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Humanities Nominee Rejected in Senate

By BARBARA GAMAREKIAN

WASHINGTON, July 17 -- After a brief, tense debate, the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee today approved by one vote the controversial nomination of Carol Iannone to the advisory council for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Nominations to the council — like all presidential nominations subject to a Senate committee's approval — are typically routine. But the nomination of Ms. Iannone, a literature teacher at New York University, has sparked a controversy that has attracted extraordinary attention. It has been opposed by some lawmakers and scholarly organizations and debated in editorials and by newspaper columnists as well as on Capitol Hill.

"It just escalated," Senator Claiborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Island, said today after the vote. "She had become a shuttlecock between the conservative establishment and the liberal establishment."

Senator Pell, a committee member and one of the endowment's founders, spoke against the nomination. He said that Ms. Iannone should be disqualified for her political views but for her lack of academic credentials. The statutory language of the endowment specifically calls for council members who have established records of distinguished service and scholarship or creativity, he said. "In my view," said Senator Pell, "she comes up short on each of these points."

Ms. Iannone was nominated to the 26-member National Council, which advises the Humanities Endowment on what programs deserve Federal money, by President Bush last year. Among those many nominations was the one for Ms. Iannone, who had been nominated in 1983 by Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Democrat of Hawaii, and in 1984 by Senator William Proxmire, Democrat of Wisconsin.

A usually routine committee vote turns into a fiery debate over credentials.

During today's debate, the committee's cochairmen, Senator Edward Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, and Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Republican of Utah, engaged in an often fiery exchange. Senator Kennedy, waving Ms. Iannone's dossier, compared the relatively short list of her scholarly writings with the wealth of materials assembled for the other two candidates. In response, Senator Hatch said: "You can't determine those positional qualities by the weight of the pages. I think you could list a lot of people who are considered the greatest writers, thinkers, critics and literary geniuses in the field who didn't even begin to write until after they were her age, 43. She brings to the council 20 years of teaching."

At another point, Senator Hatch, his voice rising in frustration, said, "If this is not political correctness, what is it? My gosh, it's one thing having these nuncatoux out there acting like academics and acting like they know a lot about intellectual life."

"What was that word again?" interrupted Senator Kennedy with a grin.

Largely a Party-Line Vote

"Hawks," restated Senator Hatch to rising laughter in the hearing room, "and I have not as yet used the word to describe anyone on this committee."

"She comes from a first-generation immigrant working-class family. Mr. Hatch continued. "She's a woman, it is tough in those early years in academia for women and anybody who doesn't believe that doesn't know what is going on."

"Ideology is not the issue," said Senator Kennedy, "Political correctness is not the issue. Numerous distinguished nominees with conservative backgrounds have been confirmed to the council in the past, as they will continue to be confirmed in the future."

The 9-to-8 vote was largely along party lines, with Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico the only Democrat to vote in support of the nomination. "I was not persuaded that anything I said was adequate to disqualify her from serving in that capacity," said Senator Bingaman after the hearing.

Lynne Cheney, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, had made Ms. Iannone's nomination something of a cause celebre, arguing the nominee's case in op-ed page articles and escorting her on personal visits to the Hill seeking votes.

Reaction of Iannone

In a statement today, Mrs. Cheney said: "Carol Iannone is a fine scholar and a fine person, as all the Republicans and one Democrat on the committee realized. It is a great disappointment that the rest of the Democrats kicked her down. Moreover, her nomination has raised vital First Amendment issues and this vote will be widely seen as sanctioning the preferred mode of free expression. That should be of concern to all Americans, both on and off our campuses."

"Ms. Iannone expressed surprise at the vote, suggesting that it was more ideologically than based on her scholarly credentials. "I am surprised that Senator Kennedy made qualifications on the issue because when I met with..."