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Rowland Evans

Robert Novak

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Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Teddy in the Shadows

The Senate’s rejection of conservative Carol Iannone had less to do with her failure to meet tests of “political correctness” than the bizarre Easter weekend events at the Kennedy estate in Palm Beach.

New York University Prof. Iannone would today be on the National Endowment for the Humanities advisory council had not Sen. Edward M. Kennedy exercised vigor and power to turn Democratic senators against her. What’s not so well known is that Kennedy’s personal appeal for votes against Iannone alleged that her supporters were lying to his connection with rape charges against his nephew.

In isolation from the timeless controversy in his personal life and his long-collapsed presidential prospects, Kennedy has struggled hard to uphold his reputation in the Senate for effectiveness and hard work—surpassing the records of his two elder brothers there. Whenever his lifestyle threatens to be on the shadows, Kennedy immediately meets with administration officials to go along with her campaign for the “right wing” made impossible for him to support her.

What the senator meant by that was made clear in evidence to fellow Labor Committee members to oppose Iannone. He told them candidly that he was under attack in the Senate in the rape charge against his nephew William Smith and that his enemies would link confirmation of Iannone to deterioration of his influence in the Senate.

Faced with that premise, Sens. Paul Simon and Christopher Dodd could not deny the rare appeal from their chairman to reverse their inclination to support confirmation. Neither of them—nor perhaps two other committee members—were happy contributing to Iannone’s defeat by a single vote.

Appealing for the vote of one senator, Kennedy mentioned that his friend, novelist William Styron, had been assaulted by Iannone. To another senator, he noted opposition to confirmation by his feminist supporters.

To backers of Iannone, Kennedy told an odd tale of how academic friends had pleaded for help in fighting confirmation. He said he had told them that if they went on, how could he abandon his allies?

Thus, the premise for Kennedy’s zeal to defeat Carol Iannone was demands from a left-wing fringe, a posture for a Kennedy so ironic and anomalous that it may have inspired a pungent speech to the Senate by Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan after Iannone’s defeat.

Moynihan noted that in 1960 when he was supporting John F. Kennedy, “reformers hated and feared” the future president. To explain the views of “working class Democrats” backing Kennedy, Moynihan wrote an article in Commentary. Frequent contributions by Iannone to that journal were cited by her foes as evidence of scholarly weakness. That outraged Moynihan, who congratulated Prof. Iannone for being “bashed in the Democratic Party.” He did not mention Ted Kennedy at the moment of his shadowy victory.