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Berman, Ronald: Memoranda (1975-1984): Correspondence 17

Livingston Biddle

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TO: SENATOR

via T.H.

FROM: LB

LB

lets talk about this

Jun. 14

Tom filled me in on the ~~Berman~~ situation vis a vis Berman this morning, and I have been doing a bit more digging today.

I had lunch with Joe Hagan -- arranged last week before the new pressures developed. Joe was very concerned about the latest Star editorial. He described Berman as being similarly concerned -- they feel that this editorial has set back again any hopes of a rapprochement or better relationship (this is the way they present a period of quiescence during the past couple of weeks.) However (and I think Joe is not aware of this part) I am pretty reliably informed that the editorial stemmed from the Endowment, if not from Berman himself, from a senior staffer... I interpret it as follows: Berman felt his case ~~needed~~ another specific boost -- he has a few Star people at his beck and call... The editorial was written, and served as a means of applying new and added pressure on Sen. Williams, which was its main purpose... They didn't quite count on the very ascerbic tone and personal charge on you... They feel this was unfortunate... I didn't comment on your reactions, but didn't discourage the impression that you were much displeased...

(I think we must bear in mind that these people do not understand you at all... They always assume your reactions will be similar to their own, under like circumstances...)

In sum -- the editorial, as written, puts them a bit on the defensive.

However, it has produced another push on Williams... I have discussed this with staff here -- Don Elisburg, the Comm. Staff Director. The best I can do at this point is to establish a tentative agreement that the Berman question would not come up until after we finish with the Arts and Humanities legislation. They would like a commitment that hearings will be held on Berman after the A&H leg. has been disposed of...

I believe Williams may approach you on this matter soon.

I would recommend agreeing... I think you will weaken your case if you hold out against hearings... Greg Fusco tells me Sen. Javits would like the situation to be resolved without hearings -- by a discussion in Committee and a vote up or down... I can't see how we would win on this one.

But I think we could go with a July Conference, and then arrange for later hearings... We would be getting toward the end of the session. I think we could ask questions at the hearings which would not be readily answered, and that we might well get enough time to win an ultimate delay (and more important, a full questioning of Berman's capability) so that the question would remain unresolved.

This plan would get Williams off the hook, it seems to me. At present he can with some justification say that inaction is causing him growingly serious embarrassment.

I would have no promises; said I'd discuss with you

There is a good, reasonable ground for saying that it would be irresponsible to hold hearings -- and have the views of adverse witnesses publicly expressed and aired -- while the legislation is in Conference... It would certainly tend to encourage added critics in the Congress to come forward. (Sen. Proxmire has had a series of diatribes against the Humanities in recent months -- but did not object, or put a hold on the Senate bill as he did the last time round, as I've been working to some extent with his staff and they were aware of your concerns and the lack of parity in the bill).

In accord with the above plan, it seems to me you could ask a series of searching questions which would require some time to answer, thus giving time as needed.

^{good}
Adverse witnesses are not going to be easily persuaded to testify... That has been apparent to me all along... Berman has little vocal opposition in the States, as their machinery is well lubricated in his favor, and there hasn't been opportunity to muster opposing views... Berman has the major Humanities institutions competing for funds, and literally fearful that criticism will lead to a cutting off or a curtailment.

This was apparent in my discussions with the Princeton group who assembled at Herb Bailey's house after you and Hal McGraw left... Many expressions antagonistic to Berman were voiced -- but when I asked, "Would you possibly be willing to say that in public at a Senate hearing?" no one said, without reservation, Yes... Not even the gent sitting on your end of the table who made the presentation of the award to you -- Matt Hodgson, who has been outspoken in his criticism of Berman for a period of more than two years... As you know, he's director of the N. Carolina Press. But he fears that the NC President might take considerable exception to any anti-Berman views, as the University is applying to Berman soon for funds for other projects.

The Press people are unanimously opposed to Berman as a proper leader, but each is receiving some funding, Princeton included... Herb Bailey's wife looked very frightened when it was suggested he might make his private views publicly known...

As I've pointed out before -- this seems to me the ultimate danger in the State Humanities program as now constituted -- it is allowing a concentration of power to develop... Berman, I'm sure, sees it as giving him this opportunity... That is why he is so loathe to change.

To recap... I would give Williams no timetable, but I would say that you could not object to hearings after the Conference, but that this could be a very unpleasant procedure with other views critical to Berman being expressed, or at least that definite possibility. To hold hearings now could vastly complicate the Conference and be hurtful to the overall program, which you feel has a great potential for good, if only it had better leadership.