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February 2017

## Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs Act (1976): Speech 02

Claiborne Pell

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### Recommended Citation

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

NOMINATION OF DR. RONALD BERMAN TO BE CHAIRMAN OF  
THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

As the Senate author of the legislation establishing the national arts and humanities programs 10 years ago and as Chairman of the Senate Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities since its establishment 12 years ago, I believe that Dr. Ronald Berman should not be confirmed for a second four-year term as chairman of the Humanities Endowment.

I oppose the Berman nomination for the following reasons:

\* The Humanities Endowment, once the stronger and more vigorous of the sister Endowments, has faltered during Dr. Berman's tenure and is today a pale shadow of the Arts Endowment.

\* Dr. Berman has characterized as "wholly unacceptable," and has actively opposed, Senate-passed legislation to create through the Humanities Endowment the Federal-state partnership envisioned by Congress and constructed so successfully by the Arts Endowment.

\* Instead of such a partnership, Dr. Berman has sought to become the czar of the humanities, controlling all activities and making all decisions in Washington.

\* During Dr. Berman's tenure the Humanities Endowment has been transformed into an agency characterized by arrogance and elitism.

\* Dr. Berman has failed to exhibit the excellence in leadership and administrative skills so necessary to bring the Humanities Endowment to its full potential.

\* From the viewpoint of precedent, I believe that, except in cases of exceptional performance, persons appointed to set four-year terms should not be reappointed, thereby giving opportunity for an infusion of new ideas and fresh enthusiasm in the agency.

I recall vividly the days more than 10 years ago when those of us committed to the concept of Federal assistance to the arts and humanities struggled against strong resistance to bring that concept to reality. In those days and in the early years after we were successful, it was the humanities constituency which provided the vigor, the creativity, and the enthusiasm which this new effort needed. The arts, by contrast, rode on the coattails of the humanities.

Today, sadly, I find this situation exactly reversed. The Arts Endowment is now characterized by those traits. It is growing, reaching out, attracting unprecedented business support and involving all segments of society; especially women, minorities, ethnic groups and the underprivileged.

The Humanities, by contrast, has faltered. Its program has not kept pace with the arts; it is less democratic; it is not having the same national

impact as the Arts. It has, in fact, been overhauled and outstripped by the Arts. And this slippage has occurred most noticeably during the Berman tenure.

In the Arts Endowment there has been flourishing for several years a strong state-based program conducted by state councils which are responsible to state governments. These councils spring from within the states and owe no allegiance to Washington. Their success has been phenomenal.

On the Humanities side the state programs are operated by state committees appointed by Washington, dominated by Washington, and responsive only to Washington.

In an attempt to right this situation the Senate this year passed legislation to allow the states themselves a voice in the operation of their own state programs. From the outset, Dr. Berman has bitterly opposed this Senate effort, calling it "wholly unacceptable."

In the Arts Endowment, the state program has been a decentralizing and democratic force. The Arts Chairman has fifty potential critics with a strong voice in the states. It is this balancing force which prevents Federal domination and allows for a true Federal-state partnership.

Dr. Berman opposes this partnership for his Endowment, desiring instead to maintain the dictatorial control he has created in the last four

years. Even the basic approach of each state Humanities committee is controlled by big-brother-like "annual theme" oriented to dictates.

Dr. Berman insists that Washington, meaning Dr. Berman, knows best. He claims that the Senate legislation would lead to bureaucratic control of the Humanities, while at the same time he is tightening the reins of his own Washington bureaucracy. He has become, truly, a czar of the humanities.

One of the strongest original objections to national arts and humanities programs from Members of Congress was based on the fear that the heads of the two Endowments would dominate those fields in a way that would frustrate the spontaneity and creativity which are so basic to their natures. That has not happened in the Arts. And I believe it imperative that trends in that direction in the Humanities be reversed.

The original legislation establishing the Endowments prescribed four-year terms for two chairmen. Provisions were made for re-appointment, but it was envisioned that re-appointment should occur only in instances of exceptional leadership and administration. Such qualities have been exhibited by the Chairman of the Arts Endowment, and I supported her re-appointment.

In most instances of set-term leadership positions in the Federal Government, re-appointment does not occur. Such has been my experience with the military and with other agencies in which there are set-terms.

My opposition to Dr. Berman's re-appointment has been based solely on the principles I have outlined. It is not and has never been based on personal considerations. As one of the fathers of this Endowment, I care passionately about its future and wish to see it flourish. It is for that reason that I believe Dr. Berman should not be re-appointed.