



Cryptocurrency and Tax Administration

Speaker Biographies

Michael J. Desmond is the 48th chief counsel of the Internal Revenue Service, where he oversees more than 2,000 employees, including approximately 1,500 attorneys. Desmond began serving as chief counsel in March 2019, following his confirmation by the US Senate in February 2019. As chief counsel, he is also an assistant general counsel in the Department of the Treasury. After serving as a law clerk for the Honorable Ronald S.W. Lew in the federal district court in Los Angeles, Desmond began his legal career with the Attorney General’s Honors Program at the Tax Division of the US Department of Justice. After that, he joined McKee Nelson LLP, where he was elected partner in 2004. In early 2005, Desmond joined the Office of Tax Policy at the Department of the Treasury, where he served as tax legislative counsel through 2008. Following his tenure at the Treasury, he spent several years as a partner at Bingham McCutchen LLP in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, California. In January 2012, Desmond started his own boutique tax firm in Santa Barbara, California, where he practiced until his nomination as chief counsel in 2018. Desmond has held several offices with the Section of Taxation of the American Bar Association and served as a regent for the American College of Tax Counsel. He also served as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University School of Law. Desmond is a graduate of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law.

Katanga Johnson, a Washington, DC–based correspondent at Thomson Reuters, reports on financial regulation at the US Securities and Exchange Commission and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. He joined the bureau full time in 2018 after completing a year-long internship covering financial regulation and other stories across the file, including the Parkland, Florida, shooting; the impact of the new Republican tax law; #MeToo allegations; and US infrastructure. A graduate of Morehouse College, Johnson spent three years as a writer in Ecuador before obtaining a master’s degree at Northwestern University’s Medill School of Journalism.

Mark J. Mazur is the Robert C. Pozen director of the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. His research interests cover all aspects of tax policy. From 2012 until early 2017, he was the assistant secretary for tax policy at the US Department of the Treasury. Mazur served in the federal government for 27 years in various positions, including policy economist at the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation, senior economist at the President’s Council of Economic Advisers; senior director at the National Economic Council; chief economist and senior policy adviser and director of policy at the US Department of Energy; acting administrator of the Energy Information Administration; director of research, analysis, and statistics at the Internal Revenue Service; and deputy assistant secretary for tax analysis in the Office of Tax Policy. Before entering public service, Mazur was an assistant professor in Heinz College at Carnegie-Mellon University. He has a bachelor’s degree in financial administration from Michigan State University and a master’s degree in economics and a doctoral degree in business from Stanford University.



Nathan Rigney joined The Tax Institute at H&R Block as a tax research analyst in 2014. His areas of focus include taxation of cryptocurrency, real estate transactions, and the qualified business income deduction. Rigney represents H&R Block as a member of the Security Summit, a partnership between the Internal Revenue Service, states, and the tax prep industry that serves to protect the US Treasury against stolen identity tax refund fraud. Rigney has analyzed and commented on cryptocurrency, tax reform, and tax administration for business associations and news outlets, including Bloomberg, the *New York Times*, National Public Radio, and MSNBC. Before his work at H&R Block, Rigney worked in mortgage finance and servicing policy at Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago. He holds a doctoral degree from DePaul University College of Law and a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Kansas.

Kristin Smith runs the Blockchain Association, a Washington, DC–based trade association that works to improve the public policy environment so the open blockchain technology ecosystem can thrive. Smith leads the association's engagement with its members and outreach to policymakers. She is responsible for the strategy that drives the organization's education efforts, advocacy campaigns, and events. She also serves as the spokesperson for the association. Before the Blockchain Association, Smith advised blockchain companies on how to navigate Washington. She served as a congressional aide on Capitol Hill for nearly 10 years, much of which was spent focusing on technology policy. She holds a master's degree from NYU Stern and serves as president of NYU's Blockchain and Digital Asset Forum Alumni Advisory Board.