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Iannone, Carol: National Council on the Humanities Nomination (1991): Correspondence 10

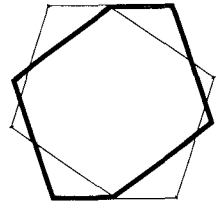
Gertrude Himmelfarb

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April 6, 1991

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
Chairman, Education Committee
United States Senate
335 Russell Senate Building
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Pell,

Since Dr. Phyllis Franklin, Executive Director of the Modern Language Association, in her letter of March 4, 1991, to the Chairman of the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, spoke so generously of my former service on the council of the National Endowment for the Humanities, it may be fitting for me to comment on the nomination of Dr. Carol Iannone to the council.

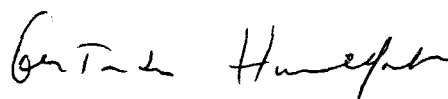
If I am at all deserving of Dr. Franklin's praise of my "profound understanding of the academic enterprise and the wisdom and experience needed to carry out a council member's responsibilities," I should like to invoke that understanding, experience, and (it is flattering to think) wisdom in support of the nomination of Dr. Iannone. She would bring to the council precisely what is now most urgently needed: the ability to bridge the gap between the academy and the literate public. With the rise in recent years of highly specialized, almost arcane modes of academic discourse in the humanities, that gap has approached the dimensions of a chasm. This is now having the most unfortunate effect, not only on the academy itself, which is threatening to become an ivory tower in the most undesirable sense of that term, but also on the culture at large, which is being deprived of the knowledge and insight that have traditionally been provided by academic scholars.

Dr. Iannone has a special talent for communicating serious, scholarly ideas in a manner that makes them intelligible to a large audience. She does this both in her teaching and in her writing. The function of the Gallatin Division of New York University, where she now serves as the director of freshman studies, is to make available to undergraduates a liberal arts program that incorporates the best of the humanities. And the publications to which Dr. Iannone has contributed so many distinguished essays are among the most serious and respected journals directed to a cultivated public.

It is especially appropriate for the National Endowment for the Humanities to seek the advice and counsel of scholars such as Dr. Iannone, since it is an important part of its mandate to make the humanities accessible to the public. And as the chairman of the Education Committee of the Senate, you must welcome the opportunity to approve a nominee who would serve that function so admirably.

In her letter Dr. Franklin was kind enough to say that I had "contributed in important ways to the NEH council." I can think of no more important contribution I can now make than to endorse strongly Dr. Iannone's nomination to the council.

Sincerely,



Gertrude Himmelfarb
Professor Emeritus of History