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Correspondence 29

Lynne V. Cheney

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The Honorable Claiborne Pell  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-3901  

Dear Senator Pell:

As you know, the executive committee of the Modern Language Association has decided to oppose confirmation of Carol Iannone to the National Council on the Humanities.

I enclose a letter that I have written to the MLA executive committee setting forth reasons why the Iannone nomination should proceed. Carol Iannone represents the kind of faculty member who teaches undergraduates and tries to bring the humanities to nonacademic audiences. These are critical commitments, and to reject her because she has made them rather than followed a career pattern the Modern Language Association prefers would surely be an error.

Sincerely,

Lynne V. Cheney  
Chairman

Enclosure
March 15, 1991

Dr. Phyllis Franklin
Executive Director
Modern Language Association of America
10 Astor Place
New York, New York 10003

Dear Phyllis:

How sad it makes me to see the Modern Language Association's Executive Council fall once again into the old elitist patterns. Your letter objecting to Carol Iannone's nomination to the NEH's National Council assumes that only one kind of academic is suited to be on the Council: someone from a research university who publishes in journals like *Publications of the Modern Language Association*. I thought by now it was clear that the house of the humanities has many mansions. Certainly the one that fits the research university model is worthy, and we are proud of our fine Council members whose careers fit that pattern. We look forward to having more such members on our Council.

But not every academic needs a single kind of career. As Ernest Boyer has pointed out, a very valuable kind of scholarship occurs when learned people teach undergraduates or when they bring their knowledge to the public. The NEH should be advised by a Council characterized by a diversity of scholars—and public members as well. We fund many activities besides the kind of research that leads to publication in journals like the *PMLA*: programs on television, in museums, in libraries, projects to improve elementary and secondary education, and the teaching of undergraduates, to name a few. Carol Iannone, a teacher of undergraduates, an editor of a periodical that addresses issues in undergraduate education, and a well-published writer on contemporary cultural matters, is well positioned to advise the Endowment.
I particularly regret your narrow definition of who is suited to serve on our Council since it is exactly that kind of restricted thinking that has led to teaching being undervalued on our campuses. It is exactly that kind of thinking that has led to the kind of work that state humanities councils undertake being disdained.

I also regret that you placed such reliance on the study of our National Council done by the National Humanities Alliance. There are serious inaccuracies in that study, as I pointed out to the NHA and to Senator Kennedy last October; moreover, it is based on the same questionable assumptions that the MLA is acting on. Research university faculty, for example, are labeled "the most productive group of humanities scholars." I am sure that will come as a surprise to faculty members at community colleges who typically have teaching responsibilities twice and more as heavy as do faculty at research universities. The NHA and MLA would do well to understand that educating the next generation is also "productive."

In short, I am sorely troubled by your letter and its notion that only one kind of faculty member properly represents "the academy." The Endowment's enabling legislation mandates selection of individuals who "will provide a comprehensive representation of the views of scholars and professional practitioners in the humanities." Carol Iannone can help us attain that goal.

Sincerely,

Lynne V. Cheney
Chairman