2016

Berman, Ronald: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1975-1976): Report 02

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I. PROVISIONS ON VOLUNTEER HUMANITIES COMMITTEES AND STATE AGENCIES

The House bill is realistic and thoughtful

1. The House's provisions reflect the overwhelming preponderence of opinion, including that of:

---major leaders of the scholarly community (presidents of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, American Council of Learned Societies, American Association for State and Local History, etc.)

---leaders and members of local and community organizations which sponsor programs for the public

---all current and former members of the National Council on the Humanities

---both previous chairmen of the Endowment (Barnaby Keeney, Wallace Edgerton)

---all current and former members of the volunteer state-based committees

---and all governors who have spoken on the matter.

2. The House bill takes into account the long history of this issue:

---Congress and the Endowment discussed whether local humanities activities should be administered by state governments as early as 1964, when the agency was created, and again in connection with reauthorization in 1967, 1970, and 1973.

---every review, both in the Endowment and in the Congress, has noted that the humanities are different in nature from the arts and are used by the public in a different way.

---over the past decade, almost 70 distinguished citizens from both political parties have been appointed to the National Council on the Humanities by three different presidents. All have concluded that the state agency structure is not appropriate for local support of the humanities.

3. The House bill already reflects a sensible and workable compromise:

---it spells out the requirements for accountability by volunteer committees

---it strengthens the entire process of state and Congressional scrutiny

---it allows for a choice between voluntary and governmental structures

---it does not force abandonment of the experience, initiative and flexibility of volunteer committees.
4. The House bill preserves those elements of the current structure which have proven to be effective:

---it keeps the program voluntary and apolitical.

---it encourages ordinary citizens to become active participants in shaping a program that spends their tax dollars, instead of having a bureaucracy do it for them.

---it recognizes the dedication and hard work of over 850 volunteer committee members around the country who are developing over 3,000 local projects each year.

---it acknowledges the success this volunteer effort has had, in reaching 20 million adult Americans and in generating $18 to $20 million in additional private or local funds this year.

The Senate bill has major shortcomings

1. It confuses the humanities with the arts:

---the preferred Senate approach is to have the program administered by a combined arts and humanities state agency. This ignores the long history of this question, and it blurs the distinction deliberately established by Congress when it decided to set up two separate endowments with distinct missions.

---both the Endowment and state agencies have already tried the approach proposed by the Senate. State-based humanities support, initially administered by official arts and humanities agencies in several states, was shifted to volunteer committees at the request of the state agencies, who found the programs inoperable by this method.

2. The Senate bill makes it wholly impossible to continue the existence of volunteer committees:

---in order to continue a volunteer committee, the state government would have to formally designate that a non-state structure would be the official state mechanism for support! Such action is unprecedented, legally tenuous, and highly unlikely to occur.

3. The Senate approach would increase the complexity and cost of the program:

---it would create another layer of bureaucracy and would require the states to develop sophisticated new administrative procedures.

---the staffing costs would be much higher. Most state arts agencies spend at least $100,000 for staff salaries alone. No volunteer humanities committee spends more than $30,000 in federal funds for this purpose.

4. The Senate approach would waste talent and momentum:

---it would discard the good work of current volunteer committees and
their network of programs in order to start all over again from scratch.

---in the interim, a large segment of the public would lose access to humanities programs, and interest and involvement would decline.

(It should be noted that the Administration prefers there be no new language at all with reference to NEH state programs).
2. CHALLENGE GRANTS

Both the House bill and Senate bill contain provision for a new "Challenge Grant" authority; but these bills as they pertain to the Humanities Endowment have quite different purposes and, moreover, would have quite different effects on humanistic institutions.

The House bill (Title III, Section 301) provides equal and similar authority to the chairmen of the two endowments, setting forth a very clear purpose: to help stimulate private monies and thereby expand the base of support for hard pressed arts and humanities institutions. Through its challenge grants, the Humanities Endowment would be able to aid the important, fundamental operations of libraries, museums, historical societies, educational institutions, and other cultural organizations--institutions which have been particularly hurt by inflation and fixed incomes--to raise private funds and to strengthen the relationship between the institutions and their communities.

Along with recognizing the financial needs of humanities institutions, the House provisions also reflect the successful experience with challenge grants which the Endowment has accumulated during the past four years. (It should be remembered that the Humanities Endowment, in co-operation with the New York Public Library, pioneered the "Challenge Grant" concept, which was subsequently adopted by the Arts Endowment and the New York Metropolitan Opera). The House bill thus would give impetus to the NEH to move beyond a restricted "project grant" approach to the humanities and encourage a more flexible policy directed at using Federal funds to generate non-Federal support for basic administrative and management improvements, long-range planning, and preservation and conservation of institutional resources. (For information about the background of NEH "challenge grant", see the attached paper prepared earlier for the House authorizing committee.)

The Senate bill (Title V-A), while investing the Arts Endowment with the same kind of broad authority for "general operating support" provided in the House bill, excludes such authority for the Humanities Endowment and, thereby, deprives humanities institutions of the kind of increased private support which challenge grants were designed to stimulate. It is unfortunate that the Senate bill thus acknowledges the financial difficulties of arts organizations, while ignoring the equal difficulties of the many thousands of humanities institutions--a far greater number than exist in the arts, incidentally: for the Senate bill may be interpreted by the public to mean that the latter have no need for increased private support. Yet the evidence is overwhelming about the great (and for many, the desperate) need of libraries, local historical societies and other humanistic organizations to keep
their doors open, their materials in usable form, and their programs accessible to scholars, students, and the general public.

Instead of establishing for the humanities the same kind of highly useful Challenge Grant authority as it has for the arts—and as is provided in the House bill—the Senate bill instead calls on NEH to offer challenge grants in support of special projects relating to a continuing commemoration of the Bicentennial. For the reasons presented in section 4 of this package, however, challenge grants would not be an effective instrument to promote this kind of work, and therefore would not advance the humanities.

The House provision for challenge grants is to be most strongly urged. We believe that equal opportunity for both arts and humanities institutions under this section may be potentially of greater significance than parity in outright funding over the next year (see below, section 3).

(It should be noted that the Administration has not expressed support for the Challenge Grant provisions in any form).
3. AUTHORIZED APPROPRIATION LEVELS

The House and Senate bills differ significantly in the appropriation levels stipulated for FY 1977 and FY 1978 while both bills are open ended for the remaining two years, FY 1979 and FY 1980.

The House provisions correspond more closely to the levels proposed in the Administration's bill, both in terms of their amounts and in respect to the long established principle of equal funding for the Arts and the Humanities Endowments. Thus the House bill preserves the essential rationale for the Foundation, as well as it provides for an adequate level of growth such that the Endowment can continue to meet at least some of the expansive array of needs that exist in the humanities.

Disparity in funding

The original NEA Act calls for the Federal government to support "national progress and scholarship in the humanities and the arts." Priority is given to neither set of activities, and the House bill reaffirms this basic tenet while the net effect of the Senate bill is to denigrate the humanities. It does this in four ways:

(1) The general program funds authorized to each agency are different. In both fiscal years, 1977 and 1978, the Arts Endowment is allocated $10.0 million more than the Humanities Endowment, implying that needs are greater in the arts than in the humanities.

(2) The Senate level for general NEH appropriations for FY 1978 is not only set below the Arts Endowment but also less than the sums authorized for FY 1976 and proposed in the Administration's reauthorization bill for FY 1977.

(3) New categorical programs are established in the Arts Endowment which lead to an additional $15.0 million disparity for the next two fiscal years--again, suggesting the arts have greater and more specific needs.

(4) An open challenge grant authority (of $15 million) is provided for the arts, while a narrowly defined, categorical, and possibly inoperable challenge authority (also of $15 million) is provided for the humanities.

Parity is essential to the Federal role. Federal appropriations provide seed monies to "complement, assist, and add to programs for the advancement of the humanities and the arts." The House bill recognizes
that in both areas the needs are great and that the agencies are the sole Federal source of support for cultural projects. It does not try to answer the questions: Are the needs greater in the Arts? Is the Public better served by providing more monies for dance than for libraries? More for theatre groups than historical associations? More for public entertainment than for public discussion?

Parity is also an essential part of the life of the Foundation in terms of its history and administration. Each successive President has recommended identical funding for the two endowments. The legislative authorizing committees have shared this view and in most years so have the appropriating committees. Parity also has practical advantages in that each Endowment can contribute equally to, and be equally served by, a shared administrative staff which offers valuable operating efficiencies.

**Appropriation levels**

The House bill ensures that the Foundation and each agency will be given an opportunity to serve more adequately the needs before it. Within the humanities we have witnessed a dramatic rise in the demand for humanistic programming. NEH received 6,824 formal applications requesting more than $302 million (and this excludes the several thousand applications NEH's State-Based Program received and the many thousands of applications now channelled to organizations which have proved their ability to serve as highly efficient administrative agents of the Endowment by regranting NEH funds for small scale projects).

There is ample documentation justifying the funding levels proposed in the Administration's and the House bills for the general NEH programs. The needs of the nation's humanities institutions are clearly in excess of even those levels. The nation has responded to the Bicentennial with a re-kindled interest in American history and culture and this will not dissipate at the end of a year, nor should it be allowed to wane. Yet, the institutions that house the humanities—libraries, museums, historical organizations, archives, colleges and universities—are encountering grave difficulties simply meeting the rising physical plant and labor costs with their more or less fixed incomes. The absence of NEH funds will invariably lead to many institutions and consequently many communities foregoing desired humanistic programs.

Based on both demonstrated need and the important principal of equal Federal funding for the Arts and the Humanities, the provisions of the House bill fixing appropriation limits is strongly recommended.
Clearly the figures proposed by the Administration are to be preferred to the lesser authorization of the Senate: parity between the Endowments (while both can provide only seed money), and maintenance of the previously authorized level, is of symbolic importance.

The question of additional categorical programs in Arts and Humanities is further addressed below in section 4. The question of challenge grants has been addressed above in section 2.

(It should be noted that the Administration has sought funding at the same level for all four years of the authorization).
Title V-A of the Senate bill establishes a Bicentennial Challenge Grant program for the Humanities Endowment. While there are no specific activities described in the section and no criteria for grant awards stipulated, the purposes expressed in the bill relate broadly to some of the kinds of projects which have been given a special priority by NEH during the past few years—that is, study of the American experience.

A substantial part of NEH supported work since its creation has, of course, been research and formal and informal education concerning American history, the development of our institutions, and the philosophical and ethical questions underlying contemporary problems. In recognition of the special interest occasioned by the present "Bicentennial Period", Endowment support for projects dealing with these subjects has increased. A focal point for many projects has been the American Issues Forum. The Forum, developed under NEH auspices, and with the strong endorsement of John D. Rockefeller, 3rd and other national leaders concerned about the Bicentennial, has involved thousands of civic, religious, business and labor organizations at the local, state and national levels and involved millions of Americans in an examination of the American past, present and future. Preliminary results from the AIF projects indicate the Endowment has reached down to the grass-roots levels of cities and small towns across the nation.

If funding were available, the Endowment should attempt to exploit the linkages established through AIF and the increased interest generated in humanistic study of American society. However, the NEH experience with AIF and other of its Bicentennial projects clearly demonstrates that these can not be conducted through the challenge grant mechanisms.

It was precisely the kinds of projects suggested in the Senate bill that conspicuously failed to generate private gift monies. Numerous matching offers were made by NEH in connection with the American Issues Forum projects; but while there was one major gift ($1 million) to help disseminate the Forum calendar, very little in the way of gift monies could be raised to support the production of media programs, the preparation or dissemination of study materials, or the conducting of community discussion programs. Some of the most significant national activities eventually did get underway through the conversion of the matching offers to outright NEH grants. (And it should be noted that
only a 1-to-1 match was proposed; a 1-to-1 match, as required by the Senate bill, would obviously have meant even fewer projects funded through gift money.

The Endowment would be responsive to an opportunity for continuing the more successful of its Bicentennial and Forum activities, but the evidence is quite clear that the agency must be prepared to commit outright program funds as private monies are unlikely to be forthcoming.

Therefore, if the Congress should seriously desire a continuation of such activities, it is recommended that these be authorized in a separate section, which would parallel those other sections of the Senate bill which create categorical programs for the Arts Endowment: the "Arts Education Program" and the "American Bicentennial Photography and Film Project." Such authority should be for outright funding, as distinguish the new NEA programs. The funding authorized for the Bicentennial challenge grants, in the Humanities, incidentally, is the same as that authorized, in aggregate, for the Arts Education Program and the American Bicentennial Photography and Film Project.

(The Endowment, however, is not entirely persuaded that such special authorities enhance the re-authorizing legislation, and it should be noted that the Administration does not support any of these provisions.)
5. THE MUSEUM SERVICES ACT

The Endowment has not taken a position on the Museum Services Act portion of the reauthorization legislation, although the House bill shows a preferable simplicity and clarity.

Regardless of the administrative location of the Institute, the Endowment does propose to continue its own program grant support to museums and historical organizations. The new Institute appears to concentrate on support for operating expenses, so no duplication is expected; insofar as such categorical operating support might be distributed by formula, the program might be more appropriately housed in H.E.W. than in N.F.A.H., which is designed for competitive grant making in substantive program areas.

If the Institute were to be placed within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Endowment would cooperate fully and willingly with that Department; similarly, were the Institute to be placed within the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, the Endowment's Chairman and the members of the National Council on the Humanities selected to serve on the Museum Services Board would do their best to see that the act was administered effectively in a way consistent with the intent of the legislation.

(It should be noted that the Administration does not approve the Museum Services Act in either form).