Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): Correspondence 10

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Senator Claiborne Pell
U.S. Senate
Washington

Dear Claiborne,

Thanks for your letter. If you can make it, wonderful, but if not, we'll understand. I asked John Chafee to come, and we may have the chance to introduce him to our NEH programs at Brown, which can only do good for NEH.

I've given a lot of thought to the Curran nomination for NEH, and I have reached a positive view of it, which, if I may, I'd like to share with you.

I think it a good nomination, and I also hope that we can see the confirmation as soon as possible.

It is a good nomination because Curran is an educator, with real experience in secondary school teaching and administration. The future of the humanities will be settled in the secondary schools (as Bill Bennett thought too), and not so much by us, the scholars. If we produce wonderful insights, but they are not translated into educational realities, our scholarship is lost. I do not think the NEH chairmanship should be limited to people holding academic Ph Ds, and I also think that Curran has some strengths and virtues that will more than compensate. In other words, I find the diversity refreshing and good for the humanities, and I think that Curran is likely to bring an important stress on education to NEH. If I were asked to be NEH chairman, that would be the division I would want to strengthen still more (and it is now a very strong division), so, in terms of policy, I think the President has made a quite good choice. I
also think it important for so small an agency as NEH to have good White House links, which Mr. Curran does have.

My reason for wanting to see confirmation proceed as rapidly as possible is simple. I think the agency suffers in a prolonged period of uncertainty. John Agresto is one of my favorite people in the world, and I cannot imagine a better person to be in charge of NEH. But if he is not to be chairman, then I think whoever is to be chairman should come in as soon as possible and give the agency that stability and firm hand that it requires.

I don't know Mr. Curran personally, but I know people who do and speak very warmly of him as a human being. And I did ask some tough questions before I wrote to you. On that side you'll be more of an expert than I and do not need my advice. I do have reason to believe that he will be responsive to your views and will care about them and take them into account, and if I was not assured on that matter, I would not have written to you as I have.

In all, let's get this thing on the road.

Affectionately,