

Rising Star: Cravath's Brittany L. Sukiennik

By Emily Johnson

Law360 (August 24, 2026) -- Brittany L. Sukiennik of Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP has guided Xcel Energy, Colorado's largest utility company, in a roughly \$640 million agreement to settle claims against it over the devastating 2021 Marshall Fire and helped lead Pacific Gas and Electric Co. through Chapter 11 bankruptcy after it faced mass tort suits over the California wildfires in 2017 and 2018, earning her a spot among practitioners under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

The biggest case of her career, and what was challenging about it:

Sukiennik said the biggest case of her career was one in which she and the legal defense team took about 400 depositions — the most she's encountered in a single case. The case involved 4,000 individual plaintiffs in Colorado.

Individual plaintiffs, local governments and insurers seeking subrogation over the 2021 Marshall Fire claimed that Xcel Energy failed to maintain adequate fire mitigation plans and didn't take appropriate steps to mitigate the fire once it started. The Marshall Fire killed two people and destroyed 6,000 acres, including numerous homes, in Boulder County, Colorado, the plaintiffs said.

In agreeing to settle the claims in September 2025, Xcel said it did not admit any fault, wrongdoing or negligence in connection with the resolution of the claims.

Sukiennik said she helped Xcel find video footage and depositions that showed the company was not at fault.

"We took 250 [depositions] of the plaintiffs themselves and about another 150 depositions of different first responders from fire departments and the sheriff's office to get as much percipient witness information as possible about where that first fire was at every moment in time to show just how devastated the community was

2026



Brittany L. Sukiennik
Cravath

Age: 39

Home base: New York

Position: Partner

Law school: Columbia Law School

First job after law school: Associate at Cravath

from that ignition that everybody agreed had absolutely nothing at all to do with our client," Sukiennik said.

Her proudest moment as an attorney:

Sukiennik said she is most proud of her work helping to prepare for trial as part of the defense team for Xcel against claims over the Marshall Fire.

"It wasn't just the outcome, but how we got there," Sukiennik said.

She said helping Xcel reach a settlement before jury selection began was part of a broader strategy of being genuinely prepared for trial.

"I think what made me proud is that we didn't treat readiness and resolution as opposites," Sukiennik said. "We prepared — we were going to try the case to a verdict, and that discipline was really evident to the opposing side and is precisely what led us to [resolution]. ... The client paid about \$260 million out of pocket on a case that analysts had estimated at over \$2 billion in exposure."

When the settlement was announced, Sukiennik said, the company's stock rose that same day.

"I think it hit like a 52-week high, and so to be able to see how the market reacted to that settlement and to see how it removed all those years of uncertainty from our client was remarkable. I was extremely proud, and I know my team was as well," she said.

What motivates her:

Sukiennik said she is motivated by working with her colleagues — "some of the smartest and most driven lawyers in the field."

"My partners and my team, they push me to think harder, to argue better and really to never settle for the easy answer, to keep digging until we've really crossed all of our t's and dotted our i's," Sukiennik said. "I think there's just a really great energy that comes from being surrounded by people who are kind of the best at getting it right. I think that just makes the work better every single time."

Other notable cases she's worked on:

Sukiennik helped guide PG&E through Chapter 11 bankruptcy after more than 2,500 suits were filed against the utility over the 2017 and 2018 California wildfires.

A U.S. bankruptcy judge in June 2020 approved PG&E's \$59 billion reorganization plan, resolving a bankruptcy prompted by liabilities stemming from a series of wildfires that killed more than 100 people, leveled entire California communities and led PG&E to plead guilty to involuntary manslaughter.

Sukiennik helped the utility reach settlements with wildfire victims, insurers and other claimants.

"To get PG&E out of bankruptcy in light of the size of that company, the various stakeholders, the ongoing regulatory and criminal and civil actions that it was facing, that was definitely one of the more challenging cases that I worked on and absolutely one of the most rewarding," she said.

--As told to Emily Johnson. Additional reporting by Rae Ann Varona and Hannah Albarazi. Editing by Rich Mills.

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2026 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,100 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2026, to be eligible for this year's award.

All Content © 2003-2026, Portfolio Media, Inc.