Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Correspondence 17

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1 July 1991

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chair, Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

I am writing as one of your constituents and as a former Chair of the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, the state-based program of NEH. The topic of my concern is the nomination of Carol Iannone to serve on the National Council of NEH, a nomination which seems to me purely ideological and certainly not reflective of NEH's tradition of attracting "the best and the brightest."

The National Endowment for the Humanities is the entity which represents both nationally and internationally the high achievement of our scholars as well as America's commitment to the intellectual life. But neither academics or the members of your committee will be impressed by Carol Iannone's achievements. This is not someone who has behind her the weight of scholarship and experience to be called "distinguished," as the NEH enabling legislation requires.

Senator Kennedy, this country is filled with scholars in the humanities who have done truly distinguished work, who have published provocative and enlightening books, who have formulated substantive theories, who have contributed to shifts in the humanities paradigm, even. Let us put their names before the public as representative of the best we have to offer rather than settling for someone with middling credentials.

In addition, I resent the accusations that those who oppose this person's nomination are guilty of "ideological" bias. The same accusation could be made against those who put Iannone's name in nomination, of course. Also, serious opposition was not mounted to the nomination of distinguished "conservatives" in the past. Most academics are committed to the free exchange of ideas; most of us exist on campuses which include faculty of various ideological beliefs, and we are used to a lively exchange of ideas. Instead of letting ourselves be distracted by the ideological red herring, we need to ask ourselves this question: Would this person be hired as a full-time faculty member by a prestigious college or university, be it Harvard, Carleton, Notre Dame, Oberlin, or the University of Massachusetts?

I am sending you letters as they come in. This is an interesting one from a professor at Joe Hagan's school against Iannone.
I am a strong supporter of NEH and its programs, and my experience with the agency is that it has always sought excellence, often without compromise of any sort. I am, therefore, surprised and disappointed that it has supported a nomination which is patently unworthy of NEH's standards. I hope that it will not pursue this nomination, but if it does, I ask you and other elected representatives on the Committee to give the agency the direction it obviously needs.

Thank you for giving this matter every attention.

Sincerely,

Angela G. Dorenkamp
Professor of English

cc: Members of Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate