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Senate Unit Skips Vote On Berman Appointment

By Phillip M. Kadis
Washington Star Staff Writer

Ronald Berman's chances for reappointment to a second term as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities now rest with the American voter.

It's unlikely to be a major issue in this year's presidential campaign. But reappointment of the former scholar and social critic will almost certainly hinge on whether Ford or Carter is elected November 2.

Berman's seven-month effort to get the Senate to act on his renomination before its adjournment this week finally failed yesterday. The Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, in a near party-line tie, declined to vote on the renomination which was sent to the Senate last February.

Berman's reappointment has been vigorously opposed by Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., a legislative father of the humanities endowment which dispenses and administers federal grants to scholarly institutions, individuals and humanities-related programs.

The sharpest issue between Pell and Berman has been the question of "politicizing" the endowment. Pell has pushed for structural changes in the state humanities committees that would make them more responsive to elected state governmental authorities and thus develop grass roots support for the humanities as well as funding in state budgets.

Pell's position has been that since taxpayers' money is being spent on the programs, taxpayers should have some say on what type of program is funded. Berman's supporters, however, claim the Pell proposal could jeopardize intellectual freedom and promote government indoctrination of values.

Other questions raised in the Berman-Pell confrontation — elitism, Berman's performance in office, the relative achievement of the endowment, personalities — were spin-offs from the basic difference over what constituted "politicization" of the the arts.

Yesterday's 7-7 tie foreclosed the possibility of floor action on Berman in this Congress. There was no vote on Berman's merits, simply a tie on a motion by Sen. Jacob Javits, R-N.Y., to proceed on consideration of the nomination. The hearings were never adjourned, merely recessed.

If Ford is elected, the President will have the option of sending Berman's name to the Senate for a third time. Pell has made it clear he would continue to oppose Berman. But he has indicated he would not block him, and probably could not.

If Carter is elected, he could also renominate Berman. But he is hardly likely to nominate a Republican with so many "deserving" Democrats available to choose from.