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Carol Iannone

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# Panel rejects non-PC Iannone

By Carol Innerst  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee yesterday found conservative academic Carol Iannone unfit to serve on the National Council on the Humanities.

Despite a Republican senator's angry accusation that it was succumbing to "political correctness," the committee rejected Miss Iannone, 43, a literary critic and faculty member at New York University's Gallatin Division. The 9-8 vote was largely along party lines and ostensibly based on her lack of academic distinction.

Miss Iannone said after the vote that she was "surprised" by that contention because the senators who scuttled her nomination had told her earlier that her qualifications were no problem, but they were troubled by her views.

The vote ended a six-month battle led by scholars affiliated with the liberal Modern Language Association. They began by criticizing Miss Iannone's academic qualifications and ultimately depicted her as a racist.

Miss Iannone, who writes for conservative publications and is vice president of the National Association of Scholars, argued in one literary criticism that some black writers won major prizes because of their race, not because of the quality of their writing.

"If this isn't political correctness, what the hell is?" asked Sen. Orrin Hatch, Utah Republican and ranking minority member of the committee. He failed to persuade the committee to postpone a vote and grant Miss Iannone a full confirmation hearing.

Nor could he persuade Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, the committee chairman, to send the nomination to the Senate floor without a recommendation, despite the close vote.

Her rejection to sit on the advisory panel to the National Endowment for the Humanities came down to her lack of scholarly credentials, Mr. Kennedy said.

NEH Chairman Lynne Cheney, calling the committee rejection "a great disappointment," said Miss Iannone's nomination "raised vital First Amendment issues, and this vote will be widely seen as sanctioning limits on free expression."

Mr. Hatch, saying he was "hypersensitive" about Miss Iannone's nomination, argued yesterday:

"It's one thing to have these nut-cakes out there running around and acting like they're academics and acting like they know a lot about intellectual minds... [but] she's from a first-generation, immigrant, working class family. She's a woman. It's tougher in those early years in academics for a woman. She's the first person in her family to have an academic degree."

"Let's hold a hearing and give her a chance to express herself," he continued. "Let's not succumb to political correctness... this attitude that if people don't say the right words and think the right things and do the same things they're unacceptable."

"Ideology is not the issue," insisted Mr. Kennedy. "'PC' is not the issue. No one is imposing political correctness on the council. Numerous distinguished nominees with conservative backgrounds have been confirmed to the council in the past, as they will continue to be confirmed in the future. But no amount of strident rhetoric over ideology can make up for the nominees's lack of qualifications."

He noted that Miss Iannone's credentials consisted of a page and a half of books and publications compared with four or more pages for two other nominees to the advisory council who were confirmed without discussion. He also observed that Miss Iannone's work was cited by other scholars eight times between 1981 and 1990, compared with 232 citations for Michael J. Malbin and 164 for Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., the appointees who were confirmed yesterday.

"I regret she's become a symbol in a strident rhetorical debate that far overshadows the importance of what this appointment is all about," said Sen. Clairborne Pell, Rhode Island Democrat. "She's caught in a cross fire between the conservative establishment and the liberal establishment over the nomination for a job that's not of great significance."

Sen. Dan Coats, Indiana Republican, also questioned the kind of scrutiny the panel was giving to a nominee for a council of 26 persons that meets four times a year to review applications for NEH grants.

"It's important work, but these people are not negotiating the START treaty," he said.

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