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## Curran, Edward: Confirmation Hearing (1985): Speech 04

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1 sincere hope that this Committee and the White House will seek  
2 further before selecting a new leader for this extraordinarily  
3 important program.

4 Thank you, sir.

5 The Chairman. Thank you.

6 Senator Pell, do you have any questions?

7 Senator Pell. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would add,  
8 as I am sure you would, that <sup>this</sup> is not <sup>a</sup> reflection on Mr. Curran.

9 It is a reflection on the White House and the <sup>fact that</sup> ~~person~~ they have  
10 <sup>The wrong person</sup> tapped <sup>^</sup> for this particular job.

11 In that regard, I was struck with Professor Ziolkowski's  
12 analysis of who should be the chairman. Could you even more  
13 refine your definition of the qualities that a chairman of  
14 the National Endowment for the Humanities should have?

15 Mr. Ziolkowski. Well, I have thought about this very  
16 carefully and mentioned five characteristics, and I am sure  
17 that I could probably on reflection think of others. But  
18 really the ones that I mentioned, representation through one's  
19 own work, sense of quality gained through experience in the  
20 field, a belief in the procedures--that is, in the peer review  
21 process as well as absolute equanimity and fair-mindedness  
22 vis-a-vis developments, because the humanities are fascinating.

23 Let me pause at this point for one remark. The question  
24 has come up several times today, are the humanities in the  
25 state of crisis? On the one hand, yes, they are; on the other

1 hand, they have been in the state of crisis at least since  
2 Socrates complained about the production of books and how it  
3 was going to destroy memory. There is always a crisis in the  
4 humanities, and for that reason the humanities represent the  
5 fascinating subject that they represent. If there were not a  
6 crisis, many of us, I think my more interesting colleagues  
7 would not be there. It is a constant crisis, and the problem  
8 is not to satisfy a tidy section of western literature or  
9 western culture and say this is what we are going to nurture  
10 and care for, but rather to be able constantly to adjust to  
11 the continuing crisis that represents the humanities. So  
12 that is an expansion of that point.

13 Then the other two points that I mentioned simply were  
14 the necessity to have a spokesperson with vision. And,  
15 finally, the commitment--and I believe in this because this  
16 is why we have the NEH--the commitment to the Federal role in  
17 the support of the humanities, not so much simply because the  
18 NEH is a channel to get needed funds to scholars. That is  
19 very, very important. But even more important, the fact that  
20 the NEH represents the visible symbol of this nation's commit-  
21 ment to the values represented by the humanities. We have  
22 symbols like NSF and NIH and NASA and others that represent  
23 our commitment to the sciences and engineering and technology.  
24 We need a powerful shining symbol of our commitment to the  
25 humanities.

1 Senator Pell. That was four points. You said there were  
2 five.

3 Mr. Ziolkowski. Well, five, the fifth was this commit-  
4 ment to the Federal role represented by the NEH.

5 Senator Pell. Forgive me. You had the past work, peer  
6 review--

7 Mr. Ziolkowski. Well, past work, but also a sense--that  
8 is, one's own past work, but also a sense of quality that you  
9 get through the work. In other words, it is important for the  
10 director not always to have to rely on the peer review panels  
11 themselves, but on the basis of his or her own sense of quality.

12 Senator Pell. All I am driving at is what are the five  
13 points, briefly? One is past work; two, belief in peer review;  
14 three is to have a spokesperson with vision; four is to have  
15 a commitment to the Federal role. What was the fifth?

16 Mr. Ziolkowski. The fifth was actually in your list after  
17 the first one; that is, I make a distinction between past  
18 work, which is a demonstration of one's achievements, but  
19 then, secondly, a sense of quality that you achieve through the  
20 past work. So I make those as separate points.

21 Senator Pell. Okay. ~~And~~ I guess that means ~~that~~ essen-  
22 tially being well-known. In this regard, Mr. Chairman, I  
23 would like to ask unanimous consent to insert in the record  
24 the Who's Who Biographies of the four previous chairmen of  
25 the Endowment for the Humanities. I would like to be able to

1 submit Mr. Curran's, but he's not, of course, in Who's Who,  
2 which is one of the points we are discussing.

3 The Chairman. Without objection, so ordered.

4 Senator Pell. I would also like to have accepted  
5 two articles, one by Professor Walter Capps on "Why  
6 Humanities Community is Uneasy Over Proposed Chairman",  
7 which appeared in the Los Angeles Times; and the other,  
8 an article in The Chronicle of Higher Education,  
9 concerning the departure of Mr. Curran from NIE.

10 The Chairman. Without objection.

11 Senator Pell. Thank you very much.

12 [Documents follow:].

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1           Senator Pell. Dr. Schaeffer, what would be your  
2 thoughts with regard to the qualities that a Chairman  
3 should have; would they be the same, or are there any  
4 variations?

5           Dr. Schaeffer. I think that Ted's list is a very,  
6 very good one. I think that perhaps I would like to  
7 add to it an ability to be able to work effectively  
8 with what is now a fairly large staff, as well as a  
9 council.

10           It is an administrative position, in addition to  
11 the leadership that Professor Ziolkowski has described,  
12 and I think one of the things that both Ron and Joe  
13 did--I did not have an opportunity to work with Bill  
14 Bennett--was to bring together not only a staff, but  
15 a sense of coherence to the councils, as they would  
16 come together, and there was a confidence that evolved  
17 there.

18           I am not saying that the nominees under consideration  
19 lack those abilities, but I think I would add those  
20 as being extremely important, because if you have  
21 internal conflicts in the Foundation, they come out  
22 visibly, and they can be indeed counterproductive very  
23 rapidly. The profession is a small one in that regard.

24           Senator Pell. Thank you.

25           What, Dr. Schaeffer, do you think would be the

1 main priorities of NEH over the next four-year cycle?

2 Dr. Schaeffer. I think we have all read Bill Bennett's  
3 report with interest. It is really not so much a report  
4 as paper of all of the many documents that we have been  
5 reading lately about the problems in undergraduate education.  
6 I think this is one of the few to whom clear authorship  
7 has been ascribed.

8 It is my feeling, however, that this report, as  
9 well as all of the others that we have been looking  
10 at, are far more in the way of mirrors than lamps; they  
11 are reflective of a situation that the various institutions  
12 in this country have been aware of for at least the  
13 last five, if not the last ten, years. They are reflecting  
14 changes that are already occurring, even as the reports  
15 come out to call for change.

16 I believe that we are at a point in American higher  
17 education where we are entering a major revitalization  
18 of the quality of undergraduate education and the role  
19 of the humanities within the general education of such  
20 students, and I am confident that somewhere in the early  
21 to mid-years of the next decade, 1992 to 1995, there  
22 is going to be an immense need for highly-trained and  
23 highly-skilled humanists to take over teaching roles  
24 that will be filled by the mass hirings that went on  
25 in the 1960s. I think it is extremely important for

1 the National Endowment and the Chairman of the National  
2 Endowment to be sensitive to these changes that are going  
3 on in the last years of the current decade in preparation  
4 for the 1990s. There are juniors and seniors in college  
5 today who are going to be the professors of the humanities  
6 disciplines by the end of the Nineties, and we have  
7 got to be extremely careful that we are identifying  
8 and nurturing and furthering the interests of those  
9 students. I give it a very, very high priority from  
10 an educational perspective.

11 Senator Pell. And Mr. Ziolkowski, what would be  
12 your thoughts as to the priorities of the next four  
13 years?

14 Mr. Ziolkowski. I would like to refine just a  
15 little bit further one of the points that  
16 Professor Schaeffer mentioned. There has been an  
17 outpouring recently of documents about the humanities,  
18 about the decline in the humanities, the needs of humanities,  
19 this and this, by Ernie Boyer, by Mr. Bennett, and by  
20 a number of others.

21 I think it is extremely necessary to have an agency  
22 that can assess those, because a lot of the information---  
23 some of the facts, for instance, that Senator Hatch  
24 mentioned earlier this morning--really need to be put  
25 in context. The fact that one loses majors in a given



1 subject, for instance, is not the only fact. The fact  
2 that enrollments are growing in some of those same subjects  
3 that are losing majors is, from the teachers' point  
4 of view, equally important, because there are a lot  
5 of courses to be filled.

6 There needs to be an assessment of this information,  
7 an objective assessment, that can take the reports that  
8 have come out, put them into a useful context, and develop  
9 some sort of a national policy, because it is a great  
10 national policy that transcends anything any individual  
11 university can do to predict what is going to be the  
12 needs in the coming decades.

13 There are going to be needs, we know, from retirement  
14 facts, that a number of teachers will be retiring in  
15 the Nineties, and we are going to need people in those  
16 jobs. The NEH could do a research role and fulfill  
17 a research commitment there.

18 However, I think above all, to turn away from the  
19 practical needs, the most important job that the NEH  
20 itself can do is to represent the central, continuing  
21 importance of the humanities steadily, as for instance,  
22 the interest in technology, computer science, and  
23 molecular biology fields--subjects with a great deal  
24 of appeal--come and distract students and the public  
25 attention from year to year or from decade to decade,

1 even. The humanities need to be constantly supported,  
2 morally supported, intellectually and ideologically  
3 supported, and it is that kind of support, that continuing  
4 support, that is much more important, I think, than  
5 new directions or the practical goals. The NEH is the  
6 agency, and the Director of the NEH is the person who  
7 really ought to represent that continued, steady belief  
8 in the humanities, the old as well as the developing  
9 humanities.

10 Senator Pell. I appreciate what you say very much  
11 indeed, and I appreciate also the tenderness of your  
12 position, and the fact that it would be much more agreeable  
13 to be testifying for the confirmation of somebody to  
14 a job, rather than opposing it.

15 I appreciate very much the stature of your positions  
16 and your role in the academic community, *as well as* ~~and I appreciate~~  
17 the tremendous time change and personal inconvenience  
18 that Professor Schaeffer went through to get here  
19 from California. I really commend you both on your  
20 testimony which is, I think, of the highest order and  
21 of the kind that should be part of the Endowment  
22 for the Humanities.

23 I would also commend you both on your gumption  
24 and guts, your courage, in taking a position, because  
25 as I said a little bit earlier, my own experience has

1 been that institutions of higher learning do not have  
2 much courage when it comes to taking a position that  
3 opposes their source of funds--somewhat like the clergymen  
4 at the time of the Vietnam War, who were very hesitant  
5 about telling their congregation their personal views *on the war*.

6 ~~And~~ I commend and congratulate both of you on your  
7 courage in coming, and I assure you I will do my best  
8 to see that there is no retribution, and we trust in  
9 the fairness of Mr. Curran, if he is confirmed ~~I think~~  
10 ~~he is basically, personally, a fair man--~~ that there  
11 will be no retribution. *I think he is basically, personally a fair*

12 I appreciate very much your coming, ~~and~~ the quality  
13 of your testimony, and the quality of your personal  
14 being.

15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 The Chairman. Thank you, Senator Pell.

17 I also appreciate you coming and giving the Committee  
18 the benefit of your thinking in these very important  
19 areas.

20 I take it, however, that you are expressing your  
21 deep-felt concerns about this nominee. I do not think  
22 either of you will say that you absolutely know that  
23 he cannot do a good job at the NEH; is that right? You  
24 are not saying that he absolutely cannot do a good job  
25 at the NEH; you are just expressing your concerns about  
that.

1 Mr. Ziolkowski. I think mine goes a bit further  
2 than concern, and I think I heard more than concern  
3 from my colleague, Bill Schaeffer.

4 I can give you an unequivocal answer. I met Mr.  
5 Curran this morning for the first time personally. We  
6 chatted outside and discovered that we have a great  
7 deal in common in our backgrounds. He went to Yale  
8 and then went to graduate school at Duke. I went to  
9 Duke and went to graduate school at Yale. So, we have  
10 a lot in common.

11 I listened to his testimony and came to appreciate  
12 why he may be here today, because I think that he must  
13 be a marvelous headmaster, and I think I would not have  
14 hesitated--and it would have been a privilege--to send  
15 one of my three children--all three of whom, by the  
16 way, have their Ph.D.s--to his school.

17 However, if you are asking me about this man and  
18 this job, I have listened to him very carefully this  
19 morning. The MLA in the letter that it sent out, did  
20 not take a position; we simply said, "These are the  
21 qualifications, and we need to know more about Mr. Curran."

22 Well, I know a little bit more. I am a scholar.  
23 I am very hesitant. I would prefer to read books and  
24 articles by him before I make up my mind. The position  
25 that I have is based on four hours of listening this

1 morning.

2           However, I must say, on the basis of what I have  
3 heard, to give you an unequivocal answer, no, I do not  
4 think that this is the right man for the job.

5           The Chairman. Well, we appreciate your opinions  
6 on it. I am not sure that you have to be in "Who's  
7 Who in America" to serve in this position. I am absolutely  
8 positive you do not have to be a Ph.D. I have met more  
9 knucklehead Ph.D.s in my day than many people, perhaps,  
10 and you have met some who do not deserve that title--.

11           Mr. Ziolkowski. Absolutely.

12           The Chairman. ---and you know that it is commonly  
13 given today where, when you and I went to school, it  
14 was a very difficult thing to get. So I admire you  
15 having one.

16           But let me just say something to you. There are  
17 a number of people who hold Ph.D.s that I am sure neither  
18 you nor I would like to see in this position.

19           So I do not think that is the criterion. I think  
20 it is important, but I do not think it is determinative.

21           I think you have outlined some fairly good qualifications,  
22 and I commend you for that--and you likewise, Dr. Schaeffer.  
23 I think both of you come here sincerely, with vast experience,  
24 I think, with a great deal of personal commitment to  
25 the field.