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Of the Art or Science of Nit-Picking

By IRVIN MOLOTSKY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 29 — "This agency," said William J. Bennett, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, "gets more ink per dollar than any other agency in town."

It is about to happen again. The publicity this time involves the seven people nominated by President Reagan to serve on the 26-member council that advises the chairman of the endowment as to which grants should be awarded. The endowment spends Federal money (\$140 million this year) to encourage support of philosophy, history, religion studies and other subjects in the humanities.

"I am a bit disappointed with the quality of some of them," said Senator Claiborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Island, who helped write the law establishing the endowment.

Senator Edward F. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, who serves on the Labor and Human Resources Committee, which is to act on the nominations, said: "I intend to conduct a thorough review of the qualifications of the pending nominees. The council's grant-making responsibilities demand real academic accomplishment and extensive background in the humanities."

'I Find the List Disturbing'

And Richard W. Lyman, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation and a former vice chairman of the humanities council, said the nominees seemed concentrated in the conservative wing of the Republican Party.

"I find the list disturbing," he added. "The chief common thread seems to be working for the right-to-life movement. Three of them have



'It's being politicized without regard to scholarly qualifications.'

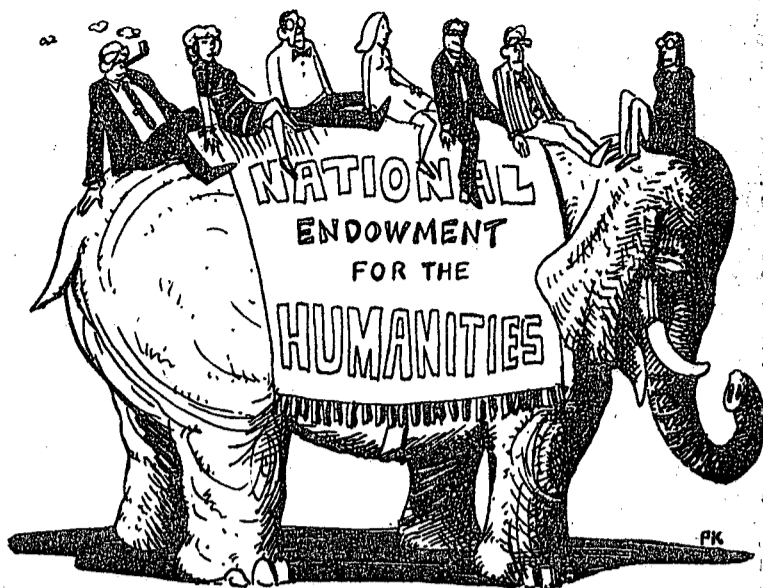
—Richard W. Lyman

no academic qualifications. The council is being more politicized than ever before and without regard to scholarly qualifications."

Mr. Lyman, a former president of Stanford University who is a Democrat, said he hoped the Senate would examine the nominees' qualifications and not give pro-forma approval, as has been the case in the past when objections were seldom raised.

If a hearing is held, it will mean more contemporary ink for an agency that usually deals in matters developing over the last two millennia, not the last two weeks. If it is held, it will join such other endowment happenings as President Reagan's original but thwarted intention to name a chairman who criticized Lincoln and found some positive aspects to slavery, and the current chairman's willingness to criticize humanities grant recipients for reputedly having turned out one-sided documentaries unrelated to the humanities.

Members of the council serve six-year terms. One of the nominees cited by Mr. Lyman for a supposed lack of academic qualifications, Helen Marie



Peter Kuper

Taylor, responded by saying of the Rockefeller Foundation chairman, "I wouldn't say his credentials are outstanding," and questioned whether Stanford was a notable educational institution. Mr. Lyman received degrees from Swarthmore and Harvard and was a Fulbright Fellow at the London School of Economics.

"I would say that I am honored to have been nominated by President Reagan and that I am qualified to serve on the council," Mrs. Taylor said from her home, Meadowfarm, in Orange, Va. She pointed out that she was an honors graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, adding, "I have had a great deal of experience over the years in all phases of the arts."

Mrs. Taylor is listed in her White House résumé as a founder of the American Shakespeare Festival Theater in Stratford, Conn., as a supporter of the New York Shakespeare Festival and as an actor and dramatic coach for many years.

She acknowledged that her experience was in the arts, not the humanities, but she said this was outweighed by her having served on various boards that had to weigh requests and make mature judgments.

The law that established the endowment said of those to be named to its council: "Such members shall be selected on the basis of distinguished service and scholarship or creativity in a manner which will provide comprehensive representation of the views of scholars and professional practitioners in the humanities and of the public throughout the United States."

The others who Mr. Lyman said did not meet those requirements were Mary Jo Cresimore of Raleigh, N.C., and Kathleen S. Kilpatrick of New Haven.

Mrs. Cresimore is listed in her résumé as a homemaker, civic leader and volunteer arts administrator. Reached at her home, she said of Mr. Lyman: "It's within his right to make any criticism. His interpretation may be very different from others."

'The Perpetuation of Culture'

Miss Kilpatrick said: "I'm not aware that membership on the council requires a Ph.D. behind one's name. There are many representatives on the council of the general public — lawyers, stockbrokers, union officials. As I understand it, membership was based on making a contribution to the general area of culture, and not limited to those with academic backgrounds."

She said her contribution to culture came from her role as publisher of The Yale Literary Magazine, and she objected to Mr. Lyman's characterization of her and her fellow nominees as representing just the conservative wing of the Republican Party.

Miss Kilpatrick said she was a Republican but found such labels as "conservative" meaningless. She also said Mr. Lyman had no way of knowing her position on abortion. "I

don't think it's important," she added. "The charge at the endowment is the perpetuation of culture."

For Mrs. Taylor, this is the second time that her nomination to a post by President Reagan had raised some opposition. Her nomination for a seat on the board of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was withdrawn when it was reportedly blocked by Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona. Accounts on how that came about differ.

Mrs. Taylor said Sharon Percy Rockefeller, chairman of the corporation, had asked her father, Senator Charles H. Percy, Republican of Illinois, to persuade Senator Goldwater to block the nomination. Mrs. Rocke-



Associated Press

'I wouldn't say his credentials are outstanding.'

—Helen Marie Taylor

feller did this, Mrs. Taylor said, because she feared losing her majority support on the board.

Mrs. Taylor made it clear that she would have opposed Mrs. Rockefeller had she become a member of the board. For her part, Mrs. Rockefeller insisted that she had played no role in blocking Mrs. Taylor's appointment. Mrs. Rockefeller added that she had spoken to neither her father nor Senator Goldwater about it.

Mrs. Taylor said her information came from Gen. Albert Wedemyer, who she said spoke to Senator Goldwater and related the account of the Percy intercession. Senator Goldwater's chief aide did not return a call seeking comment on that, but General Wedemyer denied it flatly.

"He did not say that," the general said of the Senator, "and I did not say any such thing."

General Wedemyer said he did ask Senator Goldwater to approve the nomination of Mrs. Taylor, who he said was a cousin by marriage and a woman of admirable accomplishments.