Fifth Circuit;
- Representation of an international chemical company in a toxic tort matter arising out of an alleged cancer cluster. Plaintiffs voluntarily dismissed their claims with prejudice following initial investigation and preliminary motion practice;
- Seven-figure breach of contract action for a national entertainment company in Delaware state court. Following discovery and depositions, the case settled on favorable terms;
- Nine-figure breach of contract and tort claim on behalf of a global chemical company that flowed from a massive natural gas leak in Louisiana. Following extensive discovery, the Court granted summary judgment in favor of Nick's client on certain grounds and excluded a significant portion of the opposing party's expert opinions. Case settled on favorable terms after those rulings;
- Multimillion-dollar wrongful death claims against a metals manufacturer in Pennsylvania state court.

Prior to joining Benesch, Nick spent the majority of his career at Kirkland & Ellis LLP, where he was a partner.

Credentials

EDUCATION

- Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, 2001, J.D., *cum laude*
  - Order of the Coif
  - Senior Editor, *Journal of International Law and Business*
  - Recipient, Bell, Boyd, and Lloyd Advocacy Prize
- Louisiana State University, 1998, B.A., Philosophy

BAR & COURT ADMISSIONS

- Illinois
- Florida
- Texas
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit

- U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois
- Trial Bar for the Northern District of Illinois
- U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida
- U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit

Memberships

- The Center for Family Representation
- Special Olympics New York
- National Italian American Foundation
- Trial Sections of Florida and Texas State Bar Associations

Awards & Recognition

- Listed, Chambers USA Leading Lawyers, Litigation: General Commercial, 2025-2026
- Named, Thomson Reuters Stand-Out Lawyer, 2024-2025
- Listed, Benchmark Litigation, National Litigation Star, 2024-2027

Beyond the office

Favorite Quote

“Contest living: in life, every effort is marked down at the end as a win or a loss.” – Edward Bennett Williams

Hobbies

Reading great novels; reading about history, science, economics, and geopolitics; fitness; sports; travel; spending time with my incredible wife and daughters.

Favorite Vacations

Africa; Tokyo

News & Insights

- Nicholas Secco Authors ALM | Law.com Article on How to Win When Retained on the Eve of a Jury Trial
  November 25, 2026 | Media Mentions
- Benesch Named 2027 Highly Recommended Firm by Benchmark Litigation; 14 Attorneys Recognized, Including 4 First-Time Honorees
  October 30, 2026 | Press Releases
- Bloomberg Law Quotes Nick Secco on Emerging PFAS Destruction Technologies
  October 27, 2026 | Media Mentions
- A Brave New World: Trying Causation in PFAS Cases Under CERCLA
  September 11, 2026 | Client Alerts & Insights
- Law360 Highlights Benesch Team Representing Gould Electronics in California Environmental Cleanup Matter
  July 23, 2026 | Media Mentions
- Benesch Recognized as Leading Law Firm by Chambers USA 2026 with Record Growth in National and Regional Rankings
  June 4, 2026 | Press Releases
- Thomson Reuters Westlaw Today Features Nicholas Secco on Managing Late-Stage Counsel Transitions Ahead of Trial
  May 22, 2026 | Contributed Content & Presentations
- Passing the Baton: Checklist for In-House Lawyers Retaining New Trial Counsel on the Eve of Trial
  May 19, 2026 | Client Alerts & Insights
- Benesch Secures Major Trial Victory for Professional Bull Riders in High-Profile Bankruptcy Dispute
  November 3, 2025 | Press Releases
- Benesch Earns Shoutout in The American Lawyer (ALM) Litigator of the Week
  October 31, 2025 | Media Mentions

Speaking & Events

PAST EVENTS

- Humanizing the Corporate Behemoth in High Stakes Litigation | Nicholas J. Secco
  September 12, 2024 | Firm Events