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Duffey, Joseph: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (September 9, 1977): Speech 07

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Mr. Chairman, as you know, I have a strong interest in and concern for the role of the humanities in our society. More specifically, I have a deep concern for the successful administration of the program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, because of the potential of that program to enrich the everyday lives of Americans throughout our nation.

As the original Senate author of the legislation that established the national arts and humanities programs eleven years ago, and as Chairman of the Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities since that Subcommittee was established more than 12 years ago, it has been my responsibility, and my pleasure, to manage in the Senate the four Humanities Endowment authorization bills considered by the Congress since establishment of the Endowment.
It is with this background of experience and knowledge of the Humanities Endowment that I must state, at the outset of this hearing, that I have the most serious reservations about the confirmation of Dr. Berman as Chairman of the Endowment for a second four-year term, and, thus, must say that I am strongly inclined to oppose confirmation.

Let me state briefly the basis of my concern, in the hope that we can explore, for the record, some of these areas with the nominee and perhaps with other witnesses.

---First, it is clear to me that the Humanities Endowment, which once was the stronger and more vigorous of the sister Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, has faltered during Dr. Berman's tenure, despite sharply increased Congressional appropriations. Indeed, the Humanities Endowment today has become a pale shadow as compared to the Arts Endowment.
--Secondly, in an effort to strengthen the Humanities Endowment, the Senate passed legislation to create in the Humanities Endowment, the federal-state partnership that has worked so effectively in eliciting local grass-roots participation and enthusiasm in the Arts Endowment programs. Dr. Berman characterized this proposed state-federal partnership proposal as "wholly unacceptable" and has actively opposed it.

--Thirdly, instead of supporting these proposals to broaden participation in the humanities program, Dr. Berman sought to continue and to strengthen a central Washington control of all activities and programs of the Endowment. This centralization, whether it was his intention or not, has tended to cloak the Endowment programs in elitism and hindered imaginative efforts to bring the richness of humanistic studies to bear on the lives of the average American.
We are concerned here with the leadership that will be responsible during the next four years with the authorized expenditure of several hundreds of millions of dollars of the taxpayers' money. I believe that responsibility requires excellence in leadership, and excellence in administrative skills, to make certain that these taxpayers' dollars do have an impact in enriching American life. I question whether Dr. Berman during his term as Chairman of the Humanities Endowment has exhibited the requisite excellence in leadership and administration.

I am quite cognizant that I am setting here a standard for confirmation that is quite different from the standard usually applied to appointees, who serve at the pleasure of the President for unspecified terms. We are concerned here with a re-appointment for the head of an agency to a set four-year term of office. And in those circumstances, I believe we must apply a higher standard. I believe
the Congress should insist that persons should be re-appointed to be heads of agencies and to set terms of office only in cases of exceptional performance. If the performance during the first set term has been only acceptable and passable, it is time for an infusion of new leadership, new ideas, and fresh enthusiasm.

A professional football coach who leads his team to only a passable, 50-50 won-loss season knows full well that the odds on renewal of his contract are also only 50-50.

I repeat--excellence should be the criterion for reappointment to a set-term office, and I question whether the nominee for reappointment has exhibited that excellence.

To put the performance of the Humanities Endowment in perspective, I think it is necessary to go back to those days more than ten 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, it was the humanities community in
the nation which provided the vigor, the creativity, and the
enthusiasm which this new effort required. The arts, by con-
trast, rode on the coattails of the humanities. Indeed, my
efforts in two previous Congresses to enact legislation to aid
the arts failed until the aid to the arts and humanities were
linked in legislation that brought forth the vigorous support
of the humanities community.

Today, I find the situation reversed. The Arts
Endowment is now the more vigorous, innovative and creative
of the two Endowments. It is growing, reaching out, at-
tracting unprecedented business support and involving all
segments of society; especially women, minorities, ethnic
groups and the underprivileged.

I think the American people know they are getting
value for their tax money in the Arts Endowment--they have
felt the enriching impact of the Arts Endowment programs.
Sadly, there is far less evidence that the Humanities Endowment has reached out to produce a similar enriching impact on American life. The Humanities Endowment has in fact been overhauled and outstripped by the Arts. And this slip-page has occurred most noticeably during the past few years.

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 whose genesis comes from Washington, whose chairmen were originally chosen by Washington, who are dominated by Washington, and, consequently, are responsive mainly to Washington.

In an attempt to right this situation, the Senate this year passed legislation to allow the states themselves a
a voice in the operation of their own state programs. From the outset, Dr. Berman 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.

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. But I believe it imperative that trends in that direction in the Humanities be reversed.

Mr. Chairman, these are the reasons for my reserva-
tions about confirmation of this nomination for reappointment.

I would emphasize that my concern has been based solely on the principles I have outlined. My concern 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. That is the basic reason for my concern over this nomination.

I would add, Mr. Chairman, that my concern over this nomination has been the subject of substantial commentary by columnists, much of which is distorted and shrill in tone, and most of which appears to have a common inspiration.

The surprising thing is that if these columnists and editorial writers, who come mostly from the conservative spectrum of our community, had had objective access to the facts and knew that the issue here was whether our humanities leadership should be continued in the tightening reins and grip of Washington or whether it should be spread across our
nation with Washington exerting less, not more, influence, they would have come out with an opposite viewpoint from the one they have espoused. Here, for the purposes of the record, I ask that a compilation of these commentaries be included in the hearing record. Obviously, from the viewpoint of my own political interests, it would have been far better for me if I had not become the butt of this propaganda or the target of criticism stimulated in parts of the Humanities community. It would have been easier and politically expedient to have been a good guy and said, "Fine, let's continue doing what we have been doing, even though I know it's not right."

But, in conscience, and as father of this program, I just couldn't, and shouldn't, do this.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would re-emphasize my principal concern. I believe the humanities have a tremendous potential to enrich the life of every American. But if that is to happen, the humanities must reach out from the campuses
and the ivory tower and include farmers, insurance salesmen, factory workers, young people, senior citizens, and workers in all varieties of fields. The humanities must appeal to those without an advanced, formal education. We cannot justify the expenditure of taxpayers' money in support of the humanities if the tendency of the program is to proliferate volumes of humanistic studies in university libraries, just for other academic humanists to read.

I think there is a parallel here between the humanities and the ocean sciences. Ten years ago, oceanography and the marine sciences were a highly academic field. Marine scientists compiled magnificent studies of the oceans and ocean life which simply gathered dust in university libraries. The knowledge never reached the fishermen, the environmentalists, and the conservationists--those whose lives were intimately involved with the oceans.

As the late Wib Chapman, one of the great men of
American oceanography put it at that time, "If all the oceanographers in the world dropped dead tomorrow, it would have no affect whatsoever on the world fish catch." The Sea Grant College program, which I sponsored, and which the Congress enacted, has changed that situation dramatically. Oceanography and the marine sciences are now out in the real world, and are having a real impact on man and his living relationship with the world's oceans.

I want to see the humanities reach out in a similar fashion and have a real impact on the lives of Americans. It is an exceedingly difficult challenge. It requires exceptional, innovative leadership. And that is what I will be looking for in the course of this hearing--evidence of exceptional performance and exceptional leadership that justifies reappointment to one of the most challenging positions in the executive branch of our government, and a position that, because of the very size of the money grants that are distributed, and the
way they are distributed, is having the effect of giving enormous power to a single individual to dominate the intellectual life of our nation.