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Filling Humanities Post Is an Art

By GRACE GLUCK

Washington, D.C. - Harold Leavitt has been named to serve as chairman of the nonprofit National Endowment for the Humanities. This post is one in Washington's crackerjack of thoughtful local talent searching for more ways to enrich our lives. The search has now turned to the right place.

In anticipation of Leavitt's inauguration in January, the endowment's board of governors will be formalizing a new strategy to ensure the $38 million of annual federal funds the agency will distribute throughout the country.

Leavitt, 62, who has been a professor at Williams College and a consultant to the Ford Foundation, will assume the post when Richard Holst resigns in early January. Holst, a retired Harvard professor, has served as the agency's head for 12 years.

The board of governors will be discussing the post of chairman, which Leavitt will hold until 1994, at its meeting today. It will then be confirmed by Congress, which must also confirm his nomination by President Clinton.

Leavitt is well respected in Washington and is known for his expertise in the humanities. He is a leading figure in the world of higher education and has been a driving force in persuading Congress to appropriate funds for the humanities.

Leavitt is expected to bring a fresh perspective to the endowment's work, which is devoted to promoting the study of the humanities and increasing public understanding of their importance.

The endowment was created by Congress in 1965 and is funded by the federal government. It has been a controversial agency, particularly in the past few years, when it has faced criticism for the way it has distributed its funds.

Leavitt's appointment comes at a time when the humanities are facing a resurgence of interest, as evidenced by the increasing number of students pursuing degrees in the field.

In his new role, Leavitt will be expected to help the endowment focus more on the needs of the humanities and to work with Congress to ensure that the agency receives adequate funding.

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