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Kennedy secures defeat of conservative scholar's nomination

By John Alejandra Farrell

WASHINGTON — In an eleventh-hour display of political muscle, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy yesterday secured just enough Democratic votes to defeat the nomination of a conservative scholar, Carol Innis, to an advisory council for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Innis's nomination, framed by her supporters as a battle of free speech vs. the rigid conformity of "political correctness," was rejected by a 9 to 8 vote in the Senate Labor and Human Relations Committee. Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico was the only Democrat to break ranks.

"If this isn't political correctness, what the hell is it?" asked Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah, the ranking Republican on the committee. "We are demanding that academics be academics of a certain mode."

After the vote, Kennedy said he decided to throw his full clout as committee chairman against the nomination because he felt Innis's supporters had made the appointment a partisan issue: a challenge, he said, he could not pass up.

White House lobbying

Top officials from the Bush administration, including the White House chief of staff, John Sununu, Vice President Dan Quayle and the chairwoman of the National Endow-
ment for the Humanities, Lynne Cheney, had lobbied the committee on Lissman's behalf.

"No one is imposing political correctness on the council," Kennedy said. "No one was distinguished nominee with conservative backgrounds have been confirmed to the council in the past, as they will continue to be confirmed in the future. But no amount of strident rhetoric over ideology can make up for the nominee's lack of qualifications."

In an interview yesterday, Lissman said she was disappointed but relieved that the 10-month battle was over and expressed surprise at Kennedy's sudden, vehement opposition. "When I visited with him, he said academic politics were the worst kind of politics... but he did express reservations about some of my views."

Lissman is a 43-year-old professor of English at New York University. She is a first-generation Italian-American who worked as a part-time secretary and parochial school-teacher to pay for the studies that led to her doctorate at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Because she is not widely cited or published in academic circles, Lissman's nomination was opposed by several scholarly associations on the grounds that she was unqualified.

Opinion
The editorial boards of The New York Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune and The Wall Street Journal, as well as advocates of such disparate views as the conservative George F. Will and the liberal Nat Hentoff, were convinced that the issue of qualifications was a mere and that she was being unfairly branded for her conservative attacks on feminist scholarship and some black literature.

"Carol Lissman is a fine scholar and a fine person," a disappointed Cheney said. "Her nomination has raised vital First Amendment issues, and the vote will be widely seen as sanctioning limits on free expression. That should be of concern to all Americans both on and off our campuses."