Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): Correspondence 05

John Agresto

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The Honorable Claiborne Pell  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

The enclosed letter from the Modern Language Association to some of its members was brought to my attention today. This agency hopes that the fate of its future chairman will be decided by deliberation and honest, open inquiry. Mr. Curran himself would want it no other way. But this mass mailing urging a demonstration campaign, a campaign to put pressure on the committee by assembling a "large crowd" is antithetical, in my mind, to the seriousness of the task at hand.

I thought this attempt at pressuring the committee should be known to you. Mr. Curran could pack the hall with vocal supporters, too, but he recognizes, as do we, that this kind of pressure is foreign to the deliberation and careful consideration that this position deserves.

You know that I think Mr. Curran is absolutely worthy of the office for which he was nominated, but I would be embarrassed to mount on his behalf the kind of direct pressure campaign implied by this circular.

Sincerely,

John Agresto  
Acting Chairman

cc: Phyllis Franklin
Dear Colleague:

I am writing to you and to other colleagues in the Washington area to ask your help. In July, the MLA's president and first vice-president, Theodore J. Ziolkowski and J. Hillis Miller, invited MLA members in the fourteen states with representatives on the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources to let their senators know their views on the nomination of Edward Curran as chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities. (I enclose for your information a copy of that mailing.) The many strong letters written by MLA members and others led Senator Edward Kennedy to have the hearing on this nomination postponed. It is now scheduled for 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, 2 October, in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 430.

We are told that the presence of academics and other members of the humanities community at the hearing would demonstrate our concern about this appointment and could influence the seriousness of the deliberations. If the crowd is so large that some of us must wait outside the room to learn the result of the hearing, our point will only be further emphasized.

For this reason, I urge you to join me in the Dirksen Building outside Room 430 at 9:00 a.m., 2 October. I very much hope that you can attend the hearing, and I would appreciate your letting me know if you plan to be there.

Sincerely yours,

Phyllis Franklin
Executive Director