

Ralph Oman

Ralph Oman was born in 1940 in Huntington, New York. He studied at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1960-61 and earned a bachelor of arts degree in history from Hamilton College in 1962. From 1962 to 1964, he worked for the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer in Saudi Arabia. Mr. Oman served with the U.S. Navy as a Naval Flight Officer from 1965 to 1970 and was decorated for his service in Vietnam.

In 1973, Mr. Oman received a doctor of laws degree from Georgetown University, where he served as Executive Editor of the Georgetown Journal of International Law. He is a member of the District of Columbia Bar and the Supreme Court Bar. Following law school, Mr. Oman served as law clerk to the Honorable C. Stanley Blair, U.S. District Court Judge for the District of Maryland. From 1974 to 1975, Mr. Oman was a trial attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice Antitrust Division.

In 1975, Mr. Oman moved to the U.S. Senate, where he worked for Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania as Chief Minority Counsel on the Subcommittee on Patents, Trademarks, and Copyrights. He helped the Senator draft the language and negotiate the compromises that resulted in the passage of the landmark Copyright Act of 1976. In 1977, Senator Scott retired and Mr. Oman became senior lawyer to Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland, the Senate's leading proponent of strong copyright protection. In 1982, Mr. Oman became Chief Counsel of the newly revived Subcommittee on Patents, Copyrights, and Trademarks, and in 1985 he scheduled the first Senate hearing in 50 years on U.S. adherence to the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works.

From the Chief Counsel position, he was appointed Register of Copyrights on September 23, 1985. As Register, Mr. Oman helped move the United States into the Berne Convention in 1989.

In 1990, he headed the U.S. delegation to the diplomatic conference that adopted the Washington Treaty on the Protection of Microchips, and he co-chaired the Celebration of the Bicentennial of the U.S. patent and copyright laws. During his eight years as Register, Mr. Oman made increased international protection of American copyrights his highest priority, and, to promote that effort, he established the International Copyright Institute to train foreign copyright officials. He also initiated a pilot program to convert the copyright registration process to digital/internet technology.

Mr. Oman retired from federal service in 1993 and entered private practice. Since 1993, he has also served as adjunct professor of law at the George Washington University Law School, where he teaches copyright.