Confirming Dr. Berman

It was an even four months ago that President Ford sent Dr. Ronald Berman's name to the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, nominating the distinguished analyst of contemporary culture for a second term as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. It's still there.

The committee's failure to act on the appointment in a third of a year reflects neither inefficiency nor an overcrowded agenda. Rather, it's the deliberate tactic of Sen. Claiborne Pell, who heads the subcommittee on education where action must begin. He doesn't like Dr. Berman. Seemingly, however, Sen. Pell doesn't trust his ability to persuade the rest of the committee to drop him — not enough, at least, to risk open hearings.

Using official prerogatives to obstruct the intended workings of the congressional system is despotism of a sort that seems particularly incongruous applied to an institution as elevated of purpose and conspicuous of achievement as the Endowment. The chairman's personal vigor is such that he has not sunk into the lame duck limbo Sen. Pell appears to want for him. But his indeterminate status is bound to erode his authority and, with it, the effectiveness of the organization, if it goes on much longer.

If Dr. Berman is the right man for the job—and we think he is — his renomination should be confirmed without further delay. If he isn't, there should be hearings to show why.