

April 2009

# AppointeeAlert



## this issue:

Esther Olvarria,  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of  
Homeland Security for Policy

## Olvarria's Background

Senior Fellow and Director of Immigration Policy, Center for American Progress

Senior Advisor for Government and External Relations to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Center for Refugees

Counsel, Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Refugees

Counsel, Office of Sen. Edward Kennedy

Directing Attorney, American Immigration Lawyers Pro Bono Project

Legal Services of Greater Miami

Co-Founder and Managing Attorney, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center

Staff Attorney, Haitian Refugee Center

## EDUCATION

University of Florida  
University of Florida Levin College of Law

## Who is Esther Olvarria? Legalization for all...

On February 23, 2009, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano named Esther Olvarria as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy. The Office of Policy leads coordination and development of Department-wide policies, programs, and planning, including those pertaining to law enforcement, international affairs, and immigrations statistics.

**“ It’s getting harder and harder, we can’t get driver’s licenses, we can’t do anything, and people are going home. ”**

Olvarria’s most recent responsibilities have included drafting immigration legislation for Sen. Kennedy.

“Observers on both sides of the aisle credit her with essentially drafting the 2007 immigration reform bill sponsored by Kennedy and Sen. John McCain of Arizona.” Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies (which favors restricting immigration) confirms this, “She wrote the bill. She was Kennedy’s main immigration person. She was really driving that bus.” Fn.1.

According to the Irish Voice, while filling this post, she spoke at the inaugural meeting of the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, calling

Sens. Cornyn and Kyl’s immigration bill, “heavy on enforcement,” while referring to Sen. Specter’s proposal as “the worst of solutions for the undocumented.” There were several illegal immigrants at this meeting. One of them claimed, “It’s getting harder and harder, we can’t get driver’s licenses, we can’t do anything, and people are going home.” The McCain-Kennedy solution to this problem would have made “major changes to the existing avenues of immigration – specifically, the bill would add visas to eliminate the enormous backlog of cases that are currently awaiting action.” Fn.2.

While at the Center for American Progress Olvarria “[led] the Center’s work on immigration and refugee policy.” Fn.3. Her work at the Center was principally focused on “policy and advocacy strategies on comprehensive immigration reform. Fn.4.

## Sources for further reading:

**Fn.1.** Carol Marbin Miller, *A South Floridian is tapped to help shape immigration policy in D.C.*, THE MIAMI HERALD, February 25, 2009. Available online at: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation/story/923991.html>. (Accessed April 20, 2009.)

**Fn.2.** Debbie McGoldrick, *Huge Support Greet New Lobby Group*, IRISH VOICE, December 20, 2005 at 11. Available online at: <http://www.irishabroad.com/news/irishinamerica/news/huge-support-dec1405.asp>. (Accessed April 20, 2009.)

**Fn.3.** *Esther Olavarria joins CAP/CAPAF as Senior Fellow*, Center for American Progress Press Release, August 11, 2008. Available online at: [http://www.americanprogress.org/pressroom/releases/2008/08/Olavarria\\_joins\\_CAP\\_CAPAF](http://www.americanprogress.org/pressroom/releases/2008/08/Olavarria_joins_CAP_CAPAF). (Accessed April 20, 2009.)

**Fn.4.** *John Morton to Lead Immigration and Customs Enforcement; Secretary Napolitano Names Esther Olavarria as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy*, Department of Homeland Security press release, February 23, 2009. Available online at: [http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr\\_1235438666428.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1235438666428.shtm). (Accessed April 20, 2009.)

# What you really need to know about Esther Olavarria.

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Under her direction the Center published a paper by Karla Walter that claimed “El salario mínimo, y normas para el trabajo extra, y la seguridad proveen una base garantizada para los trabajadores estadounidenses sin importar el estatus migratorio del trabajador. (Minimum wage, overtime, and workplace safety standards create a guaranteed floor for American jobs, regardless of a worker’s immigration status.)” The Center’s “Principles of Immigration Reform” are as follows:

To create a robust, modern immigration system worthy of our country we must:

- Accept increased labor mobility;
- Incorporate robust enforcement and safeguards;
- Protect U.S. workers;
- Increase and diversify legal immigration;
- Resolve the status of the undocumented; and
- Foster an inclusive American identity.

See: *Principles for Immigration Reform*, Center for American Progress, November 2008. Available online at: [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/11/pdf/immigration\\_report.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/11/pdf/immigration_report.pdf). (Accessed April 20, 2009.)

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“Both supporters and opponents of more open borders in the United States say Olavarria’s appointment as deputy assistant secretary for policy within the Department of Homeland Security likely augurs greater opportunities for migrants in the U.S., a theme that is consistent with Obama’s stump message when he was on the campaign trail.

“The fact that they chose her signals to me that the Obama administration is very serious about looking at the immigration system, and then finally coming up with a viable solution for redress,” said Marleine Bastien, executive director of Haitian Women of Miami.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, a think tank in Washington that supports tighter immigration controls, said Olavarria’s appointment can be seen as a sign Obama will work toward some sort of amnesty for undocumented migrants -- often viewed as the third rail of immigration policy. ‘He clearly has to give the pro-amnesty side something,’ Krikorian said.” Fn.1.

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9900 MAIN STREET  
SUITE 303  
FAIRFAX, VA 22031  
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