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Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): Article 01

Malcolm G. Sully

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William J. Bennett, Secretary of Education, was challenged last week by Sen. Robert T. Stafford, Republican of Vermont and chairman of the Senate Education Subcommittee, to "submit specific proposals that will make education in America better" and to abandon his efforts to cut federal funds for student aid and other higher-education programs.

"I challenge him to come forward with proposals that will remedy the defects he has been talking about," Mr. Stafford told the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools.

"The Administration's massive, mean-spirited cuts in federal funding for higher education are wrong solutions," Mr. Stafford said, referring to Mr. Bennett's statement that some students on federal financial aid may have to consider divesting themselves of cars, stereos, and beach vacations.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bennett appeared before the House Education and Labor Committee to defend the President's proposals to limit subsidized Guaranteed Student Loans to students whose families earn less than \$32,500 per year and to limit federal aid to \$4,000 per student.

Referring to Mr. Bennett's statement that the proposals would force some middle-income families to "tighten the belt even further," Rep. William D. Ford, Democrat of Michigan and chairman of the panel's Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education, said:

"Students' bellybuttons will be meeting their backbones when they get done tightening their belts as much as the Secretary of Education advocates."

Possible Choice of a Peace Corps Official to Head Humanities Fund Stirs Concern

By MALCOLM G. SCULLY

WASHINGTON

Spokesmen for scholarly associations and humanities organizations expressed deep concern last week over reports that Edward A. Curran, deputy director of the Peace Corps and former director of the National Institute of Education, was the leading candidate to replace William J. Bennett as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

While few of the association officials said they knew Mr. Curran personally, they cited controversies during his tenure at the National Institute of Education, and his lack of professional experience in higher education as grounds for their reservations.

"Our hats are firmly on our heads," said Samuel R. Gammon, executive director of the American Historical Association. "They are not being thrown up in the air."

"I'm afraid that not too many of us really know Mr. Curran, and on the face of it his curriculum vitae does not reveal the

kind of strengths we would like to see in that job," Mr. Gammon added.

He acknowledged, however, that "our reservations are based on a lack of knowledge and fear rather than certainty."

Even as Mr. Curran's possible nomination was drawing criticism from scholarly groups, there was some speculation last week that he was no longer the sole or even the leading candidate for the job.

Approved in January

Mr. Curran reportedly was approved for the post by the White House personnel office in January when Mr. Bennett was picked to succeed Terrel H. Bell as Secretary of Education. According to several observers, the N.E.H. appointment was to have been announced at the same time as Mr. Bennett's.

However, they said, the process was then stalled in the White House, apparently by moderates opposed to Mr. Curran. If the Curran nomination "got that far and then wasn't announced, that has to mean

someone in the White House is sitting on it," said an official of one Washington-based association.

In addition, the official said, there were reports that Sen. Robert T. Stafford, Republican of Vermont, already angered by Mr. Bennett's statements on federal financial aid to students, intended to put a hold on Mr. Curran's nomination if it were sent to the Senate for confirmation.

Mr. Curran distressed many educators three years ago when as director of the National Institute of Education he wrote President Reagan a letter proposing that the agency be abolished.

"After seven months here, I have concluded that the best way to advance your goals is to abolish this agency," Mr. Curran wrote in the April 1982 letter. "The taxpayers simply do not need a \$90,000 survey on the political attitudes of college professors or a \$37,000 study of the 1973 New York City Board elections."

Two months after he sent the letter, Mr.

Continued on Page 27, Column 1

6 WHO HAVE BEEN MENTIONED FOR HUMANITIES POST



HARVEY MUDD COLLEGE
William Allen



Edward Curran



CITY U. OF NEW YORK
Gertrude Himmelfarb



PRINCETON U.
Robert Hollander



W. R. MALECKI
Charles Ritcheson



T. CHARLES ERICKSON
Robin W. Winks

Possible Choice for NEH Post Stirs Concern

Continued from Preceding Page

Curran was fired by the then Secretary of Education, Terrel H. Bell.

The institute, the research arm of the Department of Education, has long been a target of hard-line conservatives, and Mr. Curran's letter endeared him to some of them. Even so, his defenders say that he is not a right-wing ideologue.

"He's no dyed-in-the-wool conservative," said one associate. "He's a very moderate person and very easy to live with."

Representatives of scholarly organizations cited three principal objections to Mr. Curran's appointment:

► That he has had difficulties with Congress in the past. "There were holds put on his nomination for the Peace Corps, and we would not be surprised to see a hold if his nomination for the N.E.H. job is sent up," said one official.

► That he lacks strong academic credentials or a background in higher education. Mr. Curran holds a master's degree in history and is the former headmaster of a private school for girls in Washington, but has never held a faculty or administrative job in higher education.

► That during his tenure at the National Institute of Education he showed a bias toward conservative points of view. "Some of our constituents are a little concerned that that bias might be reflected at N.E.H.," said the official.

"No one knows him personally. He has not circulated among the learned societies and public groups interested in the humanities."

Should Mr. Curran's nomination stall, as some observers believe it already has done, there are several other candidates reportedly waiting in the wings for the endowment post.

One of those frequently mentioned is Charles R. Ritcheson, university librarian at the University of Southern California. A historian, Mr. Ritcheson has the support of several of the humanities organizations that were critical last week of Mr. Curran's appointment.

Also mentioned have been William Allen, a professor of history at Claremont College in California; Gertrude Himmelfarb, a professor of history at the Graduate School of the City University of New York; Robert B. Hollander, Jr., a professor of comparative literature at Princeton University; and Robin W. Winks, professor of history at Yale University.

Mr. Ritcheson has also been reported to be a leading candidate for the job of National Archivist, which

will become vacant on April 15 when the current archivist, Robert M. Warner, resigns. Another name that has been mentioned for the archivist's post is that of John T. Agresto, acting chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The apparent political pressuring over the appointment of the new N.E.H. chairman is reminiscent of that which took place when the Administration chose Mr. Bennett for the endowment post in 1981. Mr. Bennett was widely viewed as the candidate of neo-conservative intellectuals over Melvin E. Bradford, a professor of English at the University

of Dallas, who was regarded as "the candidate of the old right." Eventually, Mr. Bennett got the job.

According to sources familiar with both cases, Mr. Curran's candidacy has gone further than Mr. Bradford's did. Nonetheless, these sources believe that Mr. Curran's nomination may yet be headed off.

The N.E.H. chairmanship historically has been subject to political infighting. Joseph D. Duffey, Mr. Bennett's predecessor, was an early supporter of Jimmy Carter, and his appointment stirred some fears that the agency was becoming too politicized.