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Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): News Article 05

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Curran Backed For NEH

White House to Submit Nomination

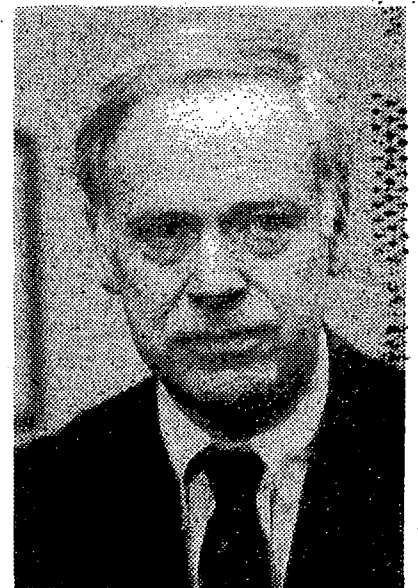
By Mary Battiata
Washington Post Staff Writer

The White House yesterday put an end to months of speculation and rumor by announcing its intention to nominate Peace Corps Deputy Director Edward A. Curran as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Curran, 51, had been considered the most controversial of the half-dozen names that circulated in recent months as possible successors to former chairman William Bennett, who left the endowment earlier this year to become secretary of education.

Curran made headlines three years ago as director of the National Institute of Education when he wrote to President Reagan suggesting the abolition of his own agency. Curran clashed with his boss, former secretary of education Terrel Bell, over the incident and resigned soon after. The letter, however, earned him praise from some con-

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EDWARD A. CURRAN

Twisted Mister Of the Big Top Circus Contortionist Rudolph Delmonte

By Michael Kernan
Washington Post Staff Writer

Let's see now. You do a back-bend, and when your hands are all the way down on the floor behind your heels, you slowly lift your legs up so you're standing on your hands. Then you bend your legs at the hip so they extend over your head like a roof. Now you bend your knees—you still with me?—and curl up until you can tuck your feet under your arms.

Then you start doing push-ups.

Rudolph Delmonte is a contortionist with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. He

is 23 years old, and the first thing he says is that he is not double-jointed.

Actually, that isn't the question. The question is whether he has any joints at all or is just made of muscle.

"I can't explain the moves," he said. He sketched on a table top with his finger. "My legs are here, my top is here, and my arms, like it makes a zigzag . . ."

He starts off his act with a one-handed handstand, simplicity itself, and then he balances on a 3-foot-long wand and does the handstand on that. Then he balances a small ladder on one of its legs and does the handstand

See CONTORTIONIST, D2, Col. 1

appeal a Park Service rejection of the disputed portion of the mural and to receive official certification for the tax credit.

Wynmark last month spent \$10,000 to paint over illusionary architectural effects designed by noted muralist Richard Haas on the front of the building. The Park Service threatened to withhold the tax credit if the artwork was not wiped out, on grounds that it changed the historic character of the building. After a work crew painted the front of the 10-story building a beige tone, the Park Service certified the tax credit.

Mark G. Griffin, one of Wynmark's owners, said he had never heard of the provision allowing for a 30-month period to win certification for the tax credit after it had been submitted to the Internal Revenue Service.

"If that were the case, I wish someone would have told us," he said.

Rogers acknowledged that "it's probably true we didn't give him that information. We usually think a

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horizontal bar, ties himself in a knot and balances there, supported by his teeth, while he whirls hoops on his arms.

The contortions are so bizarre that you tend to forget how strong he is. In fact they would be almost sickening to look at were it not for the excruciatingly slow grace with which he moves. It is a kind of ballet contained in one body.

"I did go to ballet school at 11," he said. "I did that for seven years and jazz dancing for eight years."

Five years ago he was runner-up for Mr. Teen-age America in weightlifting. It is not in the least surprising.

My mother taught me everything I know. She's from Holland, and she met my father here in the circus in 1948. He was a lion trainer, but they were divorced and my father took the act to another circus. So she worked with me."

Anna Delmonte, who was a contortionist and showgirl until 1956, sews in the wardrobe department when not coaching her son. It was she who made him the spangled cape that would have cost, as he says, \$4,000 if ordered from outside.

Brought up in Sarasota, Fla., the traditional winter home of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, the young Delmonte has been part of the circus as long as he can remember. As a kid he worked in the Circus Hall of Fame there, and he has always lived in its exotic world: the

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Curran

HUMANITIES, From D1

servative columnists and lobbying groups.

His stint at the Peace Corps has been stormy, according to friends and colleagues, who say that he often has been at odds with Peace Corps Director Loret M. Ruppe on agency policy.

News of Curran's nomination was greeted with reserve by a ranking Republican lawmaker on the Senate committee that must approve Curran's name before sending it on to the full Senate.

"I have not made up my mind on Mr. Curran and will examine his credentials when he comes before the committee," said Sen. Robert T. Stafford (R-Vt.), a member of the Labor and Human Resources Committee.

President Reagan reportedly had approved the Curran nomination at

least two months ago, but it had been stalled by administration moderates searching for a less controversial, more moderate choice. Leaders of the museum, university and scholarly groups that represent many of the recipients of endowment money had expressed fears that Curran lacked the experience and temperament required to preside over the endowment.

Stafford himself had put a hold on the nomination for a few weeks by notifying the White House that he had questions about Curran's philosophies, according to a Stafford spokesman.

Curran could not be reached for comment but released a statement saying he was "proud" that the president had chosen him and that he "looked forward to serving the President and the American people."

Lisa Phillips, executive director of the Humanities Alliance, a trade organization for many of the nation's universities, learned societies and museums, said the members of her

organization are interested in learning more about Curran's views.

"We hope for in-depth Senate hearings," Phillips said. "[Curran], of course, is different from previous NEH nominees in that he does not come from higher education and does not have a demonstrated knowledge of public programs that do not involve schools." Phillips described the nomination as "sensitive" because of the great discretion the endowment's chairman exercises over funding priorities.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is a federal agency with an impact and visibility far greater than its relatively small \$140 million budget, and the periodic search for its chairman usually produces political fireworks.

The endowment awards thousands of grants and fellowships to scholars, museums and universities for research and preservation. The chairmanship has often served as a pulpit for administrations' views on the role of the liberal arts in American life.

Bennett, for example, used the

endowment to call for a return to the study of the classics of western history, literature and philosophy. He is described by friends and critics alike as having steered the endowment away from the cultural pluralism that marked the Carter years.

The Massachusetts-born Curran was headmaster of the National Cathedral School from 1968 to 1980. He subsequently served on President Reagan's Education Transition Team and put in one year as associate director of the Office of Presidential Personnel. In 1980 he headed a political group called Professionals for Reagan, and is, according to friends, a close friend of Vice President George Bush.

Curran graduated with a bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1955 and earned a masters' degree from Duke University in 1968. He was dean of students at a Houston private school from 1957 to 1968, and taught at a private boys' school in Englewood, N.J., for two years before that.