1985

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Pell helps block agency nominee

By JOHN E. MULLIGAN
Journal-Bulletin Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee yesterday blocked President Reagan's nomination of a politically and former secondary school administrator to head the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Sen. Claiborne Pell, whose legislation created the grant-making agency, said he helped lead the opposition because the nominee, Edward A. Curran, lacked sufficient scholarly credentials.

The panel effectively killed the nomination by refusing, on a vote of 8 to 8, to report the nomination to the full Senate, which must confirm such Presidential appointments. The chairman of the panel's education subcommittee, Sen. Robert T. Stafford, R-Vt., joined Pell and the rest of the committee's Democrats in opposition.

In April Mr. Reagan nominated Curran, who joined the administration after the 1980 elections, to replace Edward Bennett. Bennett left the post in February to become secretary of education. For most of his academic career, Curran was headmaster of a private secondary school for girls in Washington.

Since joining the Reagan-Bush campaign in 1980, he has headed the National Institute of Education and served as deputy director of the Peace Corps. But his opponents said Curran was unqualified to lead the NEH because he lacks a doctorate and has never published serious scholarly papers of the sort that the NEH subsidizes through its grants program.

Pell said that Curran, 52, is known as a good administrator and would be qualified for many other positions in the education establishment. But Pell called Curran the "wrong person" to head the NEH.

"I have watched and nurtured two decades of NEH life," during which the organization has enjoyed a succession of well-qualified leaders — all of them holders of doctorates.

But he said that by nominating Curran the Reagan administration "has shown very little sensitivity" to the post's importance.

Pell pressures administration to drop cattle prods from plan

The Reagan administration, under pressure from Sen. Claiborne Pell, yesterday promised that electric cattle prods would not be supplied to Central American governments under a proposed $54-million counter-terrorism aid package.

That assurance by James Michel, a State Department official, came at a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee after Pell, ranking Democrat on the panel, asked three times whether "shock batons" would be deleted from the package.

"I have no hesitation in giving that assurance" if it would ease the way in Congress for the aid package, Michel said.

Pell said he fears the batons could be used to torture political prisoners if they fell into the wrong hands. He recalled such problems occurred under a U.S. program in the 1960s and 1970s to train and equip police forces in developing nations.

Pell pressed the matter after Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams earlier this month told him that he would "personally favor" providing shock batons — ostensibly for use in crowd control — to Costa Rica if that government requested them. Abrams cited that country's good human-rights record.

Pell said later he has several reservations concerning the proposed aid package, but that the matter of batons, in particular, bothered him.

The aid package includes $27 million in counter-terrorism aid to military forces in several Central American countries, $26 million in assistance to police forces and $1 million to protect individuals who cooperate in prosecuting suspected terrorists.