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Berman, Ronald: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1975-1976): Correspondence 01

Claiborne Pell

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Dr. Robert Wood, President
University of Massachusetts
One Washington Mall
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Dr. Wood:

Senator Kennedy has thoughtfully transmitted to me a copy of your letter to him regarding the reappointment of Dr. Ronald Berman as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

As Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities since its establishment more than ten years ago, and as one who has so closely followed the development of the Arts and Humanities programs throughout their history, I am concerned about the imbalance between the two programs, which I now perceive. In earlier times the Humanities were by far the stronger members of this cultural partnership. The Humanities brought the Arts into legislative viability. Today the situation is reversed. The Arts have surpassed the Humanities in impact.

I have strongly believed that the 20 percent of the funding from both the Arts and Humanities Endowments, which goes to help state-based programs, was highly important to bringing the values of both programs out to our people. On the Arts side, the state programs emenate from the States. On the Humanities side, the state programs emenate from Washington. On the Arts side, in ten years, state appropriations for the Arts have increased from $4 million to over $60 million; community arts groups have increased from less than 100 to more than 1,000; state governors, mayors, and other officials are increasingly bringing to public attention the benefits of the Arts as being of central importance to our daily lives.
Dr. Robert Wood
Page 2
July 6, 1976

There is no similar momentum on the Humanities side because the Humanities Endowment does not believe that the states themselves should proceed to develop their own programs in accordance with their own expressed desires and needs.

The Senate has now passed legislation to permit the states to choose among several options as to what each believes is best in this area. In my own State of Rhode Island, I believe we have an excellent existing Humanities program; but if it is to develop further and continue, I believe that the state should so decide—not Washington.

This is a fundamental principle. The fact that it has been so opposed by Dr. Berman led me to question his leadership and, indeed, to lose confidence in that leadership, which I have in the past, found worthy of praise.

My views on this subject have long been known to Dr. Berman and to the White House. I believe he has performed passably in his important job, but I do not believe he has achieved the level of excellence, which I believe is essential to a reappointment to this chairmanship.

In order to achieve the highest degree of quality in the Humanities, I believe the highest quality of leadership is required.

Livingston Biddle, who directs the staff of the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities, would be pleased to supply you with any further details you may need. I have outlined this problem. It has other complex aspects.

I do want to assure you, however, that I have given this whole matter most serious attention. My views have been considerably distorted in some sectors. They are quite straightforward, and they stem from more than ten years experience in this legislative area and from a deep conviction in the
values of the Arts and the Humanities. In fact, through my personal efforts, the Congress was persuaded to give special recognition, for the first time, to the values of the Humanities over a decade ago.

With my good wishes.

Ever sincerely,

Claiborne Pell
Chairman
Special Subcommittee on the Arts and Humanities