



Will S. Skinner

PARTNER

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RELATED SERVICES

- Employment
- Aviation
- Trial Practice

OFFICES

- Los Angeles

OVERVIEW

Will Skinner has over 30 weeks as lead trial counsel handling complex product liability cases, and at least six plus weeks as second chair/co-trial counsel. Will's trial and litigation experience covers a broad range of areas, including product liability, aviation, employment, commercial and contract disputes, intellectual property, unfair competition, personal injury and wrongful death. Will devotes a significant portion of his practice to handling employment and aviation matters. He has litigated and tried cases in state and federal courts throughout the United States.

His employment practice includes providing counseling, workplace investigations, training, and litigation services to companies regarding all types of claims, including discrimination, harassment, retaliation and wrongful termination.

Will's aviation practice includes defending general aviation product liability actions, personal injury and wrongful death claims arising out of international air transportation, commercial and contract disputes

involving general aviation manufacturers and commercial airlines, libel and defamation actions involving airlines, employment matters and sexual harassment and assault claims involving airline personnel.

Will was national coordinating counsel for asbestos claims for a general aviation manufacturer for over 15 years. He also represented the pharmaceutical industry in thousands of complex mass tort actions in multiple jurisdictions throughout the United States and defended medical device manufacturers in personal injury and wrongful death product liability actions

REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

TRIAL EXPERIENCE

- Lead trial counsel in a 2022 jury trial representing a general aviation manufacturer in a complex aviation product liability case in San Mateo Superior Court, California. This case involved the crash of a Cirrus SR22 aircraft that resulted in two deaths, a father who was the heir to a prominent financial banking family and his daughter, and serious injuries to the surviving son and family nanny. Plaintiffs sought more than \$200 million in damages prior to trial. This case involved taking over 75 depositions of corporate witnesses, experts and non-party witnesses. Although the case was scheduled for a four-month trial, it resolved favorably for Will's client after almost two weeks of trial and numerous rulings adverse to plaintiffs.
- Lead trial counsel in a 2019 jury trial representing a general aviation manufacturer in a wrongful death case in the Miami-Dade Circuit Court, Miami, Florida. The case involved the crash of a Cessna 421C resulting in the death of a husband who was the heir to a restaurant franchise and had been recently married before the crash. Plaintiff sought damages in excess of \$20 million. After a 4 plus week jury trial, the jury returned a verdict finding that the engine part at issue was not defective but then awarded damages. Although the jury awarded plaintiff damages, the award was significantly less than what plaintiffs demanded immediately before trial.
- Lead trial counsel in a 2018 jury trial representing a general aviation manufacturer in wrongful death jury trial in Tulsa County District Court in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The case involved the crash of a Beech Bonanza resulting in the deaths of 3 triplet teenagers and 2 adults. Plaintiffs sought damages more than \$25 million. After more than five weeks of trial, the jury returned a defense verdict resulting in zero liability to the engine manufacturer. The defense verdict was upheld on appeal to the Oklahoma Supreme Court.
- Lead trial counsel in a 2017 jury trial representing a general aviation manufacturer in a 6-week jury trial in federal court in Philadelphia. The case involved the death of a U.S. Forest Service employee following the crash of a Cessna T210L in June 2010. Plaintiffs sought damages in excess of \$15 million damages claiming that the decedent suffered severe pain and suffering as a result of the post-crash fire. Plaintiffs refused to make a settlement demand less than 8 figures before trial. The jury returned a verdict in Plaintiffs' favor but only awarded \$2.7 million – substantially less than the Plaintiffs' demand.

- Lead trial counsel in a 2016 jury trial representing a general aviation manufacturer in an 11 plus week trial in King County Superior Court, Seattle, Washington involving the crash of a Cessna U206F. Five people were on board: Preston and Stacie Cavner; their sons Myles (age 4) and Hudson (age 2); and Rachel Zientek (a 16-year-old babysitter). After taking off from Merrill Field in Alaska, the aircraft crashed into a vacant building in downtown Anchorage, just blocks from the airport. A post-crash fire erupted. Passersby rescued the four survivors, who suffered significant burns and other injuries. However, 4-year-old Myles Cavner perished. Plaintiffs' counsel asked the jury to award Plaintiffs more than \$120 million. After four years of litigation, the 11-plus week trial began in January 2016. Continental presented witnesses including Alaskan pilots and aviation mechanics who observed the brief accident flight and testified that the engine sounded strong and healthy, but that the aircraft appeared to be overloaded and struggled to gain altitude. Both sides presented expert witnesses. After a day and a half of deliberations, the 12-person jury returned a verdict vindicating Will's client of any liability and finding that pilot Preston Cavner's negligence was the sole cause of the fatal June 1, 2010 accident. <http://www.adn.com/article/20160427/jury-finds-anchorage-pilot-was-fault-2010-plane-crash-killed-his-son>
- Lead trial counsel in 2013 bench trial representing a general aviation manufacturer in a significant personal injury lawsuit arising out of the crash of a Cessna 210 at the Eros Airport in Windhoek, Namibia. One of the plaintiffs, a California resident, suffered spinal cord injuries causing her to be confined to a wheelchair as a paraplegic resulting from the accident. She filed suit along with her husband seeking damages in excess of \$30 million. Will prevailed on a motion to bifurcate liability and damages at trial. After a five-day bench trial in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, the Court ruled in favor of Will's client finding that Plaintiffs failed to prove their manufacturing defect claims and that the accident was caused by pilot error. See *Higley v. Cessna Aircraft Co.*, 2013 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 135158, 2013 WL 5315299 (C.D. Cal. Sept. 20, 2013).
- In 2011, Will represented a cultural organization and its leadership as trial counsel in a lawsuit arising from an attempted takeover of that organization and its property by disgruntled ex-members who had been ousted from the organization. After a several day bench trial in the Los Angeles Superior Court for the State of California, Will obtained a verdict in favor of his clients.
- In 2010, Will and one of his former partners were retained as trial counsel less than one month before trial to defend a general aviation engine manufacturer in a wrongful death case pending in Gwinnett County Superior Court for the State of Georgia. The case involved the crash of a Cessna 210 aircraft where the pilot, a prominent anesthesiologist, claimed he had an engine failure shortly before he crashed into a pine tree. Plaintiffs sought damages in excess of \$18 million. After a two plus week jury trial, the jury deliberated for a number of days and then awarded only \$1.7 million.
- In 2009, Will represented a general aviation engine manufacturer as lead trial counsel in a commercial and breach of warranty case involving a Cirrus SR22 aircraft. After a five-day jury trial in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, Will obtained a defense verdict.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT MATTERS

- Represented an aviation engine manufacturer in multiple cases throughout United States challenging and prevailing on motions to dismiss for lack of personal jurisdiction, including *LNS Enters. LLC v. Cont'l Motors, Inc.*, 22 F.4th 852 (9th Cir. 2022) and *Elliott v. Cessna Aircraft Co.*, 2021 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 85731 (C.D. Cal., Apr. 30, 2021).
- Represented an aviation engine manufacturer as national asbestos counsel for over 15 years handling asbestos cases throughout the United States.
- Represented an international tobacco client in a trademark, trade name and unfair competitions lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court targeted at prohibiting the client from using its company name and competing with a rival tobacco company. Will won a motion for summary judgment and obtained a ruling permitting his client to continue operating using its company name and trademark.
- Represented an international airline in a breach of contract and libel action where actions were filed in both federal and state court. Will won a motion for summary judgment in federal court and obtained a ruling that the published statements were not libelous and there was no breach of contract. He also won a motion to compel arbitration in federal court regarding certain aspects of the claims forcing the plaintiff to arbitrate those claims in the home country of the foreign airlines. The state court action was dismissed.
- Defended Singapore Airlines in the mass air disaster involving flight SQ006 on Oct. 31, 2000, involving the crash of a Boeing 747 on take-off from the Chaing Kai Shek International Airport in Taipei, Taiwan. Numerous personal injury and wrongful death actions were filed throughout the United States as a result of this accident.

PUBLICATIONS

- Recent Developments in Aviation Law – 2011, 77 J. AIR L. & COM. 275, Spring 2012, Co-Author
- DOHSA's Commercial Aviation Exception: How Mass Airline Disasters Influenced Congress On Compensation For Deaths On The High Seas, 75 J. AIR L. & COM. 137, Winter 2010, Co-Author
- Preemption In The Ninth Circuit: *Martin v. Midwest* and the Pervasive Regulation Standard, AVIATION LITIGATION QUARTERLY, Spring 2009 (Vol. 10, No. 1), republished in APPELLATE PRACTICE JOURNAL, Summer 2009 (Vol. 28, No. 3), Author
- The Preemptive Effect of the Federal Aviation Act: The Question of GARA and Congressional Intent to Occupy the Field of Aviation Safety, ANNALS OF AIR & SPACE LAW, Vol. XXXIV 2009, Co-Author
- The Sophisticated Pilot: A New Line of Defense In The Field of General Aviation, 73 J. AIR L. & COM. 527, Summer 2008, Author
- THE LIABILITY REPORTER (International Air Transport Association and Condon & Forsyth LLP) from 2000-2003, (Volumes 3-6), Contributing Author
- Preventing Gray Markets: Is Copyright Law The Solution? 26 SYRACUSE J. INT'L L. & COM. 318, Spring 1999, Author

PRESENTATIONS

- Best Practices for Addressing Gender Diversity in the Workplace, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Los Angeles, CA, June 2024
- London Market Professionals – Claims Matters, An International Perspective on Claims Handling, Panel Member, February 2014
- 46th Annual SMU Air Law Symposium, Recent Developments in Aviation Law, Speaker, March 2012

CREDENTIALS

Admissions

- California
- California Federal Courts
- U.S. Supreme Court

Memberships

- Royal Aeronautical Society – London
- Aviation Insurance Association
- Syracuse University College of Law, J.D., cum laude, 1999
 - Syracuse Journal of International Law & Commerce, Senior Editor
 - The Labor Lawyer (ABA Publication), Senior Editor,
 - Syracuse Law and Technology Journal, founding member and Executive Editor
- Western Washington University, B.A., cum laude, 1996