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National Arts Legislation: Pell Bill (1964): Speech 01

Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL BEFORE THE SPECIAL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND LABOR REGARDING H. R. 9587

Wednesday, April 15th, 1964

Mr. Chairman:

It is a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity -- before the House Special Subcommittee on Labor chaired by the distinguished Congressman from New Jersey -- of adding my support to the legislation you are considering which provides for the establishment of a National Council on the Arts and a National Arts Foundation.

As Chairman of the Senate Special Subcommittee on the Arts and Floor Manager in our Body of this legislation, I was most gratified when the Senate passed the identical bill, S. 2379, on December 20th. I would earnestly hope that the House of Representatives would give its full approval to H. R. 9587, Title I of which provides for the Council and Title II of which provides for the Foundation.

I believe firmly that both titles are needed and that they serve as significant corollaries to each other.

The Council will bring together the best talents we have in this country to plan for the development of our cultural resources, to devise methods by which to coordinate existing resources and facilities, and to foster artistic and cultural endeavors and the use of the arts, both nationally and internationally, in the best interests of our country.

The Foundation -- in providing for funds on a matching-grant basis to nonprofit professional groups engaged in or concerned with the arts, and to the individual States -- will engender cultural development throughout the length and breadth of our land. Never has this been more important; for in recent years artistic excellence in the United States has tended to become more and more concentrated only in major centers of population.

In the United States, traditionally, support for our cultural life has come from private sources. These no longer suffice to meet new demands. There is a great desire today on the part of our people to participate in cultural undertakings. It stems from the benefits our society has fostered: greater leisure time, improving education, the highest standard of living of any nation on earth, a more secure and rewarding old age. The desire is wholly new in the scope of its appeal -- and we

must seek urgently to answer it, because it relates fundamentally to our national welfare.

Mr. John D. Rockefeller, III, a witness at our hearings, put it this way during the Senate Subcommittee hearings: "As new institutions spring into being in response to new demands for wider availability of the arts, deficit financing is bound to multiply. The rate of expansion is so rapid that neither private philanthropy nor subscription plans can keep up with the burgeoning requirements. It seems obvious to me that only by enlightened government action at the municipal, State, and national levels, can the gap between inevitable needs and present resources be appreciably narrowed. The need is real," Mr. Rockefeller concluded. "It is pressing. It concerns the whole aim and purpose of life, without which all other government services are of little significance and, in terms of the well-being and happiness of the individual, ultimately without real effect."

An example of increasing interest in the arts can be found among our museums which serve as cultural centers. Their number has increased from 1,500 to 5,500 during the past 30 years; but they are struggling today with serious financial problems.

Witness after witness at the Senate hearings emphasized the situation of financial crisis in our cultural life, and they also made it abundantly clear that they would welcome the kind of assistance which H. R. 9587 exemplifies.

This assistance is very different from direct subsidy. It is partial assistance based on mutual cooperation. Thus, in establishing the needed partnership between government and the individual citizen, this legislation is in accord with our own principles and traditions.

Moreover, the members of the Council and the trustees of the Foundation would be selected from among private citizens noted for their broad knowledge of the arts, for their experience and profound interest in them. I stress the word "private," and the fact that the assurance in Section 3 of the Act *against Federal interference* in the arts is in accord with our principles.

I am convinced that the matching-grant formula would return many

times over its investment. The New York State Council on the Arts has already provided us with an example of this. From an initial State appropriation of \$50,000 and over a three-year period, almost \$400,000 was derived from private sources to help finance new cultural activities which the Council has initiated. Over this three-year span, the ratio became almost 1 to 8 between the first State allocation and subsequent *private* financing.

When we consider the growing financial crisis in the arts, and the advantages this legislation would bring in decentralizing the arts, in giving our citizens wider exposure to creative and interpretive excellence; when we consider that this legislation will give to the American artist the recognition for which he has long yearned in our country, and that the broad base of the legislation will stimulate such benefits as greater architectural accomplishment and better design for the products we produce in an increasingly competitive world market -- then, Mr. Chairman, I say that the appropriation of \$10 million is a modest sum indeed.

Ten million dollars represents five cents per person per year in the United States. In this respect and discounting the paramount standard of living we enjoy, it is noteworthy that the governments of both Canada and Great Britain spend over twice this amount for the arts on a per capita basis; that in Free Europe France and West Germany spend virtually four times this amount; and that Austria -- in supporting its five major theaters, its music programs including the Salzburg festival, its museums, its art academies and literary undertakings -- spends almost 30 times as much. Throughout Free Europe, where the arts have long thrived vigorously, governmental support is considered basic to cultural vitality. The legislation under consideration translates this concept into American terms, into terms adapted to our own beliefs.

The Bureau of the Budget submitted this statement to the Senate Subcommittee: "We recognize that this legislation is the most comprehensive in the arts area to come before the Senate for consideration. We support the basic principles and fundamental values contained in (the legislation) and agree with their objectives of increasing the cultural

resources and improving the cultural vitality of the United States. "

This legislation has recently received endorsement from the White House. In a letter to me dated March 27th, the Honorable Lawrence F. O'Brien, Special Assistant to the President, said: "The Administration, as you know, supports the basic principles of this legislation." I ask unanimous consent that this letter be included at this point in my remarks.

The Congress has already approved funds for the construction here in Washington of a cultural center named in honor of our late President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who did so much during his remarkable lifetime to enhance artistic achievement. But to fulfill the potentials we possess, our cultural resources must now be nourished throughout the whole of our country, in every State.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my commendations to you for your initiative in bringing this bill to the attention of the House of Representatives and for your leadership in championing the cause of the arts in our Nation in the past; and I would like to conclude with this observation:

We are in conflict today the world over with the materialism of totalitarian forms of government, which by definition stifle creative thought. We must contribute something more lofty than the purely material, something in harmony with free men, something to inspire them. I believe that this legislation is both enlightened and constructive and that it will help us, in significant fashion, to attain this goal.

In proportion, as the best in our cultural life grows and is nourished, so will we give to our people what they are searching for and need, so will we demonstrate still another failure of Communism to meet a human need; and at the same time we will give to the world a meaningful heritage.
