

Statement on qualifications as ICOC Vice Chair from Art Torres

My thanks for your patience in waiting until I returned from Washington D.C. to share my perspective regarding my candidacy for the position of Vice Chair of the ICOC.

I believe that I meet the statutory criteria to serve as Vice Chair. Also, I support Sherry Lansing, as chair of the Governance Committee, in providing guidance in defining the role of the Vice Chair. She has demonstrated a genuine commitment to the ICOC's mission, and I trust her leadership.

I believe the most important criteria for the Vice Chair is being a “patient advocate.” The ICOC composition is itself perhaps the best definition of the term, representing founders of national patient advocacy organizations; clinicians and scientific researchers who have dedicated their careers to curing and caring for people with chronic diseases; individuals living with diseases in which stem cell therapy may hold significant promise; prominent philanthropists and activists in the disease advocacy community who work to fund research or aid those afflicted with chronic, often devastating diseases. In short, they are patient advocates whose qualifications as such are diverse but almost universally beyond question.

I have been a patient advocate as long as I can remember, both personally and in public service. Sadly, cancer has always been present in my family, my grandmother died of it in the 1950s, and my father's Aunt was a frequent patient at the City of Hope during that time. My Father died of cancer in 1996. My Mother is a breast cancer survivor. In fact, I had to contend with my own colon cancer in 2006.

Before serving in the legislature, my work with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers constantly dealt with the deadly effects of pesticide poisonings that occurred in the late 1960's and continue to present day.

Those personal experiences helped shape my views and made me a patient advocate as a legislator. **But, words are not enough to qualify as a “patient advocate,” actions that result in meaningful change are.**

As Chair of the Assembly Health Committee I worked with Dr. Marcus Conant at UCSF and others throughout California to fight for funding and increase awareness as the AIDS epidemic emerged in the early 1980s. Remember, during those early years it was hard to get people to listen and take action. I am proud to say that there was a group of us (including former Senator John Vasconcellos and others) that made a positive difference that resulted in funding basic research to understand the nature of this terrible disease. Those experiences allowed me work to directly with the AIDS Healthcare Foundation during my years in the legislature and thereafter as a board member.

Health care has always been my policy focus. In the late 1980's, I created the first Senate Toxics Committee and began to advocate on behalf of those living in cancer clusters in the San Joaquin Valley. At the time, the residents did not know whether the cause of their cancers was due to pesticide exposure or the drinking water. My public hearings in San Joaquin Valley were not popular with the embedded economic interests, but we they had to be done. As a result, I co-authored Proposition 65, the California Clean Water Drinking Act approved by the California voters.

Responding to constituent concerns, I held hearings on water contamination in the San Gabriel Valley. I advocated against the abnormally high cancer incidents among California firefighters and lifeguards along our Southern California beaches. Those efforts resulted in changing the burden of proof for widows of firefighters seeking redress for cancer deaths.

Since my father passed away, I have served on the board of One Legacy, an organ transplant foundation based in Southern California. I have continually advocated in communities of color for organ transplant awareness. I have helped Diabetes organizations in raising funds to increases awareness, especially since this disease affects so many Latino families.

I am a patient advocate and respectfully submit that my credentials are equal to and honor to the hard work being done by the current advocates on the ICOC.

During the 2004 election, I was excited that Proposition 71 was placed on the ballot. As Chairman of the California Democratic Party, I communicated our support as part of an aggressive coordinated campaign effort that reached millions of voters by mail and other outreach efforts.

What lies ahead now for the ICOC is three-fold:

First, funding for this crucial effort is more challenged than ever. Confronting this challenge will require a renewed focus by the ICOC and the continued leadership of Bob Klein. Funding is scarce, and I can work with Bob, the ICOC, and state leaders in furthering that agenda.

Second, I think the ICOC must continue to educate the public about its accomplishments and future plans. The voters must be assured that their support for Proposition 71 is justified. The Vice Chair can play an important role in this area. My thirty-five years in the public has afforded me the opportunity to participate in numerous debates and interactions with the media (countless interviews on national and local TV, radio, etc.). This experience will greatly aid the ICOC's outreach and education efforts. And, being fluent in Spanish, I can help reach an important and growing constituency in our state.

Third, consensus building is important on any board or organization. I've spent an entire

career building coalitions, interacting with “unique” personalities, and working with both sides of the aisle in the legislature (remember, you can't get bills out of committee or the floor without Republican votes). As Vice Chair, I hope to explore the idea of creating an ICOC Executive Committee comprised of board members to aid in facilitating the exchange of information and increase the productivity of meetings.

Finally, let me share that I am impressed with Bob; he is a talented individual and committed humanitarian. I am confident that I can work closely with him and the CIRM staff to further the mission of Proposition 71: *to fund the best science that will lead to cures and therapies to alleviate pain and suffering*. Also, the ICOC is a dynamic group of individuals and I been impressed with their depth of experience and genuine desire for the ICOC to succeed. I am excited by this opportunity and would be honored to serve as Vice Chair.

Senator Art Torres (Ret.)