Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): Correspondence 24

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The Honorable Robert T. Stafford  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510  

Dear Senator Stafford:

During the recent Senate hearings on the reauthorization of the National Endowment for the Humanities, several public witnesses were asked their opinions about the most recent group of Presidential nominees to the National Council on the Humanities. I am taking the liberty of writing to you in order to voice my sentiments on the matter and to take exception to some of the general characterizations about the nominees made during the hearing.

I have worked closely with these eight individuals for almost a year now, and I should like to state emphatically and publicly my admiration for their intelligence, hard work, and commitment to the humanities. However, I would prefer not to speak about them solely as a group; several witnesses at the recent hearing hesitated to discuss the nominees' individual merits but instead -- and unfairly in my view -- tried only to characterize them as a class. Therefore, let me briefly describe the qualifications of each individual nominee:

Robert Laxalt, the brother of Senator Paul Laxalt, has brought to us in this country much of what we know about Basque history and culture. He has published six books and over 200 articles, he has been a Fulbright Research Scholar and is the founder of the University of Nevada Press. He is currently the Reynolds Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of Journalism at the University of Nevada at Reno. His most recent work appears in the July issue of National Geographic.

Leon Kass is a chaired professor on the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago and has also taught at St. John's College in Annapolis. An expert in medical ethics and issues concerning the relationships between the sciences and humanities, Dr. Kass has published in such journals as the New England Journal of Medicine, Science, and The Public Interest.
William Allen is a professor of humanities at Harvey Mudd College/Claremont Graduate School and a former president of the Claremont School District Board of Education. A scholar of American government, jurisprudence, and political science, Dr. Allen is a noted authority on the American Constitution and its history. His publications include a two-volume edition of *The Works of Fisher Ames*, a book on James Madison, and numerous essays in such journals as *Publius*, *Interpretation*, and *The Independent Journal of Philosophy*. He is currently completing a new translation of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*.

Helen Marie Taylor has achieved considerable distinction in bringing classical works of drama and literature and important historical artifacts to the general public. She is a former member of the Board of Governors of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and was co-chair of Free Shakespeare in Central Park. In addition, Mrs. Taylor is a founder of the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre and Academy, the James Madison Museum in Virginia, and presently serves as a regent of the James Monroe Law Office Museum and Memorial Library.

Mary Josephine Cresimore is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of North Carolina. Mrs. Cresimore was a classroom teacher and is currently a member of the board of directors of several North Carolina civic and cultural organizations, and has recently been recognized by Governor James Hunt as North Carolina's Outstanding Volunteer.

James V. Schall, S.J. holds degrees in philosophy, theology, and political science. Now professor of political science at Georgetown University, his publications include *Human Dignity* and *Human Numbers* and *Christianity and Politics*. Currently Fr. Schall is co-editor of a series entitled *Contemporary Catholic Theology*, published by Doubleday Press.

Kathleen Kilpatrick has contributed markedly to the public appreciation of literature through her efforts as a publisher of American authors. She is the president of the American Literary Society and the publisher of the *Yale Literary Magazine*. She has been executive director of the Education and Research Institute and has served with the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy, both based in Washington, D.C.
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George Hart, recently added to the group under consideration for confirmation, is a member of the Boards of Trustees of Boston University, the San Francisco Fine Arts Museum Foundation, and the Institute of Medical Sciences. He is also a member of the Board of Overseers of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Board of Fellows of Boston University. From 1962 to 1974, he served on the Board of Regents of the California State University and College System.

My view is that President Reagan's nominees to our Council include a good mix of nationally recognized humanities scholars and public spirited private citizens. They include Democrats as well as Republicans, teachers, trustees, and scholars. Each nominee has already made significant contributions to the deliberations of the National Council, and I would strongly urge that each of them be considered by the Committee and confirmed in the near future so that the important advisory functions of the Council can continue with continuity and with the benefit of their services.

Sincerely,

John Agresto  
Acting Chairman

cc: Members of the Committee