

1984

## National Endowment for the Humanities: Council Reappointments (1984): Letter to the Editor 01

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

July 12, 1984



Letters to the Editor  
The Washington Post  
1150 15th Street, N. W.  
Washington, D. C. 20071

The Post's article on the President's recess appointments to the NEH (Style, July 7th), might well leave a reader with the impression that the action was unprecedented or that unqualified citizens were put on the council in place of serious academicians. Both impressions are false.

Recess appointments have been made by previous administrations; and, like previous recess appointees, our new council members must still be confirmed by the Senate by the end of the next session. In fact, the outgoing members of our council were themselves appointed to their positions by President Carter during a recess. The President's action is therefore unexceptional.

One individual quoted in the article asserted that the nominees lack appropriate academic credentials. There is a long and valued tradition of citizens as well as scholars on the council, and with these nominees, the President continues that tradition. Still, among the seven nominees named to our council one is a chaired professor of ethics and biology from the University of Chicago; another is a professor of political philosophy and former regional school board president from Claremont College; a third, the founder and director of a university press; and a fourth, a professor of government from Georgetown University. Among the "non-academic" members one finds the publisher of the Yale Literary Magazine; the second, the founding chairman of the Raleigh North Carolina Arts Commission, a former teacher, and recent recipient of her state's "outstanding volunteer award" given by the state's present Democratic governor; and the third "non-academic" member is an honors graduate of the Royal Academy of London, founder of the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut, and former co-chairman of Citizens for Free Shakespeare in Central Park. Yet the President's appointment of public spirited citizens is belittled because they "lack academic credentials."

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Finally, one can only be amused by the characterization given by the president of Bard College of the appointments -- which include both Democrats and Republicans -- as having "common conservative views" and being "outrageously bad." Perhaps he assumes that conservative views disqualify a person from the ranks of scholarship. Or perhaps he concludes, with the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, who was also quoted in the article, that naming conservative scholars and citizens makes for a particularly "political slate." One wonders where these critics were when President Carter appointed the now departing members, who included not only fewer academics and scholars, but also the president of the National Urban Coalition, a labor union leader, and a sitting member of the Finance Council of the Democratic National Committee!

The new members named by the President to our council bring with them manifest abilities and strong credentials, and we look forward to working with them.

Sincerely,

John Agresto  
Assistant Chairman