

PRESIDENT BUSH APPOINTS OLLIE CANTOS TO ANOTHER HIGH POST

WASHINGTON (May 8) - The White House today announced the appointment of Olegario "Ollie" D. Cantos VII to serve a full two-year term as Member of the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities, beginning on May 12, 2008.

Cantos, 37, presently serves as Special Counsel to the Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Justice; and, he is to continue his related responsibilities concurrently with his new presidential appointment. A leader in the disability community since November 1990, Cantos dedicated two consecutive terms of service as Associate Director for Domestic Policy at the White House. Prior to that, he served as Special Assistant to the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, having begun his tenure in that capacity in August 2004. He attained this position after a two-year stint as General Counsel and Director of Programs for a Washington-based non-profit disability organization. He began his career as an attorney in June 1999 at the Disability Rights Legal Center in Los Angeles, California. Over the years, Cantos has worked with thousands of people with intellectual disabilities and their advocates, most particularly within the arenas of employment, crime victimization issues, and self-advocacy.

"Members of the disability community, including children and adults with intellectual disabilities, deserve to live in a world that is free from barriers to full societal participation," Cantos said. "I am honored to serve the President yet again, and I look forward to working with colleagues on the Committee to craft meaningful recommendations whose decisive implementation will foster ongoing improvement in real opportunities for greater integration than ever before."

The President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities (as the body is now known since having been renamed by President George W. Bush in 2003) was initially organized as a blue ribbon Panel by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and was formally established as a Committee by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966 under an Executive Order. Eight years later, in 1974, new goals for the Committee focusing on deinstitutionalization, prevention, and legal rights were established by President Richard M. Nixon. In 1996, a new set of goals for the Committee encouraging full community inclusion and citizens' rights was created by President William Jefferson Clinton.

Much has changed for people with intellectual disabilities since the 1960's due to advances in medicine, technology, research, education, and public understanding. The purpose of the Committee is to advise the President on the achievements, continuing needs, and emerging issues in this dynamic field. The Committee evaluates the adequacy of current practices and programs and reviews federal agency activities that have an impact on the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. The Committee also highlights the need for appropriate changes and encourages research, education, and services and supports relating to people with intellectual disabilities.

As opportunities may present themselves, the Committee collaborates with other federal agencies and national organizations in convening conferences and forums and disseminating information to the public on issues and accomplishments of people with intellectual disabilities.

The Committee has built upon the foundational principles of the New Freedom Initiative introduced by President George W. Bush in February 2001: Expanding educational opportunities, increasing access to technology, improving individual and family support, increasing employment and economic independence, and promoting access and integration into community life.

The Committee consists of up to 21 citizen members appointed by the President and thirteen ex officio (Federal Government) members designated by the President. The thirteen ex officio members include the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary of Education, Secretary of Labor, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of Transportation, Secretary of Interior, Secretary of Homeland Security, the Attorney General, the President and CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Chair of the National Council on Disability, and the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration. The ex officio members undertake Committee duties in addition to their daily occupations.

The Committee reports its findings to the President of the United States, in accordance with the President's Executive Order.

Other new presidential appointees include James M. Boles of New York, Stephanie Preshong Brown of Florida, Eric Lee Cole of Maryland, Berthy De La Rosa-Aponte of Florida, William J. Edwards of California, MaryMargaret Pucci of Illinois, Linda Hampton Starnes of Florida, Dallas Rob Sweezy of Virginia, William E. Tienken of Illinois, Eric Todd Treat of Arkansas, Charles Weis of Indiana, and Mary Ellen Zeppuhar of West Virginia. The President has designated Steven C. Rhatigan of Texas to serve as Chair.