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Edward Curran

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October 4, 1985

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

During the October 2 hearings before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee on my nomination to be Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, you asked if I would comply with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations. I responded that I felt it appropriate to seek advice from legal counsel and NEH staff. I noted that I believe in affirmative action (as I do, and as my record will confirm) and that I support the nondiscrimination resolution of the National Council on the Humanities, that "The National Endowment for the Humanities should neither favor nor slight anyone because of race, color, national origin, religion, or gender." I replied in this way for several reasons: I agree with the National Council; I was aware of the strong position which NEH has taken on the matter in the past; and it had not been possible for me, as one outside the agency, to know all the background of this complicated matter.

You asked that I add to my response, noting that you felt this was a matter of great importance. The intent of Congress on this issue is increasingly clear. Yesterday the Senate passed S. 1264, which reauthorizes NEH. The report of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee on that bill instructs NEH to comply with EEOC guidelines and regulations. The House reauthorization bill for NEH, H.R. 3248, has a similar provision both in the bill and the report. I want to add to my remarks of Wednesday that NEH under my leadership will comply with all legal requirements under EEOC laws and regulations.

I believe this is responsive to your concern.

Warmest personal regards.

Sincerely,



Edward Curran

cc: Members of the Committee

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Previous Experience

Question 1: Do you think your limited previous experience will be a disadvantage or limitation to your work as Chairman of NEH.

Answer: I disagree with the statement that my previous experience has been limited. During the past several years I have occupied two senior administrative posts in the federal government. Prior to that I was for twenty-five years a teacher and administrator in schools at the secondary level. My academic credentials include a BA from Yale (1955) and an M.A.T. from Duke (1968). I think that, on the contrary, my working experience has been in many ways particularly broad and instructive. In nominating me to head an important agency of the federal government, I think that the President was quite aware of the relevance and worth of my prior experience, especially as it relates to managing a complex organizational enterprise.

I would suggest further that my experience in pre-collegiate education is highly pertinent to an issue that centrally affects the health of the humanities. Several major studies, including A Nation at Risk, have made it clear that there are serious deficiencies in the way we educate our youth. Primary and secondary education is basic. Advanced education and research critically depend upon the foundation that is established in the schools. Moreover, education at the primary and secondary levels is universal: at some point every American is affected by what is taught at the pre-collegiate level.

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Staffing

Question 2: What changes, if any, do you intend to make with the staff, particularly the senior staff. What commitment do you have to bringing in experts and humanities professionals into your decision-making processes.

Answer: During the hearing, I mentioned that I have had discussions with the division directors and several meetings with the Endowment's senior staff. I have been impressed with their expertise, enthusiasm, and concern for the humanities. At this time, I have no plans to make any major staffing changes.

As I have stated, I intend to meet with representatives from all areas of the humanities community to discuss their ideas and suggestions. I will also rely on the NEH peer review system for guidance in awarding grants. The advice of the National Council on the Humanities will be sought for major policy decisions.

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Mr. Uzzell

Question 3: Do you intend to hire Larry Uzzell in any capacity at NEH?

Answer: No.

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Relationship With Higher Education Community

Question 4: What relationship will you seek with the higher education community to pursue mutual goals of an effective national policy in the humanities?

Answer: I look forward to meeting with representatives of the higher education community and discussing their concerns in the humanities in the years ahead. As with past NEH chairmen, I expect to meet with many spokesmen from all areas of the humanities.

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Tenneco

Question 5: Your biographical material submitted for your present position lists consultant work for Tenneco which was not included in the material submitted to the Labor and Human Resources Committee.

What was your position with Tenneco?

Were you teaching there. What educational or economic development program, if any, were you involved in?

Answer: I apologize for the oversight of not mentioning this consultant work in my submission to the Committee.

I was a consultant to the Tennessee Gas Transmission Corporation (now Tenneco) in June and July of 1960 to assist the company in establishing schools in their overseas operations in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina.

In 1963, I spent one term teaching in and evaluating the Tennessee Gas Transmission Corporation school I helped to establish for the children of American and national employees in Ecuador and Argentina and for the children of American employees in Bolivia. I have had no further association with Tennessee Gas Transmission Corporation.

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Editing Program

Question 6: One letter which I received from the History of Science Society mentioned that, "during the past year NEH has cut off funding for several major ongoing editing projects, such as the papers of Calhoun and Frederick Douglass."

Can you explore for the Committee, whether there has been a change of policy at the Endowment regarding ongoing editing projects, or, whether these projects were not judged to be competitive?

Answer: I understand that there has been no "change of policy at the Endowment regarding ongoing editing projects..." In fact, staff informs me that the Calhoun project was funded.



Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Panelists

Question 7: What changes, if any, will you make in the composition of panel members? Do you think that the panelists have been of the highest quality and of a wide expertise, or, do you feel that you would tap new scholars and groups to serve?

Answer: I have been quite favorably impressed by the competence and seriousness of NEH panelists, and it is evident to me that the Endowment has traditionally cast a wide net in selecting scholars and others knowledgeable in the humanities to serve in this capacity.

The Endowment does not select panelists on the basis of sex, race, or ethnic characteristics. Instead, the Endowment's sole concern is that each panel be made up of persons who are highly qualified to review the specific set of applications that will come before it. Nevertheless, I understand that the composition of NEH panels fully reflects the broad cultural and geographic diversity of the United States and of the academic and professional groups from which they are drawn.

I think that the excellent reputation of the NEH panel review system is well deserved.

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Newer Areas of Scholarly Research

Question 8: What are your attitudes toward the newer areas of scholarly research?

Answer: I will judge each individual project on its merits, without regard to the field of the humanities involved.

I do believe, however, that the Endowment should emphasize the central disciplines of the humanities.

I'm not sure that concern for "newer areas of scholarly research" is warranted. I understand that funding ratios for new interdisciplinary areas such as Women's Studies and Black Studies are much higher than the overall Endowment average.

Senator Kennedy

Credentials - Role of NEH

Question 9: Do you see the role of the NEH as directive or responsive, that is, would you see the NEH taking a special initiative to encourage certain kinds of projects or as responding to the concerns of the scholarly community?

Answer: This question is not simply an "either/or" issue. NEH should be both "directive" and "responsive," although I would suggest using a word other than "directive." (Perhaps "dynamic" is more appropriate.)

I recognize (and firmly believe) that NEH must remain responsive to the concerns of the scholarly community.

I admire what Mr. Bennett and Mr. Agrestó have done at NEH -- setting a well-articulated sense of purpose for the agency and establishing goals and objectives for advancing the humanities nationwide. These activities have been both "directive" and "responsive."

I look forward to meeting with representatives of the scholarly community (as well as public humanities groups) to discuss any concerns or interests they may have about the programs and direction of NEH.

Senator Kennedy

EEOC

Mr. Curran: Your predecessor, Secretary Bennett, sent Clarence Thomas, Chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a letter on January 16, 1984 indicating that the National Endowment for the Humanities would no longer comply with EEOC regulations.

As you know, Congress has given EEOC full authority to issue these regulations for affirmative plans for equal opportunity.

Question 1: Do you agree with the point of view described by Mr. Bennett in this letter?

Answer: As I said yesterday, I support Mr. Bennett's position on this issue -- race, color, creed, nationality, and gender should not be pre-conditions of employment at NEH. I also support the resolution of the National Council on the Humanities: "The National ENDowment for the Humanities should neither favor nor slight anyone because of race, color, national origin, religion, or gender."

I understand that NEH has an exemplary record for hiring minorities and women when compared to the rest of the federal government. In fact, employment of these groups at NEH apparently is also in excess of their overall representation in the humanities community.

Question 2: Will you give the Committee your full assurance that you will comply with EEOC guidelines?

Answer: Yes.

Question 3: What timetable can you give the Committee for compliance with these regulations?

Answer: The next required submission for NEH will contain the required information.

Senator Kennedy

Agency - NEH Budget

Question 1: What do you believe to be a reasonable and effective budget for the NEH?

Answer: The budget for NEH should be sufficient to fund all the excellent applications submitted.

Endowment senior staff have told me that the request budget for the agency for fiscal 1986 will support all the projected excellent-rated applications in addition to many proposals rated "very good" and "good."

As Chairman, I will ensure that all excellent-rated projects continue to be funded, and the budgets I submit to OMB and Congress will reflect this commitment.

It is important to remember that support of the humanities is primarily the responsibility of the private sector-NEH apparently provides less than .6 percent of total national funding of the humanities.

Senator Kennedy

Agency - Chairman's Role in the Budget

Question 2: How active of a role do you feel the Chairman of the NEH should play concerning deliberations on its budget?

Answer: Since the chairman is responsible for administering the budget, the chairman must be active in all deliberations concerning it. It is the chairman, after due consultation with staff and the National Council on the Humanities, who determines the allocations of funds among th various programs and divisions that are necessary for carrying forward the policies of the agency. This is an important responsibility and one that must command the chairman's close attention.

Senator Kennedy

Agency - Personal Commitment to NEH

Question 3: What would you describe to be your personal commitments toward the NEH?

Answer: I am committed to making the Endowment the vigorous champion of excellence in the humanities that it has become under Mr. Bennett and Mr. Agresto. NEH is important because the humanities are important.

The humanities are a vehicle for citizens to engage in serious thinking and reflection about their culture. This is important individually and personally to the citizen, but it is also important collectively to the culture and to the society. The humanities provide a vital sense of its origin, development, and present condition of civilization.

NEH is important. As the enabling legislation makes clear: "the encouragement and support of national progress and scholarship in the humanities" is "an appropriate matter of concern to the federal government."

BUT the legislation also makes clear that NEH is to play a limited role, that the humanities are primarily a concern of private and local initiative.