

Diversity Matters

An Interview with Antoinette Cook Bush, Esq., Co-Head, Communications Law Group, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, Washington, DC



Antoinette Cook Bush

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining Skadden, Arps in 1993 as a partner in the firm's Communications Law Group, Antoinette Cook Bush served as senior counsel to the communications subcommittee of the U.S. Senate's Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. She left the firm in 2000 to become executive vice president of Northpoint Technology and BroadwaveUSA, and rejoined Skadden in February 2004. The recipient of a B.A. from Wellesley College and a J.D. from Northwestern University Law School, Bush serves on numerous boards of trustees, including Sesame Workshop, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and The History Makers.

What are the key features of your work in the Communications Law Group?

The Communications Law Group at Skadden is a terrific practice, primarily because the constant advances in technology create new legal and regulatory issues. In addition, the practice crosses many disciplines and has a significant international component. Indeed, the breadth of this practice is one of the reasons I decided to join Skadden – it creates so many opportunities. For example, we represent the government of South Africa, as it is rewriting the country's telecommunications laws.

How important are the close

working relationships and cooperation that exist among the different practices within Skadden?

They're critical. I routinely work with members of our mergers and acquisitions, corporate, and tax practices, and it's one of the things I really enjoy about being at Skadden. The firm stresses the importance of working together across practice areas and offices. I am often asked by my partners who are in different practice areas if I would like to attend meetings or help with projects involving communications or technology companies, and this collaboration serves our clients well.

Diversity has been fundamental to Skadden for a long time. Is that one reason you were attracted to the firm?

Yes, Skadden's dedication to creating and maintaining a truly diverse culture significantly influenced my decision to come here. The emphasis on diversity and the resources committed to it have increased since I joined the firm. Diversity – or lack of it – in a law firm or corporation impacts the organization in many ways, including its ability to deliver the best, most effective client service, to recruit and retain the most talented legal professionals, and to provide innovative client solutions and build a truly global organization.

What does the firm do to promote diversity?

Skadden does a great deal in this area, as well as in professional development. When I was chair of our diversity committee, we implemented a firm-wide mentoring program – not just for minority and women associates, but for all associates. Mentoring is very important to the success of new lawyers – and even experienced lawyers, for that matter. I've been practicing for 25 years, and I still have mentors. Likewise, there are people with whom I have worked at other places, whom I continue to mentor.

A number of years ago, we expanded the scope and manner of our recruiting outreach to students of diverse back-

grounds and experiences. Our overarching goal is to build relationships with diverse students and new lawyers by regularly working and interacting with faculty, law student associations, and Skadden alumni through informal gatherings, hosting cultural and social events, participating in educational seminars, and presenting our "Facets" diversity seminar series and "Skadden Series for Women" lectures. We recently launched a new quarterly publication, also called *Facets*, which highlights our attorneys and others in the legal community.

In the broader context of diversity, the firm also has a very meaningful commitment to pro bono work. Many of our lawyers, including those who are heads or co-heads of their practice areas, are actively involved. For example, when I was on the board of the Legal Aid Society in Washington, DC, we initiated an attorney rotation program whereby a Skadden lawyer spends six months working at the Legal Aid Society in DC, affording those lawyers additional trial experience and the Legal Aid Society the services of talented lawyers. In 1988, we established the Skadden Fellowship Foundation, which subsidizes approximately 25 recent law graduates each year to work in the public sector for two years. More than 90 percent of our 473 Skadden Fellows have remained in the public sector since the program's inception.

Is senior management engaged in these activities?

Absolutely. The leaders of the firm and every practice group head recognize the inherent importance of diversity and mentoring. We need diversity among our lawyers in order to provide high-quality legal service to our clients and to thrive as a successful firm. The same reality exists in the legal profession as a whole. ●

Facets, Skadden's diversity newsletter, was launched last year.

