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Museum Services Act (1984): Speech 02

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STATEMENT OF

SUSAN E. PHILLIPS

Director, Institute of Museum Services

Before the

Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies

of the

Appropriations Committee

of the

United States Senate

March 20, 1984

Senator McClure and distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today to review with you the President's request for funds for the Institute of Museum Services for Fiscal Year 1985.

As we all are aware, IMS has had a confusing past and was perceived at times to have an uncertain future. As I have met with museum people from around the country both here in Washington and in the field I have received many interesting comments: "IMS? Oh, I thought that you were eliminated two years ago?", "IMS? tell me, are you a part of the Department of Education or the National Endowment for the Arts?" Even people in the government are not exactly certain how we fit in to the overall scheme of things. Most are surprised to learn that we are an independent agency within the Executive Branch.

Since assuming the responsibilities of Director in July of 1983, with the able assistance of my staff, I have been striving to answer these questions and ease the uncertainties. The budget presented here this morning is consistent with the efforts we have made over the past several months to clarify the role of IMS as distinct from other agencies or programs which provide funds to our nation's museums.

The Administration is requesting an appropriation of \$11,612,000 for Fiscal Year 1985, slightly higher than its request for Fiscal Year 1984. The increase of just under \$100,000 is to cover the increased overhead of the agency which we added to the request rather than reduce the funds available for grants to museums at this level. Ours is a very simple budget and covers three categories of expenditure: Grants to Museums, Administration, and the National Museum Services Board. We are requesting that all funds available in the Grants to Museums portion of our budget be disseminated to applicants through the General Operating Support program. As in previous years, up to \$240,000 of this amount would be available for the Museum Assessment Program.

Of all the programs with which I am familiar across the Federal government, General Operating Support is one of the cleanest and easiest to administer. The security guard's salary, the light bill, the acid free paper on which to mount a masterpiece, are not sexy fodder for development campaigns. I am frequently impressed on my visits to museums across the country, by the numerous plaques, tiles, labels and, indeed, monuments, which pay homage to the generosity of patrons who support the cost of a particular exhibit, an animal or species within the zoo, or a room or a building. No where have I seen the John Jones light bill immortalized in marble or even lucite.

One application form, one set of regulations does the trick. Eligibility is clear. Procedures are uniform. And the money is awarded with few strings attached. There is no chance that the Federal government will infringe on the creativity of a controversial exhibit or that it will become a Federal ministry determining what is appropriate to be exhibited or conserved. All of that remains the responsibility of the museum to determine as it sees fit, and that is as it should be. Institutions are judged solely on their ability to effectively and efficiently utilize the resources under their care. If they want to spend the funds on an exhibit or conservation, that is within the discretion of the museum. If they prefer to pay the rent or develop a new program for docents, well, that's O.K. too.

The request for funds for Administration is \$159,000 above the amount requested in the F.Y. 1984 budget but \$24,000 below the actual 1984 appropriation when a reprogramming of \$183,000 is added. (As I write this, the reprogramming has been approved by the House, and we are awaiting Senate approval). While I wish I could present a request lower than the 7% of our total budget this represents, I can not do so. On a visit to the Corcoran Gallery here in Washington this fall, I happened to meet a very interesting woman who had prepared the labels for the objects in the show which was then on display. It suddenly struck me that though I had been visiting museums all of my life, I had never given any thought to how or by whom the labels were produced. I fear that the same blindness occurs when we look at Federal agencies. Payroll records must be kept, checks disseminated; personnel functions performed: numerous forms filled out, positions posted and competed; materials for office use must be requisitioned and purchased; incoming mail must reach its intended recipient and outgoing mail franked and sent on its way; applications for award must be entered into computers which generate lists of reviewers matched by discipline and size to the applicant; and when decisions are finally made as to who is to get these highly valued funds, award documents must be generated, funds disseminated and reports received. A full 25% of our Administrative budget, \$222,000, is needed to reimburse other agencies, individuals, and businesses which provide these necessary services to IMS. Standard Level User Charges and rent and utilities represent 1% of IMS' total budget, salaries and benefits, more than 3%. While we pledge to take advantage of every possible economy in the administration of this agency, we cannot suggest cuts which would endanger the agency's ability to manage its grants programs in a manner which both serves the museum community and protects the American taxpayer.

The budget for the expenses of the National Museum Services Board remains consistent with this year's experience. It is expected that the cost of travel will be lower for F.Y. 1985 as committees of the Board should have to meet less frequently than this year when all application packets were being revised and a new program implemented. As always, the Board is reminded that it should utilize Government Travel Requests for its travel as frequently as is possible.

In a radio address to the Nation on May 1, 1982, President Reagan stated:

Government must stay within the limit of its revenues. This is not a political issue between parties. It's an issue simply of sense versus nonsense, of endless red ink versus lasting recovery.

IMS is striving through the presentation of this "hold the line" budget request to do its small part to dry up the sea of red ink.

And, as the President said in a toast to the Governors at a meeting of the National Governors Association on February 26, 1984, "People are no longer looking to Washington to solve every problem." It is gratifying to learn that the private sector, and nonfederal segments of the public sector are responding to the President's oft spoken philosophy that the growth of the Federal government must be curbed, by increasing their own contributions to cultural institutions.

In a press release dated February 29, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies reports that state legislatures have increased funds by 9.5% for Fiscal Year 1984, this follows a 2.3% increase in 1983 over '82 funds. The Business Committee on the Arts reported last November on the results of a major survey it had conducted. The survey found that:

American businesses provided a record total of \$506 million to the arts in 1982 according to national survey findings....This is a 32% increase over the 1981 total of \$385 million during a time when the U.S. Department of Commerce reported that pre-tax profits of U.S. business declined by 45% ...

Ralph P. Davidson, Chairman of the Board of Time, Inc. and Chairman of the Business Committee for the Arts, Inc. commented:

This survey showed a remarkable commitment to the arts by thousands of corporations hit by the recession last year and a good, solid foundation for increased giving as the economy recovers...

Of the amounts contributed by Business, museums received 19¢ of every dollar, with historic and cultural preservation projects receiving 4¢ and exhibition sponsorship an additional 4¢.

IMS presents this budget with the knowledge and understanding that the funds requested are but but one source of those available to museums and with the belief that the activities of the Institute will not duplicate those of other Federal programs for which museums are eligible to apply.

I would be happy to answer your questions at this time.