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Senatorial 'Courtesy'

The sex scandals have had the

effect of picking up the rock of Cap-

tol Hill, and giving the public a
glimpse of what scurries under-

neath. The problem is not so much

sex as it is the atmosphere of arro-
gnant pettiness—the sheer effrontery

of keeping a mistress on the public

payroll, of voting yourself expense

allowances on top of expense allow-

ances and so on.

Such arrogance is so much a

way of life on Capitol Hill that it
takes a sex scandal to get anyone to
stop and notice. But by cheapening
life on the Hill, the humdrum

abuses provide the soil in which the
flagrant ones grow. As an example

of the normal workaday pettiness so

completely tolerated in the Con-
gress, it is worth considering the lit-
tle vendetta Senator Claiborne Pell
of Rhode Island is running against

Dr. Ronald Berman, chairman of
the National Endowment for the

Humanities.

Senator Pell has long had his

own pet theory on how the endow-
ment should dispense its funds,
something about handing them out
to state councils that would pass
along $500 so a lumberjack could do
some history. Under Dr. Berman's
tenure, the endowment has instead
used its funds for things like helping
produce "The Adams Chronicles,"
funding the traveling museum ex-
hibits of Chinese art and Scythian
gold and funding serious scholar-
ship. On these grounds, Senator Pell
has determined to block Dr. Ber-
man's reappointment.

Understandably, the Senator has
had a little trouble picking up allies.
He got the administration to post-

pone nomination for two months
while it studied his complaints; af-
after acquainting itself with the hu-
manities, the White House quickly
sent Dr. Berman's name down after
all. The endowment's council, in-
cluding holdovers from the last
Democratic administration, stands
something like 20-1 in favor of the
appointment. And aside from Sen-
ator Pell, no one on the relevant Sen-
ate committee, Labor and Public
Welfare, has expressed any oppo-

sition.

But thanks to the prevailing

ethic on Capitol Hill, it looks as if
Senator Pell may have his way. The
nomination was sent down last Feb-
ruary 11, and as Congress gets
ready for its July 4 recess no hear-
ing on it has been scheduled. Sena-
tor Pell is claiming something
quaintly called "Senatorial Cour-
tesy," extended to Senators from a
nominee's home state or, in this
case, the chairman of a relevant
subcommittee. The doctrine of Sena-
torial Courtesy, plainly put, is that
if a Senator has a grudge against a
nominee he can keep his name from
coming to a vote.

Even by the standards implicit
in this custom Senator Pell's petti-
ness is pretty ripe, but so far his
committee colleagues are going
along with it. Committee Chair-
man Harrison Williams of New Jer-
sey has the power to give Dr. Berman
his day before the committee, and
to insure that his reappointment is
voted up or down by the light of
day. But that is not always the way
things are done on Capitol Hill, as
Congressman Wayne Hays can tes-
tify.