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## Berman, Ronald: News Articles (1976): News Article 13

Patrick Buchanan

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## Patrick Buchanan

# A scholar who won't give in



WASHINGTON—In the world's wealthiest republic, with its Nelson Rockefellers and vastly endowed Ivy League schools, should the middle class be dunned to subsidize a National Endowment for the Humanities? Probably not.

But such an endowment has existed for 10 years. And the most persuasive arguments for its continuance are the results produced, and the standards by which it has operated. For the last half decade, the Endowment has been chaired by Dr. Ronald Berman, a tough-minded Shakespearean scholar, who has attracted into the Endowment's ambience thinkers of the candle power of Irving Kristol and Sidney Hook.

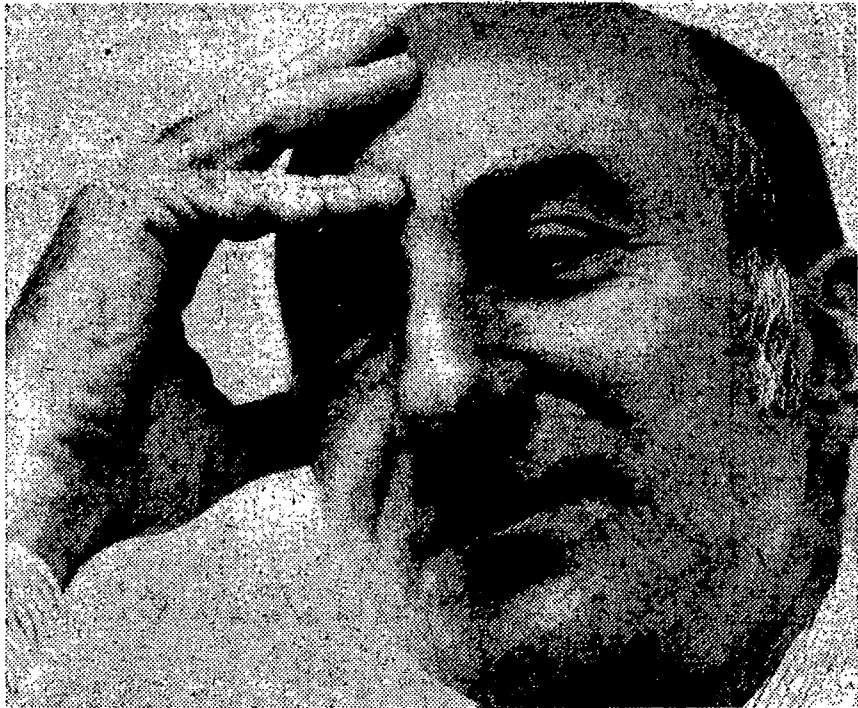
At Berman's direction, the Endowment moved to save the New York Public Library, to sponsor public television's "The Adams Chronicles," to bring to public view the Scythian Gold and Chinese art exhibits.

NOT EVERY Berman grant has fallen upon good ground. One, for example, for almost a quarter million dollars went to the American Library Association, which produced a bicentennial reading list on U. S. business, politics, and history that might have been drawn up by one of the zanier minions of Jeremy Rifkin.

But such has been the exception, because it is Dr. Berman's rule that grants will be made to scholars, projects, schools, and communities upon the basis of merit, not political clout.

Dr. Berman's record has won him the plaudits of the academic community, the endorsement of 20 to 21 members of his board, and renomination by President Ford. On the Senate Education and Labor Committee, before which he is to appear for confirmation, he is without opposition—excepting that of Claiborne Pell [D., R. I.], the father of NEH.

Pell's opposition to Dr. Berman seems partially a clash of personality. But more important, Dr. Berman crossed the subcommittee chairman by resisting, on principle, Pell's effort to have 20 per cent of the Endowment budget turned over to the states in block grants. In Berman's reasoned judgment, this would mean turning



Berman: Not a hack, but a man of principle.

the Humanities' money into simply another variety of federal pork.

Ruminating about his idea, Pell, in an unguarded moment, suggested making grants for historical research to lumberjacks and "mom and pop" subsidies to study the Great Books. The rolling wave of laughter through academia that followed the senator's recommendation seems to have steeled his determination to take it out on Dr. Berman—by denying him a hearing for confirmation.

This nonsense has continued for six months. The "senatorial courtesy" being extended to Pell by Democrats and Republicans alike is rapidly degenerating into something else again: A crass abuse of congressional power.

BERMAN IS not some political hack hired for a federal post to bring over a few delegates to a contested primary state. He is a scholar of national repute, a bureaucrat with the guts to defend the integrity of his agency at the risk of his job. Had he been a fellow of less kidney, he could have

knuckled under to Pell's demands, been given his hearing and Senate approval without dissent.

Instead, he chose to stand on principle. The very least he deserves is the right to defend his ideas about the endowment, his record, and himself in a public hearing, for the suspicion is building that Pell is now holding off the hearings so that a new administration can kill it, and turn the endowment into a \$100 million pork barrel to be opened and ladled out to academics politically sympathetic to the Democratic Party.

If Pell has any close friends on the Hill, they ought to take him aside and let him know what a petty and vindictive man he now appears. As for the Republicans, they—and the President—should observe closely the fate of Berman. If his nomination is killed in this deceptive fashion, it is a harbinger of things to come for the endowment, and they ought to start thinking seriously of folding it up.