

## Lawyer of the Year

■ RUNNER-UP | PHILIP S. BECK ■

### Call him anything but a 'cause lawyer'

By Gail Diane Cox  
STAFF REPORTER

TO CHICAGO LITIGATOR Philip S. Beck, one of the worst epithets around is "cause lawyer."

As he told reporters last fall on winning a \$15 million verdict against the city of Chicago in a police corruption civil rights case, "It's not like I'm some kind of bleeding-heart liberal here who is a cause lawyer."

Whatever one's politics, he went on to explain, no one is in favor of locking up the wrong man—and his client, James Newsome, had been wrongfully locked up for 15 years.

"Our case was that they rigged the lineup," he said. "They just needed a black man to blame." *Newsome v. McCabe*, No. 96C7680 (N.D.Ill.).

Not that anyone had gotten close to calling Beck a bleeding-heart liberal, given his other famous recent client: George W. Bush. Beck was the president-to-be's point man last year, successfully arguing for a Republican win in the Florida recount election. The day that Circuit Judge N. Sanders Sauls declined to allow a re-count of nearly 13,000 disputed votes, the national press corps started calling Beck "a star."

As Newsome crowed when his verdict came in, Beck "was Bush's lawyer. Bush could have had anyone he wanted, and he got him."

Presumably when the Justice Department chose a lead trial lawyer to replace David Boies on the Microsoft case this past summer, it too could have had anyone it wanted. And it chose Beck.

"What's at stake here is the future of the Internet, and what amount of power any one actor can exercise in controlling the future of the Internet," Stanford Law School professor Lawrence Lessig told reporters when Beck's new role was announced.

The choice looked even better two

months later when Beck won \$96 million in a construction loan case. *Residential Funding Corp. v. DeGeorge Financial Corp.*, No. 3:00CV202 (JBA) (D. Conn.).

This has been Beck's year—his breakthrough, as Hollywood would call it if he had put in a couple of decades as a character actor and suddenly became a leading man. It's been belated, some say, but maybe the nation needed some time to grasp a self-described conservative Republican with a maverick career path.

Beck is a Chicago native, born April 30, 1951. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin "with distinction" in 1973 and went on to earn his law degree from Boston University magna cum laude three years later. After clerking for a federal judge in the D.C. Circuit, he went directly into the megafirm of Kirkland & Ellis. In 1993, he and the lawyer he sometimes dubs his mentor, Fred Bartlit Jr., left to found their own commercial litigation shop, now Bartlit Beck Herman Palenchar & Scott, with 43 lawyers.

Bartlit says his friend isn't geared toward working in big organizations.

#### Under the radar

"He's an in-depth thinker," he says of Beck. "He dances to his own tune and way of doing things. He's a guy who's always flown under the radar."

The stealth litigator was visible in two earlier cases. In December 1994, a Philadelphia jury gave him a long-shot defense win in a pollution case. Plaintiffs had alleged a lead processing plant, first owned by NL Industries



JAY MALLIN

BREAKOUT YEAR: Philip S. Beck on Nov. 6 at the U.S. District Courthouse in Washington, D.C., after a hearing in the Microsoft case, which was a part of his big year.

Inc. and later by Anzon Inc., had been contaminating a blue-collar neighborhood. A class of some 7,500 present and former residents who grew up in the area sued Anzon and NL Industries, charging injuries from exposure to lead. Just before the trial ended, the judge recommended that the defendants settle, suggesting a payout by NL Industries of \$16 million and by Anzon of \$6 million. Anzon settled, on the day of closing arguments, for \$6 million. NL Industries declined and, represented by Beck, went on to win.

Beck was briefly back in the news in April 1997 with another defense win, when he represented a drug company, Alpha Therapeutic Corp., in a products action brought by two HIV-positive teenaged hemophiliacs.

Married and the father of three, Beck is a skier and a golfer with a lifelong fondness for reading—especially American history. And now he is not only reading it, he's making it. **NLJ**