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## Reagan Administration: Funding Cuts News Articles (1981-1982): News Article 41

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# Cleansing the 'esoteric' image of humanities fund

**George Will**

WASHINGTON — The name of Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) will not dominate the histories of our age, but he has left a mark. Thanks to him, President Carter was able to nominate a new head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the foundation most important to American scholarship.

Pell's importance to the life of the mind in America flows from his chairmanship of the authorization subcommittee that is sovereign over NEH. Pell's most notable recent exercise of sovereignty was in blocking for more than a year (until after the 1976 election) a vote on President Ford's nomination of Ronald Berman for a second term as head of NEH.

Brought to a vote, the nomination, which enjoyed broad and distinguished support in the academic community, would have been approved overwhelmingly. But Berman is a scholar and a Republican. To give Pell his due, he was offended by the former not the latter.

Without being usefully specific, Pell thinks NEH funds too many "esoteric" scholarly projects that do not "reach out to the length and breadth of our country." He sometimes seems to think scholarship is esoteric. He thinks NEH should be more like the National Endowment for the Arts, which Nancy Hanks runs in a way designed to win the admiration of Congress.

Pursuant to the exacting standards Carter set for appointments ("Why not the best?"), the White House conducted a seven-month search for a nominee. After several candidates declined, Carter reached into his administration for Joseph Duffey, one of the early supporters of Carter's candidacy. Duffey's mandate includes cleansing NEH of what Carter calls its "elitist image."

Duffey, 45, describes himself as "a

political person." He is a minister from Connecticut, where he received a Ph.D. from Hartford Seminary. He taught there and, briefly, at Yale before running unsuccessfully for the Senate, administering the American Association of University Professors, and serving as an Assistant Secretary of State. His wife is an Assistant Secretary of Commerce. It is possible Duffey is "the best," or just the best person to please Pell.

Pell thinks NEH has been a "pale shadow" compared with the Arts Endowment, which he says has "generated more momentum" at the "grass-roots." Pell thinks NEH should offer grants to "lumberjacks," "grocers" and "shoemakers." Presumably (Pell is a bit vague on this point) each would do his thing in the humanities field of his choice.

Surely, Pell is pleased at least by the fact that NEH spent just \$500,000 to bring the Egyptian exhibition of the treasures of King Tut to six million U.S. museum visitors. NEH spent just \$250,000 to bring BBC's "War and Peace" to 20 million television viewers. That is .0125 cents per viewer, a statistic that should satisfy Pell and others who think such cost analysis is a sufficient criterion for evaluating investment in culture.

Pell falls easily under the spell of statistics, and is powerfully affected by the fact that in a recent 15-month period the Arts Endowment issued 5,050 grants totaling \$115 million while NEH issued only 2,045 totaling \$111 million.

Perhaps Duffey will be inclined and able to make Pell understand that the aim of NEH under Berman was excellence, whereas under Hanks one aim of the Arts Endowment seems to be the satisfaction of a large number of applicants from a large number of congressional districts.

The Arts Endowment can give \$500 to a voter in Leadville, Colo., who wants to be subsidized when playing the recorder. The Arts Endowment can rationalize this in terms of a populist, democratic doctrine that "art" is almost any instanta-

neous enjoyment of "self-expression." Needless to say, congressmen understand the charm of this.

But most worthy humanities projects — for example, historical monographs, or translations — involve a more demanding standard of excellence achieved over

**Claiborne Pell**

The Humanities Endowment next year will dispense more than 100 million of the taxpayers dollars, with the congressionally-mandated objective of enriching American life by supporting the study and appreciation of humanistic learning.

There are important questions of policy and philosophy to be debated and decided involving the direction of this program during the coming years.

Regrettably, some critics make no real contribution to this debate, but instead confuse the issues by flailing out at nearly everyone involved, including President Carter; Nancy Hanks, the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts; Dr. Joseph Duffey, the nominee for chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Congress generally; and myself in particular.

In the process, critics have distorted my own views, and not incidentally, buttressed their own arguments with erroneous information.

But let us focus on the real issue.

I am convinced that the Endowment for the Humanities has not realized its full potential to provide opportunities for the enrichment of American life, and that, to fulfill its potential, the Humanities Endowment must enlist broader participation in a quality program.

handling, heated and unheated storage space, commercial office space, a passenger lounge and administrative offices for the port director and staff.

revenue future looks bright  
Wakefield  
John R. Lynch

time. Hence, grants for humanities projects generally must have a larger "critical mass" than grants for "art" as the Arts Endowment can conveniently define it.

Because of the nature of the disciplines it encompasses, NEH is inherently more comparable to the National Science Foun-

dation than to the Arts Endowment. But one should not dwell on this fact, lest it kindle in Pell and Carter anxieties about the Science Foundation's "esoteric" projects and "elitist image."

George Will is a contributor to the National Review.

## NEH on target for sound goals

In proposing that the Humanities endowment reach out more vigorously to involve a broader spectrum of the American people, I am not rushing in blindly to destroy the citadels of scholarship in the United States.

Some appear to have forgotten that the Endowment for the Humanities was established by legislation which I introduced, and which was adopted by the Congress 12 years ago.

Since the establishment of the Endowment, I have had the privilege and responsibility of serving as Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee which authorizes the program and its funding. I have encouraged and supported the growth of the Humanities Endowment program from an initial funding of \$2 million to its current level of \$115 million for this fiscal year.

I am not about to aid in the destruction of what I have labored to create and develop. But I do believe that the Endowment has given insufficient emphasis to broadening participation and to diffusion of humanistic learning. The Endowment, with vastly increased financial resources, provided by the taxpayers, was in fact tending towards favoring an exclusive few or what some would call "elitism."

Now what does elitist used in this sense mean? To me it means narrow, self-serving, ingrained, and closed off to the majority of our population.

Critics' views notwithstanding, I believe that quality humanistic studies need not be exclusive; and indeed, I believe that

exclusiveness in the administration of the Endowment program endangers its quality.

The chairmanship of the Humanities Endowment is a sensitive and influential position. I think it essential that leadership of the Endowment recognize the quality may be found in every state of the country, in every academic, ethnic, and social community, and that every community can benefit from humanistic studies, projects, and grant awards.

The Endowment hampers its own goals if it tends toward concentrating grant awards within a relatively closed circle of scholars and academic associates.

That is why I opposed the reappointment of Dr. Ronald Berman after he had served four years as Chairman of the Endowment. And here a correction is in order. A vote on consideration of Dr. Berman's nomination was held in the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare before, not after, the November, 1976, election. Far from gaining overwhelming support, Dr. Berman's nomination did not receive the majority support required to proceed to consideration.

In conclusion, I suppose I should be pleased that at least one critic has nominated me for at least a footnote in history because of my opposition to Dr. Berman's reappointment. I would far rather be remembered as a Senator who worked for more than a decade to establish and build the National Endowment for the Humanities as an effective program to enrich American life.

Claiborne Pell is the senior U.S. Senator from Rhode Island.