

University of Rhode Island

DigitalCommons@URI

Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities
(1994-1996)

Education: National Endowment for the Arts
and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996)

11-1996

Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Article 01

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_82

Recommended Citation

"Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Article 01" (1996). *Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996)*. Paper 29.

https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_82/29

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education: National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996) at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

BIG ISSUES

SHOULD CONGRESS CEASE FUNDING NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR ARTS?

Rep. Philip M. Crane (R-Ill.)



YES

Beginning before the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Americans have debated the proper role of the federal government. Ever since Republicans won control of Congress in 1994, this debate has become more pronounced. Democrats defend the government they created during 40 years as the majority in Congress. Republican budget cutters argue for a return to the traditionally smaller, limited government espoused by our founding fathers.

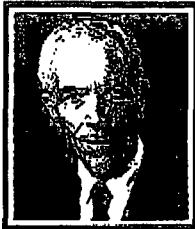
Exemplifying this larger debate is the argument over whether the federal government should be responsible for advancing our culture through taxpayer-funded bureaucracies such as the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). As a former professor of U.S. history, I do not believe that these agencies are constitutional responsibilities of the federal government.

I know that supporters of the NEA are well intentioned and that the NEA has funded some worthwhile endeavors. However, those arguing that the NEA provides the breath for an otherwise lifeless art culture must ignore all the works produced without government funding before and since NEA's birth.

Because of budgetary constraints, NEA cannot possibly fund every artist in the United States, which leads to the government deciding which artists receive special taxpayer assistance. It is improper for a government ministry to decide what is "acceptable" art for Americans. Although I would defend the right of others to voluntarily raise private money to fund certain avant-garde art, I cannot rationalize using involuntarily raised tax dollars to fund art that offends many taxpayers.

Facing a \$5 trillion debt forces us in Congress to make some tough decisions with regard to our spending priorities. The arts cannot, and hopefully by 1998, will not, be a priority for the federal government. However, I have faith in American altruism and in the infallible wisdom of the free market. Therefore, I believe the NEA will not be missed and that art in our country will flourish without it.

Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.)



NO

Although I take a father's pride in its accomplishments, I must observe that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has been remarkably successful in furthering the ideals for which it was created. Every single community in our country now has access to its indigenous and creative national culture.

As NEA grew, it sponsored a few grants that I wish it had not, but that was no reason to throw out the solid arts networks built over 30 years. NEA has awarded more than 100,000 grants, less than 40 have resulted in any controversy whatsoever—a success rate of 99.96 percent.

Recently NEA improved its review and oversight process. In addition, the endowment took a budget cut of 40 percent in Fiscal Year 1996. It has eliminated a total of 89 positions, 47 percent of its staff. Anything more would severely curtail the availability and accessibility of countless arts programs in communities nationwide.

Every parent knows that the arts teach young people creativity, increase self-discipline and are a critical means of passing on an understanding of American culture and civilization. Study of even a single artistic discipline is of immense value to a child, who might go on to become an avid amateur or patron.

Moreover, NEA grants prime the pump for other levels of government and for corporate and private funding of the arts. Each year NEA draws matching funds of approximately \$1.4 billion from private, state and local patrons.

Corporate giving has declined in recent years despite economic growth. Further, removal of both the national recognition and the stimulation of partnerships offered through federal grants will produce a dramatic reduction in state and local support.

NEA has given rise to things of great beauty and has also done much to nourish our appreciation and access to the arts. When you attend a concert, watch a play, enjoy a public television show or visit an art exhibit, look for an acknowledgment of NEA funding—and then remember the vital role the endowment plays in enriching our lives.

Senators and Representatives may express their views by writing The Honorable (name), U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510; or The Honorable (name), House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20510. You may call the U.S. Senate at (202) 224-3121; the House at (202) 225-3121.