

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMITTEES: DIVERSITY

by *Walter W. Burford, Washington, DC*

This is an exciting time for the Diversity Committee. As a result of our newly customized Committee strategy, the efforts of the Committee's leadership team, and the partnerships we have undertaken within and outside of the Section, we have increased our membership by more than 40% in the first six months of this fiscal year. The Committee also cosponsored a Midyear program profiling Section leaders who are minorities, women, or both, and has taken the lead in brokering a partnership between the Tax Section and the Real Property, Probate and Trust Section (RPPT) to conduct a CLE program designed to attract members of various ethnic bar associations.

The Committee seeks to foster diversity within the Section by seeking the active involvement by tax lawyers of color, women lawyers, lawyers with disabilities, lawyers from diverse ethnic backgrounds and lawyers of diverse sexual orientation. During May of 2005, we devised a new strategy that would help us achieve some necessary interim goals. We therefore created Subcommittees with the following leadership: Advisory Committee (Glenn Carrington, Chair); Programming (Craig Boise, Chair); Committee Partnerships (Gerald Thomas and Maria Murphy, Co-Chairs); Membership and Development (Alex Perez, Chair); and Public Relations (Kristin Jones, Chair).

The Committee's new strategy, spearheaded by the new Subcommittees, focuses on: 1) working with the Section leadership and senior level tax practitioners to achieve greater diversity with-

in the Section; 2) identifying programming that encourages participation by a diverse audience; 3) identifying opportunities to work with other committees and organizations; 4) recruiting members of diverse backgrounds, and evaluating the success of our strategies for meeting the needs of these members; and 5) creating greater awareness of the Committee's activities.

The Committee has recently worked on various projects and continues to work on new projects and activities. Recently, the Committee co-sponsored a two-part program on the intersection of race and tax. Part I included Prof. David Brennen, Prof. Beverly Moran, Prof. Janet Thompson Jackson, and Mildeen Worrell (House Ways & Means Committee staff lawyer), and Part II included Prof. Karen Brown, Prof. Dorothy Brown, and Mylinh Uy (practicing attorney). The panelists addressed the impact on minorities of rules regarding tax-exempt organizations, social security, taxation of the marital unit, economic development (such as the New Markets Tax Credit), the treatment of the costs of home ownership, and whether any possible connections exist between race and the legislative process. Thus, the content of the panel discussions focused on the intersection of tax policy and race and brought an emerging genre of scholarship, sometimes referred to as critical tax, to the Section. Both parts of the program were enthusiastically received.

During the Section Midyear meeting in February of this year, the Committee co-sponsored a program entitled, "Profiles in Diversity," which featured a number of section leaders,

including Glenn Carrington (Council Member), Reginald Clark (Chair, Corporate Tax Committee) and Susan Serota (Tax Section Chair-Elect), who shared their experiences and provided concrete steps interested members could take to rise to leadership positions in the Section, as well as within their respective areas of tax practice.

The Committee also has represented the Section in discussions with RPPT's Community Outreach Committee. That committee provides continuing legal education training that is designed to attract members of various ethnic bar associations. The Section has approved a proposal to work with RPPT on this important CLE program and we expect that the Section and RPPT will soon begin to undertake this effort.

As indicated by the few examples of the Committee's activities discussed above, the Committee is making significant progress in achieving its mission. However, we need to continue to increase the number of people within the Section who would like to assist in supporting the Committee's efforts. There are countless ways Section members can assist, including actively seeking diversity in your panel discussions, committee activities, networking, and mentoring.

To obtain more information about the Diversity Committee including contact information for the officers, go to the committee's webpage at www.abanet.org/tax. ■