7-19-1991

Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): News Article 48

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_36

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_36/83

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education: National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996) at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.
On Wednesday morning, Carol Iannone, the NYU literature professor and literary critic, was denied confirmation to a seat on the advisory council of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The 9-8 vote by members of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee followed party lines, save for Democrat Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, who supported Iannone.

The negative vote climaxed a campaign that showed much about the state of freedom of expression in the country: the final lesson — left-wing standards of "Political Correctness" have extended their reach from American campuses all the way to the Democratic side of the aisle in the Senate — is not a happy one.

The story of how the forces of PC orthodoxy were organized and brought to bear against Carol Iannone's nomination is one that surely will be told at length in the weeks and months ahead. But the outlines are clear already.

Before the final vote, anti-Iannone Democrats argued that the candidate had inadequate credentials for the minor post in question. No claim could be more laughable. Iannone has a Ph.D., teaches at a top flight university (NYU) and has written extensively as lead fiction critic for a magazine (Commentary) that intellectuals actually read and respect. She has, in fact, already established a considerable reputation as a literary critic. In happier days, the career path of a young, female Italian-American scholar from a working class background who made a name for herself as a literary critic would have been considered exemplary.

In fact, several senators told Iannone in private meetings before the vote that there was no real question about her credentials. One senator who eventually voted against her, Rhode Island socialite Claiborne Pell, suggested that she withdraw her nomination and come back in a year or so, after she'd written for more "middle-of-the-road" publications — a clear indication that what troubled him about Iannone was her conservative worldview.

Probably, some Pell aide actually reviewed Iannone's articles. And, unlike the envious professors who protested her appointment — and who write impenetrable "deconstructionist" essays in academic journals that nobody reads — Iannone does have a paper trail. For the better part of the last decade, she has forthrightly confronted the great moral issues of the day through the prism of literature.

The Modern Language Association and other guardians of left-wing orthodoxy don't like what she's had to say. Through extensive lobbying and considerable innuendo, they let the Democratic senators know they wanted her nomination defeated.

Still, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that Democratic senators would take their cues from the PC crowd at the MLA. After all, Senators Kennedy, Dodd, Pell and Simon wouldn't recognize left-wing literary criticism if it hit them in the face.

In the days before the vote, several Democrats intimated that they would probably support Iannone. But last Tuesday evening, Senator Kennedy summoned a caucus of Democratic committee members and — according to sources — told them he wanted a party-line "No" vote. "My reputation is at stake," Kennedy insisted.

On Capitol Hill, a chairman who makes a plea of this sort is generally heeded.

Who's the loser here? In a sense Carol Iannone, who won't have the privilege of being one of 25 members of the NEH advisory panel. But we have no doubt that Iannone will survive the slight.

The real losers will be, first, writers — they'll have learned that they'd best be very careful about challenging reigning left-wing academic orthodoxies in their work. From Iannone's experience, young academics will learn that a single idea can be twisted out context to a point where an author is declared "out of the mainstream."

Ultimately, writers and academics will begin to practice a protective self-censorship. And American intellectual life will be impoverished.