

1975

Berman, Ronald: Memoranda (1975-1984): Correspondence 18

Livingston Biddle

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CONFIDENTIAL

TO: SENATOR ✓

FROM: LB

LB

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*Very interesting -
agree with your
conclusions*
Nov. 26, '75

*Like idea of less
francising*

I had a long telephone conversation (initiated by me) with Dr. Robert Lumiansky, head of the American Council of Learned Societies, and perhaps the most prestigious and broad-based group of scholars and humanists in the country. As noted in an earlier memo, the ACLS was very instrumental in original formation of the supporting groups for the Arts and Humanities legislation. Lumiansky was a member of the first National Council on the Humanities -- a good friend of Barnaby's, and also of Henry Moe (the first interim Chairman before Keeney took over.)

I explained that the conversation, no matter where it led, would be kept in absolute confidence at this time. He was aware of much of the background -- apparently your problems and controversy with Berman ^{are} ~~is~~ now well known in academia.

Lumiansky said that he appreciated especially the confidentiality of the call. He said that ACLS gets "a lot of money" from the Humanities Endowment and that his Board of Directors, on which serve illustrious humanists (including Hannah Gray, provost of Yale), had taken a position of a "No Comment" stance at present. All this seems to me understandable, but it underscores the cautious attitude being officially taken, ~~the~~ It also reinforces my feeling that Berman is making many calls around the country to bolster support, with the good possibility that he is using Endowment help, or its possibility, to strengthen his position. If he should get caught at this, it would

be a disastrous development, or so it would seem to me... but who would reveal this now?

After being assured of confidentiality, Lumiansky then made the following points:

1. Berman "is distinctly not a Henry Allen Moe or a Barnaby Keeney." He has the stature of neither.

2. Berman is a highly "political" animal. Lumiansky used this term in a derogative sense, meaning that Berman would play politics to keep his position (as above suggested), and that he had played various groups against each other, or for his own advantage, before he got into trouble. Lumiansky suggested that Berman would first react "politically" to a project, and secondarily as to its basic merits. I am putting words into Lumiansky's mouth here, but this was his fundamental implication.

3. The scholars of the country are not satisfied with Berman's performance. He, they feel, is placing too much emphasis on projects which have a public appeal -- to them this appears spurious. Lumiansky said that this criticism might appear to run counter to some of your own feelings that the program lacks public appeal.... However, it also suggests that whatever Berman is doing it would seem not to be achieving satisfactory public acclaim, nor giving the scholarly community great cause for cheering.

4. Berman is personally a most egocentric man. He is joked about in some circles for constantly seeking publicity.

5. The likes of Barnaby Keeney were far different, ^{far} above what Lumiansky implied was a characteristic of pettiness in insistence on stage center.

Lumiansky gave me this background on Berman's appointment.

ACLS submitted a number of names as the successor for Keeney and then Wally Edgerton... None of these recommendations was honored by the White House... Hess, instead, was proposed. He was opposed at the start by ACLS (and also by you as I gather, though I was not about then)... Goheen was mentioned, but the Nixon group considered him a Democrat, and they were looking for a Nixon card-carrying Republican. Finally Berman's name surfaced, through a very respected scholar at Yale, Prof. Maynard Mack, under whom Berman had written his PhD. dissertation. Mack gave Berman high marks. He was a Californian Republican. He agreed with Nixon on education (very, very conservative) and on other political points. His name was advanced.

~~White, White, xax~~ While none of the above is necessarily new to us, the source is highly reputable, and gives further corroboration of your feelings.

Lumiansky said, however, that if asked today officially for comment, he would probably say that Berman had done a respectable job and should not be removed. Or he would have no comment. He felt his Board would prevent him from making any more detailed or critical statement. This leads me to believe that it will be difficult to find anyone, except a disaffected grant applicant who has nothing to lose, to come forward at this time in an official way. But this could all change, given more time...

See my suggestion below. (R 4)

Meanwhile, the audit has begun. The GAO team has been given space and carte blanche and the run of the Endowment. Joe reports that he is very hopeful that the report will turn out favorably, or that it will contain no really damaging information. That could be, under the circumstances -- though the GAO people know exactly what we are looking for.

Going down the road a bit... At this time I would recommend a period of watchful waiting, let me explore leads as fully as possible, I will keep in touch every few days with the auditors to keep them on the track. If Berman's name is sent up to us, we will simply delay, at least until we have the preliminary audit study in late January. There is no one in the Senate right now who is going to push us on this -- at least I am not aware of anyone now. Everyone who calls about the Pell State Humanities amendment ends up agreeing that you have a very reasonable point -- volumes of mail are still coming in on this to other offices.

BUT Berman's main ~~achilles~~ Achilles heel would be through lower funding than the Arts. If this should emerge from mark-up (and there is an entirely different and valid set of arguments for such a course), I think Berman would resign, because he would lose the support of his present constituents. His promises would no longer have influence... (Incidentally, I tried out very tentatively the concept of less funding for Humanities than Arts with Greg Fusco, Javits man -- we had a long lunch the other day to cement relations -- and Greg said he thought Javits would "go for" that idea)

