



Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled

Contact: LaWanda York

Public Affairs

Phone: (703) 603-2128

Fax: (703) 603-0655

Email: lyork@abilityone.gov

Web: www.abilityone.gov



**Andrew Houghton,
Hollywood, Fl. reelected
Committee Chairperson**



**James Omvig, Tucson, Az.
reelected Committee Vice
Chairperson**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Committee reelects leadership

Washington, DC, July 10, 2008— The Committee for Purchase From People Who are Blind or Severely Disabled reelected its Chairperson and Vice Chairperson this morning. The Committee is an independent federal agency responsible for administering the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act, a public law that directs the federal government to purchase certain products and services furnished by nonprofit agencies employing individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

Andrew D. Houghton of Hollywood, Fla., was unanimously reelected Chairperson of the Committee. He was appointed to the Committee by President George W. Bush in March 2003 and reappointed in May 2006, serving as a private citizen representing the interests of nonprofit agency employees with severe disabilities. Houghton was Vice Chairperson of the Committee from July 2004 to July 2006 and was the first private citizen elected as Chairperson in July 2006. His reelection confirms the confidence the Committee members have with his ability to oversee the Committee and the AbilityOne Program.

"I am honored to serve another term as the Chairperson for the Committee and look forward to codifying some of our current initiatives," Houghton said. "We are aligning the program to fit the 21st century workforce and to provide quality employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. The Committee is also capitalizing on the enthusiasm, inspired by the Executive Director, Tina Ballard, in growing the AbilityOne Program."

Houghton's leadership skills and broad experience in the disability arena make him highly qualified to guide the Committee in the fulfillment of its employment mission. In addition to his Committee work, Houghton was also appointed to the Florida Rehabilitation Council, where he is currently First Vice Chairman. Houghton's business, Disability Inclusion Solutions, has provided consulting services to clients ranging from the Fortune 500 to nonprofit organizations. His personal accomplishments include the development of domestic and international programs that promote full inclusion for people with disabilities through sports and recreation.

The AbilityOne Program provides employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities in the manufacture and delivery of products and services to the federal government and is the single largest for this vast population.

James H. Omvig, a resident of Tucson, Az., was unanimously reelected Vice Chairperson of the Committee. He was appointed to the Committee by President George W. Bush in March 2003. Omvig serves as a private citizen representing the interests of nonprofit agency employees who are blind. He is a nationally recognized leader in the field of rehabilitation and lifelong advocate for people who are blind.

"I am very pleased and honored to accept the Vice Chairperson position," Omvig said. "I look forward to the immense progress under the leadership of the new executive director."

"As the chair of the nomination subcommittee, I was thrilled that Andy and Jim agreed and were able to serve the Committee for another term," Kathleen James, Committee Member representing the Air Force, said. "Their energy and work for the Committee has been outstanding which affected the program positively."

Omvig began his career as the first blind attorney ever employed by the National Labor Relations Board, and went on to direct the Iowa Commission for the Blind's Adult Orientation and Adjustment Center for nine years. In 1978, he moved to Baltimore to become director of an employment program for people with disabilities at the Social Security Administration where he served for six years. The capstone of Omvig's career was serving as director of the Alaska Center for Blind and Deaf Adults from 1984-1987. He is an accomplished author of numerous articles, published speeches and books. His most popular book, Freedom for the Blind: The Secret is Empowerment, was republished in 2005 and is a resource for the Department of Education on how best to provide training and rehabilitation services to people who are blind.

The Committee is comprised of 15 Presidentially-appointed members, 11 of whom represent governmental agencies and four private citizens knowledgeable about the employment problems of people who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

###

The Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled is the independent Federal agency that administers the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program, which generates employment for individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities. National Industries for the Blind (NIB) and NISH (serving people with a range of disabilities) are two central nonprofit organizations that have been designated by the Committee to help Federal agencies and nonprofit organizations that employ persons with severe disabilities participate in the JWOD Program. The JWOD Program's primary means of achieving its employment goal is by facilitating Federal Government purchases of supplies and services from nonprofit agencies employing such individuals.

The Committee's office is located in Arlington, Virginia.