

GREETINGS FROM THE WHITE HOUSE.

Since August 23, I have served as a Kennedy Public Policy Fellow assisting the White House. As a member of the program staff of the Domestic Policy Council, my primary focus is on disability policy.

Chaired by President Clinton, the Domestic Policy Council has a full docket of issues that concern the 43 million Americans with disabilities and their families. In addition to President Clinton, the council includes Vice President Gore and 22 cabinet and other high-ranking federal officials.

The council's day-to-day work is led by Carol H. Rasco, the assistant to the president for domestic policy. I report directly to Ms. Rasco and, as one of 12 professionals, help her to shepherd the president's domestic agenda. We meet in her west wing office to map strategy and exchange information.

the white house

WASHINGTON, D.C.



Professor Stanley S. Herr is the first Kennedy Fellow to serve with the White House.

As a Kennedy Fellow, I try to direct attention to the needs and rights of persons with mental retardation and their families. Since 1982, the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation has sponsored this unique public policy program in

which professionals from various disciplines are generally placed for one-year periods with key Congressional committees or executive branch offices. I am the first Kennedy Fellow to serve with the White House, an assignment that makes me feel both fortunate and humbled.

Working from a high-ceilinged office in the Old Executive Office Building, I do a variety of ever-changing tasks. They can range from reviewing legislation, executive orders or a cabinet officer's position on a bill, to writing different types of reports, memoranda, letters and presidential proclamations. I also attend the routine (and not so routine) events and meetings that swirl around the White House.

One truly historic moment was the chance to witness the Israeli-PLO peace accords signed on the White House's south lawn. Having spent a year in Israel as a Fulbright Scholar under the cloud of Persian Gulf hostilities, I was deeply moved by this

marvelous opportunity for peace. I was also reminded of the potential for joint cooperation to build better lives for people with disabilities and their families in the affected region by linking domestic expertise and channels of international exchange.

I was privileged to be present at the launch of the health care initiative, to witness the bill-signing ceremonies for national voluntary service and for the lifting of sanctions against South Africa in recognition of its human rights progress. I have had the opportunity to shake hands with the president shortly after the House passage of NAFTA, and to work with the first lady and other dedicated White House officials who want to ensure universal health care coverage.

I am also working with the Clinton administration to strengthen the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which President

Clinton recently described as a "national pledge of civil rights for people with disabilities." In various ways, I hope

to assist the president to devise concrete steps to "ensure that individuals with disabilities will not be excluded from the social, cultural and economic mainstream." From time to time, I've also had the chance to present the administration's views on this subject to national and international meetings in the disability field.

There are many ties between my experience at the University of Maryland School of Law and my current assignment. My background in disability law, law and the homeless, and public interest law has proved a good preparation for the issues on which I can now intervene. Moving from training student attorneys to be advocates, to being on the receiving end of an advocate's pitch, makes one better understand what separates a weak from a persuasive argument.

Coming into contact with one's former students who are now well-placed officials in the federal government (such as Awilda Marquez '88, White House liaison to the State Department; Beth Wiggins '87, Federal Judicial Center; and David Cade '85, attorney in the Health and Human Services secretary's office) is also quite gratifying.

I'm grateful to Dean Gifford and my colleagues for their warm encouragement during this challenging assignment. But I'll also be relieved when I no longer have to commute three and one-half hours a day. Until then, best regards.

Stanley S. Herr