

WASHINGTON HOTLINE



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The opposition of ALA in 1975 to Daniel Boorstin's nomination as Librarian of Congress was recalled by several Senators in the context of ALA's current opposition to the nomination of John Agresto as U.S. Archivist. Senate Governmental Affairs committee members attending a hearing on the Agresto nomination cited Boorstin's excellent performance as an example of how organizations like ALA can make mistakes. The history lesson tended to discredit the stand of ALA and 12 other archival, historical, and genealogical organizations on the Archivist position.

However, the opposition of the 13 organizations centered on the qualifications for the position specified in the 1984 law establishing an independent National Archives and Records Administration, and the potential for politicization of the Archives under an appointee with close ties to a particular Administration.

The legislation which separated the National Archives from the General Services Administration specifically stated that the Archivist "shall be appointed without regard to political affiliations and solely on the basis of the professional qualifications required to perform the duties and responsibilities of the office of Archivist." Legislative history on the law states Congress' intent that the Archivist "be an officer performing professional archival and records management functions insulated from the political orientation of a particular administration," and that the role of Archivist be "non-partisan" and that "the office ought not to change hands automatically with the election of a new President."

A former political science professor and protege of Secretary of Education William Bennett, John Agresto was most recently Acting Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. At the August 13 hearing, Agresto brushed off the organizations' objections as a "turf fight." Senators questioned him about his ties to the Administration, and his position on access to Nixon Administration records. The National Archives has issued regulations in conformance with the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act. The Office of Management and Budget has conditioned their use on compliance with a Justice Department legal opinion which, in conflict with the regulations, says that former President Nixon's claims of executive privilege must be honored. Agresto said he would abide by the regulations as written.

Agresto also said he had the required background to "interpret" the documents in the Archives, and would try to raise public awareness of the institution. The lengthy question and answer session left no time for several archival and civil rights organizations which had asked to testify in

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opposition. The Committee will hold a second session on the nomination in September.

Senators Paul Simon (D-IL), who introduced Agresto, Ted Stevens (R-AK), David Durenberger (R-MN), Thomas Eagleton (D-MO), and Carl Levin (D-MI) all mentioned ALA's opposition to Daniel Boorstin. ALA's position on the LC nomination was read into the hearing record, as well as the names of the other 12 organizations which have taken positions against the Archivist nomination. They are the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, the American Association for State and Local History, the National Council on Public History, the Society for History in the Federal Government, the American Studies Association, the Midwest Archives Conference, the Federation of Genealogical Societies, the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, and the American Military Institute.

ALA's position originated in a membership resolution at the recent Annual Conference in New York City, and was then passed by the ALA Council (CD #56) on July 2.



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