Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): News Article 50

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Yet, in a conversation with Iannone before he voted to defenestrate her, Pell told her that maybe if she would withdraw her nomination and return to these august precincts in a year or so—if having written for "a middle of the road journal"—she might find a more favorable reception.

In terms of her "qualifications," what difference could a year make—unless, as Pell more than implied, her appearance in a "middle of the road" journal would make up for her politically incorrect credits in conservative publications?

Iannone's views certainly did have a lot to do with the sustained campaign against her by the guardians of academic orthodoxy. She had the effrontery to write that certain black novelists were getting prizes more because they were black than because their work was all that remarkable. She also offended certain feminists by putting a harsh light on the kind of feminist scholarship that is trimmed for political ends.

Finally, however, it was a different kind of politics—having little to do with her views—that sent her packing.

It looked for a time as if at least two Democratic senators—aside from Bingaman (D-N.M.), who did vote for her—were going to support Iannone. One of them said, "I don't understand it. She's qualified. Why all this fuss?"

But the day before the vote on July 17, Kennedy called a caucus of his party's senators on the committee. (Sen. Bingaman tells me he didn't know about the caucus and he wasn't there. In any case, "I was for her," he said. "We have a pretty broad mainstream in this country, and she's part of it!"

At the caucus, Kennedy, invoking his privilege as chairman, asked for the votes of his fellow Democrats against Iannone. Kennedy told them that this battle had become personal and certain backers of Iannone were after him. He considered his reputation to be at stake.

Why, actually, did Kennedy become so obsessed with this nomination? Despite whatever headlines he has made over the years that are not connected with his work in the Senate, Kennedy is valued in Massachusetts because he is seen as a powerful figure in the Senate. But he is becoming anxious that this power not be seen as vulnerable.

What would Massachusetts' sardonic political writers, for instance, have made of his failure to get the support of his own party's senators in the matter of Iannone?

Accordingly, John Aloisius Farrell of the Boston Globe had the right lead on his story about the fall of Iannone: "In an eleventh-hour display of political muscle, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy yesterday secured just enough Democratic votes to defeat the nomination of a conservative scholar, Carol Iannone."

The vote was 9-8. Only Sen. Bingaman, among the Democrats, declined to sacrifice the conservative scholar to the chairman's anxieties.

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