

William J. Wilkins*



For my final Chair's column, I'd like to look back on the Section's accomplishments and challenges in the past year. My overall impression of the Chair's job at this point brings to mind the image of a relay race, where each Chair needs to take a clean handoff, maintain and hopefully enhance the team's position, and then deliver a clean handoff from a position of strength. One reason this comes to mind is that so many of this year's accomplishments involved executing and finalizing great initiatives that were well under way when I started my term.

May Meeting

The May Meeting continues to deliver what our members want. Given the difficult economic times, we were apprehensive about attendance—but we need not have been. We had just over 2,000 attendees, which is in keeping with attendance of years past.

Our May Meeting would not be nearly as successful without participation of our government guests. More than 200 representatives from federal and state agencies, congressional offices, and the courts contributed essential insights for our substantive programming and CLE. We appreciate the contributions of time and attention that our government speakers have shown over the years, and I am grateful to committee chairs, panelists, and Section officers past and present who have helped make Section meetings welcoming and informative events for our government guests.

This year, we piloted a new format for our Friday programming at the May Meeting, in order to accommodate all Section committee meetings and CLE at the host hotel, the Grand Hyatt Washington. The new track of scheduling moved meeting times around a bit, and changed some of the committee lunch times. Attendees with whom I talked generally liked the changes. In particular, we were able to offer three more hours of CLE programming, and our shorter lunch break (made possible by using boxed lunches) made for a more efficient use of valuable Friday time. The active participation of Section committees in spotting and resolving

issues with the many iterations of the proposed scheduling was the most important element in making the new schedule as successful as it was.

Leadership Changes

This year brought several changes to our Tax Section leadership. This spring our Chair-Elect, Karen Hawkins, resigned her Section post to become the new Director of the IRS Office of Professional Responsibility. Karen left the Section in mid-April, but joined us at the May Meeting Plenary Luncheon to accept the Section's thanks for her service, and to speak about her tenure as Chair-Elect.

In light of Karen's departure, the Section's Nominating Committee voted Stuart Lewis to become Chair-Elect upon Karen's departure. That vote was confirmed by the Section Council and ratified at the May Meeting Plenary Luncheon. Stuart is now Chair-Elect and will become Chair at the end of my term, which formally concludes with the ABA Annual Meeting in Chicago this August. Also at the August meeting, a new slate of leadership nominees will be considered and voted upon.

On May 12, President Obama nominated me to become Chief Counsel of the Internal Revenue Service and an Assistant General Counsel of the Department of Treasury. At this writing, I am awaiting the beginning of the Senate confirmation process. If I am sworn in before the formal end of my term as Section Chair, I will need to resign from my Section office but, as noted above, Stuart Lewis would immediately become

Chair in that event. Stuart is already hard at work on Section leadership, and there are several active matters already receiving his skilled and thoughtful attention.

White Papers

An initiative of mine that I hope will be useful to future Section leaders is the drafting of "White Papers" on tax issues that are likely to come up for congressional consideration. In the past, the Section has occasionally been frustrated by the combination of a tight deadline for congressional testimony and the length of time needed to prepare appropriate testimony and have it approved by the Section Council and by ABA "Blanket Authority" processes. The White Papers are meant to provide background for testimony should the Section be asked to provide comment to the relevant committees and members of Congress. Several papers are already finalized and approved, and we expect that soon a total of five papers will have been approved and distributed to appropriate policymakers. The subjects are tax simplification; tax penalty reform; tax issues in health care reform; international tax reform; and transfer tax reform. These reflect significant contributions from some of our most active committees and best thinkers and writers, and will enable us to add our valuable expertise to ongoing policy debates.

Pro Bono Activities

Over the last year, the Section has stepped up our activities in the area of pro bono. We hired a staff attorney to help identify opportunities for our members

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and to work with members and outside groups to develop programs that benefit low-income taxpayers.

Our investment in this area has paid off: we now have a Pro Bono Opportunities web page that provides information about low income taxpayer clinics that need assistance and allows members to sign up to help. The page also describes an important program to assist in the U.S. Tax Court on Calendar Call days, and encourages lawyers to get involved. The page is still being developed, and we are always soliciting ideas for getting our members involved. The web address is: <http://www.abanet.org/tax/probono/>.

Through the leadership of Ken Gideon and his special committee, we now have selected our first two Public Service Fellows, and we have excellent processes in place for future selection rounds.

Special Thanks

While it's not possible to thank individually everyone who helped me during my term as chair, I do want to take this opportunity to recognize the outstanding participation of our Council and Section leadership who contributed their time and many talents throughout the year.

Karen Hawkins was an outstanding Chair-Elect, and took on several special tasks, including coordinating Section participation in this year's Tax Court Judicial Conference. Our Vice Chairs, Ruddy Ramelli (Administration), Peter Connors (Committee Operations), Ellen Aprill (Communications), Armando Gomez (Government Relations), Sam Braunstein (Professional Services), and Lou Mezzullo (Publications), along with Alice Abreu (Secretary) and Brian Trauman (Assistant Secretary), provided outstanding leadership throughout the year. Ruddy, Armando, Sam, Lou, and Alice will be moving out of their posts at the end of this year, so special thanks are due as they conclude their service.

I also want to thank our Delegates to the ABA House of Delegates, who have been of great assistance, Paul Sax and Dick Lipton. Their guidance and advice was invaluable during the many conversations with the ABA throughout the year. Section relations with ABA executives and governing bodies present challenges to every Section Chair. This past year was no exception, and this next year won't be either. We are fortunate to have Paul and Dick as our Delegates in these times.

As I first noted above, much of what a Section Chair accomplishes involves completion or continued good execution of well-designed initiatives of prior Chairs. I am grateful to my predecessors—especially Stanley Blend, Susan Serota, and Dennis Drapkin—not only for putting me in a strong position, but also for their ongoing hard work on the Section's most important management issues.

Our Council Directors and committee leaders have done a tremendous job this year in putting together outstanding CLE programming, organizing public policy comment projects, helping with the Section White Papers, and assisting with many other Section activities during the year. We are fortunate to have such an outstanding group of committed professionals who are willing to contribute their time and energy to the Section's work. Thank you.

I have to save my final and most heartfelt thanks of all for Christine Brunswick and her wonderful staff. Their dedication, good judgment, energy, organization, and good cheer keep the Section operating at the highest level, and make it a real pleasure to serve as a volunteer Section leader. ■

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