

7-18-2002

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Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Governor Jeb Bush Puts Batista's Grandson on State Supreme Court." (2002). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8984>

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Governor Jeb Bush Puts Batista's Grandson on State Supreme Court

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Cuba

Published: 2002-07-18

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush named Raoul Cantero III to a seat on the state Supreme Court. Cantero is the grandson of former Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista (1933-1959). Cantero supporters praised his accomplishments as a lawyer while opponents tried to draw attention to his role in acquiring a pardon and permanent US residence for convicted anti-Castro terrorist Orlando Bosch.

Cantero was born in Spain but is a naturalized US citizen. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School. At present, he is head of the appellate division of a Florida law firm and has argued cases before the Florida Supreme Court. When he goes to the bench in September, he will be first Hispanic on the court.

Announcing his choice in mid-July, Bush called Cantero, 41, "one of the finest appellate lawyers in the state....Above all else Raoul is a man of exceptional character." Regarding Cantero's age and the prospect of his serving several decades on the court, Gov. Bush said, "This is a chance for me to make a difference for the future of our state."

Gov. Bush's connections with Orlando Bosch

In his application statement for the position, Cantero wrote, "As an American whose family escaped a totalitarian regime, I have learned to appreciate and defend democratic values and the rule of law." But critics of the appointment argue that Cantero's enthusiastic defense of Bosch does not indicate a consistency in his appreciation of democratic values. In 1976, Venezuelan authorities arrested Bosch for the bombing of a Cubana de Aviacion airliner that killed 73 people. Along with Bosch, Cuban-born Luis Posada Carriles and two Venezuelans were charged with the bombing.

Posada Carriles escaped prison in 1985. After serving 10 years, Bosch was acquitted under suspicious circumstances and left the country, allegedly with the help of then US Ambassador to Venezuela Otto Reich and the administration of President George H.W. Bush. Bosch returned to the US, but was denied a visa owing to Justice Department opposition. A Justice Department report concluded that there was considerable evidence that Bosch had engaged in terrorist acts in the US, Cuba, and other countries for 30 years.

Upon entering the US in 1989, Bosch was promptly arrested for violating his parole on a 10-year sentence for the 1968 Bazooka shelling of a Polish freighter bound for Havana from the Port of Miami. During the trial, both the judge and prosecutor said they believed Bosch used highly

publicized terrorist acts to acquire power in the exile community and collect money. Bosch was now officially considered a terrorist and a public danger by the Justice Department.

But in August 1989, The New York Times reported that Florida State Sen. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen negotiated Bosch's release with the Bush administration, assisted by Jeb Bush who was Ros-Lehtinen's campaign manager. Jeb Bush was elected governor in 1990 while Ros-Lehtinen went to the US Congress both with exile-community support. The same year, President George H.W. Bush issued Bosch a pardon. Bosch has been a Florida resident since then. Despite renouncing violence as one of the terms for the pardon, Bosch has made numerous declarations condoning and praising its use against President Fidel Castro and other Cuban targets.

Cantero defends Bosch

Cantero was a member of the law firm that represented Bosch in trying to overturn the Justice Department's opposition to admitting him into the US. He also acted as a political advocate defending Bosch's terrorists acts. Cantero, the late Jorge Mas Canosa, head of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), and other prominent exile radicals essentially formed an alliance with the Florida Republican Party and Jeb Bush to secure the pardon.

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On a Miami radio show in 1989, Cantero called Bosch "a Cuban patriot," and justified the attack on the freighter as "a political statement" that did not cause any harm. He described Bosch's terrorist acts as "a heroic fight against the terrorism of Fidel Castro." Gov. Bush lauded Cantero's qualifications for the bench and said his conservative views would bring balance to what he considers a liberal court. The Miami Herald said Cantero was "an excellent choice." But critics of the appointment, while acknowledging Cantero's skills as an attorney, focused on the Bosch connection.

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