6-13-1991

Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): News Article 29

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NEH's Last-Ditch Pitch for a Conservative

By Charles Trueheart
Washington Post Staff Writer

Lyman V. Cheney, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is escorting embattled scholar Carol Iannone to the Senate today in search of the votes she needs—and doesn't have—to win a seat on the endowment's advisory council.

Typically a routine presidential appointment to a virtually invisible panel, Iannone's nomination to the endowment has been stoutly defended by, among others, Lynne Cheney's, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is escorting embattled scholar Carol Iannone to the Senate today in search of the votes she needs—and doesn't have—to win a seat on the endowment's advisory council.

As the author of the endowment's enabling legislation, Pell is an influential figure in any vote that concerns it—and Senate sources said yesterday that Pell is likely to vote no on the Iannone nomination. Most other committee Democrats, and some Republicans, are declaring themselves officially undecided, even if they were prepared to cast their votes last week.

Del Real said "we feel very confident that the senators will listen to Carol with an open mind."

Scholarly groups opposed to Iannone's appointment have questioned her academic credentials rather than her ideological positions. But she gave her detractors fresh ammunition, and some senators cause serious concern, with an essay published in the March Commentary. In "Literature by Quota," Iannone criticized recent literary awards to novels by African Americans as acts of "reparation" and "tribalism" rather than artistic achievement.

Iannone, who has declined interview requests, was to have been considered last week along with new nominations to the humanities council, Harvard's Harvey Mansfield and SUNY/Albany's Michael Malbin. Though Mansfield and Malbin are politically conservative scholars, they have prompted no discernible opposition. Nonetheless, the vote on their nominations was postponed as well, at Cheney's request.

A committee source said yesterday that action on Iannone and the two others would probably come after the July 4 congressional recess.