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Stanely N. Katz

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Washington Post 8/1/91

Stanley N. Katz

Politics Wasn't Why We Opposed Iannone

Although *The Post* has minimized the importance of the National Council on the Humanities in two recent editorials, it has nonetheless provided its readers with a heavy dose of news and opinion pieces on the nomination of Carol Iannone to the council. With the exception of Richard Cohen's assessment, the opinion pieces by Evans and Novak, Nat Henoff (two), Charles Krauthammer, Jonathan Yardley, Lynne Cheney and Carol Iannone

Taking Exception

have all supported the administration's charge that all opposition to Iannone was solely based on "political correctness." The *Post* also found space for news stories by Charles Truheart and Kim Masters. Clearly, despite its editorials, the *Post* assigned a high priority to the issue.

An intensive newspaper campaign undertaken by Iannone's supporters before and after the Senate committee's action has insisted and continues to insist that the organizations questioning the nomination were motivated by "political correctness." This charge cannot go unanswered.

The American Council of Learned Societies, one of the five scholarly organizations opposing the nomination, is a coalition of 51 professional associations representing more than 350,000 post-doctoral scholars in the United States. These scholars are Democrats and Republicans, radicals and conservatives. They do not agree on matters of politics, and ACLS does not take political positions. We are simply in favor of open, fair and democratic procedures in public life as they affect teaching and scholarship. But when it comes to scholarship, we support only the highest standards—as established by peer review. For this reason we, and the other opposing organizations, did not question the two other nominees—political scientists Harvey C. Mansfield Jr. and Michael Malbin—the Senate Committee considered July 17. Both are leading exponents of views similar to those of Iannone.



BY MARGARET SCOTT

"We are simply in favor of open, fair and democratic procedures in public life as they affect teaching and scholarship. But when it comes to scholarship, we support only the highest standards."

The objections of ACLS and other organizations to Iannone's qualifications are deeply held, since the academic members of the council assist in the distribution of many millions of dollars each year to scholarly institutions, individual scholars, teachers and the public humanities. The legislation authorizing the National Endowment for the Humanities specifies the qualification of distinction for scholar members of the council precisely to ensure the highest scholarly standards in the award of NEH grants. The concurrence of Sen. Claiborne Pell, one of the drafters of the original statute, with our position should help to make the point. This was also the strongly held conviction of the committee chairman, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

Is Iannone, then, qualified to be a "public" member of the council? The Senate committee did not accept the fallback argument of Iannone's supporters that she could represent the public humanities. ACLS has been notably active in promoting the humanities outside institutions of higher learning—in state humanities councils, elementary and secondary schools and in the media. We welcome the appointment of public humanists who do not

make their living in the academy, but we cannot support the appointment of unqualified academics for these important positions.

Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, an Iannone supporter on the committee, gave the administration game away when she admitted that Iannone "might not meet the criteria, but I don't know that any great calamity is going to happen at the National Endowment for the Humanities." Would she say the same thing of an unqualified nominee to the National Science Board? Are the humanities less important? We think not. We believe that a distinguished council is the best guarantor of the integrity of the endowment.

Although those of us who opposed Carol Iannone's nomination did so because of her credentials and not because of her politics, we are concerned that when the terms of nine council members conclude next year, the administration will continue to put forward nominees with similarly weak records. Fortunately, both Sens. Pell and Kennedy have announced that they will continue to scrutinize the qualifications of each nominee. So will we.

The writer is president of the American Council of Learned Societies.