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Tax Maven

The Contemporary Tax Journal's Interview with Mr. Ray Beeman

By: Tam Nguyen, MST Student

Ray Beeman is the co-leader of EY's Washington Council Ernst & Young practice where he provides clients with strategic advice and representation on issues and developments involving tax and budget policy. Prior to joining EY, Mr. Beeman was Tax Counsel and Special Advisor for Tax Reform with the U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means. He also served Congress as Legislation Counsel for the Joint Committee on Taxation where he was involved in several tax legislative proposals that were passed by Congress and signed into law by the President, including the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004.

Mr. Beeman is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley and received a J.D. from Pepperdine University School of Law, as well as an LL.M. in taxation from Boston University School of Law. Ray is a member of the State Bar of California and the DC Bar.

I had the pleasure to interview Mr. Beeman on January 7, 2022 via Zoom. He was extremely personable and very enthusiastic about tax policy. Mr. Beeman and I delightfully conversed about being an attorney at a Big 4 accounting firm and how tax policy gets enacted. Below are the thoughts and experiences he was kind enough to share with *The Contemporary Tax Journal*.

1. How did you get involved in the tax field? Was that your plan when you were in college?

Through two and a half years of law school and certainly during college, I had no conceivable notion that I'd ever be interested in tax law (I thought I wanted to be an antitrust lawyer, at least until I took an antitrust class). I always hated math; I was all about words rather than numbers. Fortunately, I went to a law school that required a basic tax course, which was not typical then, but I delayed taking the course until the last semester of my last year. Turns out the whole topic clicked for me. I received the highest score of any course I took in law school, and I had a great professor. My only regret is that I didn't take the course earlier in law school so that I could have taken more tax classes, but I couldn't wait to enroll in an LLM program.

2. What stands out as one or two of your most significant accomplishments in your career?

My most significant career accomplishment to this point has to be my involvement in working for the House Ways and Means Committee and helping draft Chairman Dave Camp's Tax Reform Act of 2014 (H.R. 1), important parts of which later became the GILTI and FDII provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Second would be my time working for

the Joint Committee on Taxation and helping draft the American Jobs Creation Act of 2004, which at that time included the most significant corporate and international tax reforms since the Tax Reform Act of 1986. Being able to work for the American people in Congress has been the greatest honor of my career, an opportunity that I had never thought would come my way.

3. How did you get involved with the legislative and policy aspects of tax work?

In 1996, I was offered the opportunity to move to Washington DC and join EY's National Tax Department, where I had the opportunity to work with an entire building filled with brilliant colleagues who previously worked at the IRS and Treasury Department, and my interest in tax policy grew from there. Fortunately, EY totally supported my desire to pursue tax policy more fully by leaving the firm for a position in government, which initially turned out to be the Joint Committee on Taxation.

4. How do you and your firm get comments to lawmakers about needed law changes or comments on active legislation?

Hill tax staff tend to be very accessible and there is no special process for giving them comments on active tax legislation or proposals for tax legislation. If anything, even though your constituency as a Hill staffer reaches far beyond that of a particular client like in private practice, it can often feel like you are doing important but complicated technical work in a vacuum, so I encouraged or even urged people to comment on my work or what I should be working on. Of course, I tended to open emails first from people I knew versus people I didn't know, but I tried to eventually open and respond to all of them. Comments that are more technical in nature (versus comments on policy choices) should start with the Joint Committee on Taxation.

5. What do you think is one key area of our federal tax system that could/should be improved and why?

Without question the federal tax legislative process would benefit from less reliance on revenue as a proxy for policy. In other words, too often the policy merits of a legislative proposal are equated with how much revenue the proposal raises or loses, and the increasing use of the budget reconciliation procedures to pass tax legislation has made this problem worse. This is not a new issue. I can't say exactly when it became a problem, but it dates back to at least the 1990s. I would highly recommend that everyone read Professor Michael Graetz's 1995 article entitled, "[Paint-By-Numbers Tax Lawmaking](#)," to better understand this dynamic, which I don't see changing anytime soon, unfortunately.

6. What advice do you have for students preparing for a career in tax?

As with any field of law or even beyond, make sure it really is your passion, because

you're going to be doing it for a long time. For a career in tax specifically, endeavor to gain exposure to as many areas of tax as possible early in your career, and don't be surprised if you end up gravitating towards a particular area that you might not have anticipated. The same holds true about different career paths in the private sector, public sector, and academia. And just because a particular area might be trendy or seem to offer better job prospects doesn't necessarily mean it's the right one for everybody. The great thing about a career in tax is that it offers so many different paths to excellence.

Second, don't get overly focused on choosing a particular area at the outset of your career. Inevitably, your path will change as opportunities arise or you learn more. I've often told younger people that wherever they start their career in tax won't be where they end it. Far more often than not, that ends up being the case.

Finally, devour as much information and knowledge as you can early in your career because that gets much harder to do later on as you acquire more responsibilities both professionally and personally. Conversely, find opportunities and topics to write and publish your own articles. Admittedly, it has become more challenging for younger tax lawyers to find time to write and publish articles, but it's a great opportunity to differentiate yourself from the pack and build your brand.

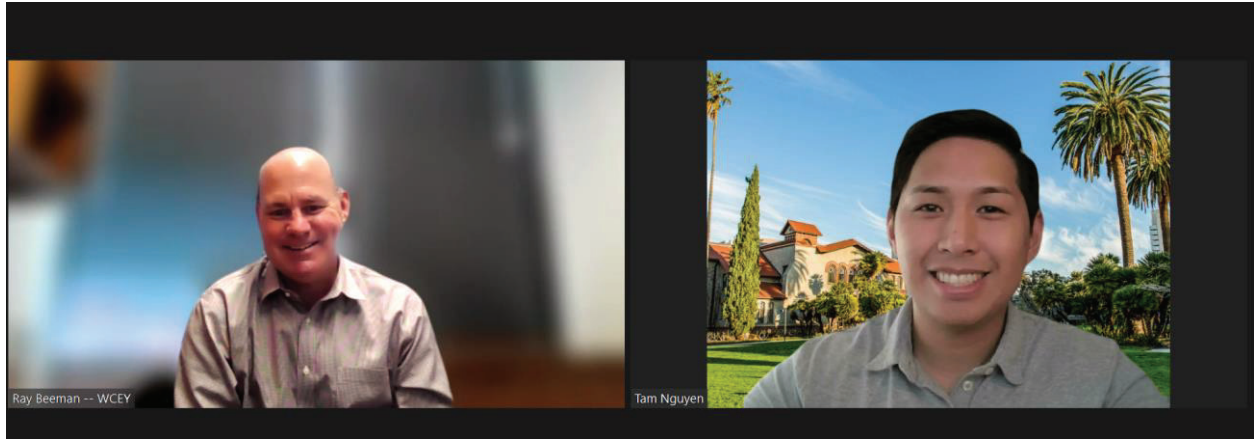
Fun Questions:

7. If you could have dinner with anyone (living or not), who would it be?

I would like to have dinner with Isaac Steele Sr., who served in the South Carolina 2nd Regiment during the American Revolution. I am a descendant of his. Needless to say, I would be fascinated to hear him describe what it was like to witness and fight for the birth of our nation, but I also think he would be amazed at what this nation has become and hopefully gratified to hear that the spirit of service to our country – whether it be military or civilian – lives on to this day in his family tree.

8. What is the most unusual item in your office or something in it that has special meaning to you?

I keep a Masai talking stick in my office. The Masai are an ancient people who live in the Rift Valley of Africa, and they use the talking stick as a tool of communication. In a group setting, only the holder of the talking stick is permitted to speak. In order for someone else to speak, the stick must first be yielded to them (not too different from a speaker on the House or Senate floor yielding to another member to speak).



Ray Beeman and Tam Nguyen, January 7, 2022 (Zoom Interview)