1991

Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): Correspondence 01

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To the Editor
Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, New York 10281

Dear Sir:

The crude ad hominem attack on Senators Kennedy and Pell in your July 19 editorial on the defeat of the nomination of Carol Iannone for the NEH Council is unworthy of your journalistic traditions and is not helpful to your readers. The several academic organizations which opposed the Iannone nomination all objected that she failed to meet the statutory standard that NEH Councillors "have established records of distinguished service and scholarship or creativity." None of the objecting organizations complained about the other two nominees, whose political views are very similar to those of Dr. Iannone.

Senator Kassebaum, speaking in behalf of Dr. Iannone, gave the game away. "She might not meet the criteria, but I don't know that any great calamity is going to happen at the National Endowment for the Humanities." Quite so, if one doesn't value the NEH Council as we do. More to the point, as Mrs. Cheney remarked in another context, "I completely understand why people who are rejected look for some reason other than the fact that their proposal was lacking."

The issue for us is one of academic qualifications for the governance of the dominant humanities funding agency. There is nothing we would like more than to keep NEH out of politics. During Mrs. Cheney's tenure, we have provided the White House Office of Presidential Personnel with Names and supporting documentation of more than a score of distinguished scholars. None has been nominated. The President has every right to make nominations, but the Senate has the obligation to determine the objective qualification of nominees.

ACLS and the other groups are seriously concerned about the increasing lack of distinction and independence of the NEH Council, on which nine vacancies will occur next year. The qualifications of each councillor, whether appointed to represent the public humanities or the academic humanists merit scrutiny. At the same time; the balance of the Council as a whole is critically important. It is the Bush administration that seems determined to end the pluralism that has traditionally existed on the Council.
As Senator Pell said at the Senate committee meeting on July 17: "The confidence of the humanities community and the Congress in the NEH has been strong and it is crucial that this confidence be sustained. The best way to reassure the public and to safeguard the quality and integrity of NEH policies and awards is to have the strongest possible National Council on the Humanities."

Both Senator Kennedy and Senator Pell endorsed maintaining the highest standards at the NEH.

Yours sincerely,

Stanley N. Katz
President, ACLS