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Ellen Messer-Davidow

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July 10, 1991

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
U.S. Senate, 335 SROB
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell,

I am writing to ask you to oppose the appointment of Carol Iannone to the national council of the NEH.

After reading opinions in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that Dr. Iannone is a "distinguished" humanities teacher and scholar, I was shocked by her *curriculum vitae* and publications. On the basis of her credentials and the quality of her thought and writing, she cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered distinguished. If, with these same credentials, Dr. Iannone were reviewed by my department, which is typical of English departments in good public research universities, not only would she be unable to win tenure and promotion to associate professor, but she would compare unfavorably with new Ph.D.'s seeking employment as assistant professors. The last six assistant professors hired already had substantial scholarly publications, including articles in journals, edited books, and book manuscripts in hand.

The NEH enabling legislation requires appointees to the council to have distinguished records in their fields. Dr. Iannone lacks even a moderately accomplished one. Although some previous appointees also may have lacked distinction, that fact should not be permitted to become a precedent.

Finally, the professional associations have not spoken to one widespread concern that I wish to address. Chairman Cheney, some current members of the council, and Dr. Iannone are on record as excoriating certain new kinds of humanities scholarship. As private individuals, they are entitled to their opinion; as public trustees, they are not entitled to let this private opinion (an opinion not shared by numerous humanities teachers and scholars) guide the dispersal of federal funds intended to support a full range of humanities scholarship. This appointment, I fear, will only support the flow of NEH funding toward certain kinds of scholarship and away from other kinds.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Ellen Messer-Davidow
McKnight-Land Grant
Associate Professor