Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): Memorandum 05

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MEMORANDUM

June 4, 1985

TO:  Senator
FROM: ADC
RE: Wed. Appointment with John Agresto, Acting NEH Chairman

John Agresto requested this short courtesy appointment with you in advance of the reauthorization hearing scheduled for June 20.

He was Bill Bennett's Deputy Chairman and became Acting Chair when Bennett moved to the Department of Education. Agresto did not expect to be in the Acting slot this long as Ed Curran was expected to take over. Agresto was never a serious candidate for the top slot and will probably go over to work for Bennett again when the NEH Chairmanship is filled. He was one of Bennett's most conservative ideologues at NEH.

He knows we expect to introduce the Subcommittee's reauthorization bill this week sometime. The only section which NEH has some concern about is the addition of language pertaining to qualifications of Council nominees. We have added the phrase "from citizens of the United States who are recognized for their broad knowledge of, or expertise in the humanities..." to the following paragraph where marked. NEH is worried that their flexibility in appointing who they want is compromised by this addition.

I have told them that recent appointments to the Council have deeply concerned members of the Subcommittee and that there is wide support for this add on. Moreover, the new phrase is similar to one used in the section having to do with Arts Council nominees.

(b) The Council shall be composed of the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, who shall be the Chairman of the Council, and twenty-six other members appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, from private life. Such members shall be selected on the basis of distinguished service and scholarship or creativity and in a manner which will provide a comprehensive representation of the views of scholars and professional practitioners in the humanities and of the public throughout the United States. The President is requested in the making of such appointments to give consideration to such recommendations as may from time to time be submitted to him by leading national organizations concerned with the humanities.

Other issues you will raise at the hearing:

- fairness of panel system, rotation of panelists who represent a wide variety of views.
- status of state humanities programs including NEH oversight and the 20% set aside for states
- quality of Council - need for distinguished, thoughtful leaders