

Harold Hongju Koh on Lister as an "institutional voice" for the Human Rights Bureau

The one thing that really happened through the institutionalization of the human rights bureaucracy was the creation of career human rights officials, who were dedicated to the cause and not political appointees. George was as much as anyone the institutional memory of the Human Rights Bureau. He had been there from the very beginning, pretty much, and he came in through some bureaucratic moves that no one really understood. He was assigned through some mechanism that nobody understood, but he had lived through a tremendous amount of institutional history. One thing is he had developed relations with both Republicans and Democrats and very strong connections with people on the hill, like Tom Harkin and others. As a result, he both knew where a lot of institutional history was buried and knew who to call and more than that was a kind of institutional voice for what the Human Rights Bureau ought to do. Where George played an amazing role is he had a set of file cabinets and he seemed to be the only person that knew what was in them. But, when something would happen and there would be a meeting in the Bureau to discuss it, suddenly a copy of a document would appear in my inbox. It would be typed on a manual typewriter and usually it was by George. I ate lunch with him pretty regularly and there is a lot of stuff that is not written down anywhere and he knew it. That was very valuable in making sure that we were staying on course.