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Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (1976): Speech 01

Claiborne Pell

Ann Vermel

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TRANSCRIPT OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL AND ANN VERMEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE RHODE ISLAND STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS: WASHINGTON, D.C. JUNE 30TH, 1976.

ANN

VERMEL: The state arts council in R.I. is entering into its planning process, and wants a sense of your feelings about (these) two issues: what is the place of a state arts agency in terms of the national picture these days; and what would be good directions for them to take a strong look at for their own agency?

SEN.

PELL:

My own view is that the portion of the money spent on the state agencies - about a fifth of the total - is being spent, so far, very, very well by the state arts councils. In general ~~I think~~ - looking at it from the Washington viewpoint, ~~the overall viewpoint~~ - I've been absolutely pleased with the way they've spent their money, and with the results. Now, ~~as far as the kinds of projects go, I think~~ my own objective has always been to try to get the help as much to the individual - ~~onto~~ the personal level, ~~as possible~~. The more help that can be given to individuals, and through the individuals to institutions in which they participate - but, to the individuals - the happier I am. I realize it's difficult, - Institutions that really do need help, they come to you for help. - And you are right, I would also hope you would not lose sight of the fact that a substantial portion of the funds you receive should be awarded to individual artists or small projects - and as diversified as possible. It's tough because you have, as I said, the institutional groups that need help and may dissolve without it. At the same time what we're trying to do is to introduce art, ~~as well~~, to people - new people - the people who have not yet been touched by it ... and if it gets into a neighborhood or to a community where it hasn't been before, it may have a more igniting effect; that is, it ~~continues~~ ~~to fuel an institution that's already going~~ ~~and serve~~ ~~a nearby~~ ~~already exists.~~

Many different projects are involved, but possible especially involved in and all understanding of art,

appropriated for the National Endowment for the Arts

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VERMEL: The RISCA is presently doing a great deal of active community programming. We administer the program; we design and staff the programs. It's very different from most state arts agencies, which subcontract that kind of activity to groups that are established; but there are no such groups in R.I. We find this has been the most successful generative part of our program. But we're uncomfortable with it, because it does put us in competition with other organizations.

PELL: Could you give me an example of what you ~~says~~ are outlining?

VERMEL: Yes. What I'm saying is: assuming that the arts council is doing - as we are - a fairly extensive program in the prison, we are putting \$6,000 of our money, which is not very much but which is still important in our total budget, into that program. We are also extracting other state funds from the department of corrections, and we have an Endowment grant. The total program comes to some \$27,000. The feeling

of a number of our constituents is that that \$6,000 is their money, that it really is better spent, that we are in fact competing with the theatres and the museum and the children's theatre groups because we are spending money on our own designed programs. For a state agency or any government agency, that's a serious problem - although those programs are all hiring individual artists.

tough

PELL: It's a ~~tough~~ ^{you're} problem, and it's one you have to wrestle with as a council, because ~~you're~~ ^{you're} the ones in the front line, ~~perceiving~~ ^{for help} these cries of ~~anguish~~ ^{very much} from the institutions that also want to be fed this necessary fuel for them to go on. ~~But~~ I still like the idea of the programs that you're doing. The one you cited is obviously a wonderful one - the one in the prisons where the amount \$6,000, as you point out, is not a great deal - substantially less than one percent of what you're spending in the state. Yet both from the viewpoint of the impact on people's lives, and the example to other states, (the program is) substantial and I would hope that that would be continued. Are you giving any money directly to individual artists?

received

VERMEL: We have one very small grant program which gives five grants of \$2,500 each, each year. This last year we had 200 applications.

PELL: I can quite imagine that, and I think that shows the importance of ~~these~~ individual applications and ~~these~~ individual grants. You may ~~have to make~~ ^{wish} ~~as a matter of judgment~~ ^{regarding individual grants}, ~~the commission policy as to whether~~ ^{just as the federal gov-} ~~ernment makes sure that 20 percent of (their) funds are divid-~~ ^{ed} ~~ed by the states, and their entities~~ ^{you} ~~you~~ ^{decide}, on a state level, that a certain percentage, ~~20 percent~~ ^{may}, ~~for the sake of argument~~ would be (allocated) for individuals. This would be a matter of policy, ~~as you decide~~.

a council allocated for

VERMEL: If one counts the amount of our budget that is spent on hiring artists to work as artists in the program, the percentage goes up very significantly. But these are, in fact, monies that are spent for services and not for the creation of new work. You are suggesting that we should be dealing with both?

PELL: I'm suggesting that ^{National Endowment for} ... exactly, and that there should be some interface between the individual artist and the council in R.I., just as there is some interface between the individual artist and the ~~federal council on the Arts~~ ^{just}. I don't know what the percentage of funding is that the ~~federal council~~ distributes directly to individuals. It's very small, but it's quite significant - it's about 5 percent of the total - and I would like to see that 5 percent expanded, and I would like to see the state council with more or less the same rule of thumb ... maybe 5 percent ... ~~maybe expanded~~ ^{perhaps an expansion}.

VERMEL: We are going to be dispatching, in the next few weeks, a public policy statement which will identify the goals and objectives ^{relatively} ^{Endowment}

could bring cert out into communities.

of the Council's programs. Then after that, we will begin to shift our priorities through a total policy statement as the years go by. I hear you putting a good deal of emphasis on support of the creation of new works, and also on audience development. Maybe you could spend a little time just talking about ways in which that awareness - that new awareness of art - could be implemented.

PELL: I think ~~the street theatre~~ ^{of street as one means.} ... I'm not sure ~~I think we did it several years ago~~ ~~I'm not sure we've done it since~~ ~~the long, hot summers at the end of the Vietnam war ...~~ ~~A theatrical group might go out into the inner cities and the other poor areas of cities ... or diversified art groups.~~ ~~I remember for some time I used to send out a collection of paintings that would be hung in different city halls around the state, and at that time there was no support - (those were) very, very early days in the development of the arts.~~ ~~I used to have to pay for that out of my own pocket at times.~~ ~~But I think that this is the kind of project that would be helped~~ ~~(I should say - out of my own pocket - but fine friends who would have a station wagon would contribute and move the collection around).~~ This is the kind of program about which I'm thinking. ~~While, As you know, the National Gallery of the Art and the Smithsonian, I believe, have some visiting exhibits, some exhibits that can be toured and sent around, it's rather unlikely that local communities will get in touch with the Washington level, and they're more likely to get in touch with your level.~~ Maybe it would have a ^{substantial} effect in our state if you (used) your money for just that purpose - for a station wagon and a driver and a ~~sort of~~ rotating collection of R.I. artists, or some copies of great masters ~~from Washington something of that sort~~ ~~When I say great masters from Washington, I mean great masters from the National Gallery or the Smithsonian.~~ ^(from the past)

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VERMEL: There is ... one other programmatic question. The Council has begun giving operating grants to the arts organizations - not tied to program ideas; but simply if you have done well and are doing well and making a significant contribution, we fund you. This seemed a terribly appropriate idea at the time, but it's begun to develop some wrinkles. What we're running into is the development of a dependency on the part of the arts organizations I wonder, since you have a background knowledge (of) a number of agency problems, if you can give me an idea of how we can combat that.

PELL: ^{It's} ~~very~~ ^{some organizations may} very difficult. I think the best person to talk to about it is Miss Hanks, because she sees it on the national level, where ~~the New York Philharmonic will become dependent on some national grants for its very continuation, and~~ ~~on the state level you will find again this will occur.~~ You'll be faced with some very tough choices: whether you should adopt a ~~self-denying~~ resolution that, as a matter of policy, no grant will be extended for more than x-number of years - say, three years - to ~~run~~ an institution, ^{help support} unless every member of your council votes

their

In that event, could

~~its~~ affirmatively to continue it, ~~and one person can stop~~ ^{could} ~~it continuing, doing that, I would add, I think by~~ ~~secret ballot. You would find that this would have a some~~ ~~very rough effects, but would remove this dependence on~~ ~~the state council. On the other hand, you might find~~ ~~that you would cut off too much if you did that. You might~~ ~~want to set aside a portion of your budget for these con-~~ ~~tinuing processes, accepting the fact that your help is~~ ~~accepted by these institutions just as much as the day-~~ ~~light or any other matter that comes to them on a regular~~ ~~basis. But again, these are questions which I would not~~ ~~want to see spelled out from Washington. For the very~~ ~~reason for the varying council on the arts is that each~~ ~~state, each council, will adopt its own methods. Then, I~~ ~~would hope that some day we will get some kind of grant~~ ~~a study will be made, perhaps by the National Council, of~~ ~~all 50 states, seeing at the end of a period of time which~~ ~~of these techniques seems to be responsible for the great~~ ~~est exposure of the development and consciousness of art~~ ~~in these communities, throughout the nation.~~

I would recommend such a procedure

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but private support simply is no longer sufficient. Costs have greatly increased, mainly because of increased elements for services. We need not to increase the relationship between government support and private support. There's still a long way to go.

That each

should

VERMEL:

I think we all find ourselves in a very highly experimental situation. We try one thing for quite a while and see if it will go - sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. We lose track of long-range potentialities in the face of short-range crises. Is it fair to suggest that the arts organization will rapidly become like the school or the educational institution - dependent on a measure of public support, always?

PELL:

I think public support is essential. Oh, yes, I think you'll find as a general rule ~~the cer-~~ ~~tainly more expensive forms of art - ballet, opera or orchestra - will probably have to have some kind of public support, some patron.~~ In the old days it was the Medici, ~~and then there were more recently very rich families in our state who contributed a great deal to the develop-~~ ~~ment of art in our state, now their number is being dra-~~ ~~stically reduced. You will find that the state as a whole~~ ~~will have to replace the Medici and be the patron.~~

VERMEL:

The question of research. I know you and I have discussed the future planning for the arts in the past, and I'm very interested as a matter ... Of course, we're now involved in planning, but I'm concerned about the basic research and the larger extensions of that in the future. First, I'd like to know: what kinds of information consistently would the Congress like to receive from all state arts agencies, so that you would have some kind of ~~an~~ ^{continuing} ~~basis of assessment.~~ *I think such information would be most helpful during our*

PELL:

~~I'm not sure we're capable of absorbing much information~~ ~~on an individual basis. You see, (in) Congress, this~~ ~~view consists of - Senate side, at least - Senator Javits~~ ~~and myself, and we have many, many responsibilities. We~~ ~~have a staff with no full-time person running it, Living-~~ ~~ston Biddle runs it, and he's supposed to spend about 30~~ ~~percent of his time on the arts and humanities rolled together.~~ *when the arts or the humanities programs are*

periodic reviews of the program. We have a limited staff, but at times to be reauthorized, we try to be as thorough as possible.

and the
PELL - VERMEL TRANSCRIPT PAGE 5

I think that kind of detailed information would be especially valuable to the National Council Endowment. They can share with its particular problems but they have a full research capability.
~~So we cannot absorb much information, and I think the information has to be sent into the National Council, through them to us with the individual problems for our own state except to your own senator and your own congressman when they arise.~~

VERMEL: In terms of future planning for the arts: from that answer, I get the feeling that you feel the National Council is the place at which all the conceptualizing in planning should come together.

PELL: *And the Congress will review those plans as they develop.*
Right. ~~I think the Congress, if they have a specific interest, it will be expressed, and I would hope that some honor and serious attention would be given to their thoughts.~~ *If we*
I think there's nothing wrong with individual members of Congress from a particular state having ~~an~~ *some* input into that particular state's council, in the same way that the council itself is - and I'm very glad it is - elected or chosen ~~to the political processes by the governor, usually with the Congress and the state legislature.~~ *in accordance with the state's political process*
~~Their wishes also should be taken into account.~~ If the Governor and the state legislature have strong views on something, ~~even if we don't like their ideas,~~ I think they should be very carefully considered and weighed, ~~into your decision,~~ and if at all possible, honored.

VERMEL: Now I want to ask if you have any questions for me, of Rhode Island's arts council. *with an appendix if needed of the grantees.*

PELL: *particular*
No. I think what would be of interest to me - maybe to the other members of Congress - would be if each council made a one or two page report - no more - at the end of the year, detailing the amounts (granted) and the names of the recipients, and ~~just any general questions of philosophy that they've developed.~~ *a summary*
Literally, two pages, single-spaced, and if each council did this to their members of Congress and senators, it would be helpful.
Another question of which ~~I'm concerned~~ is the joint development of the arts and humanities, ~~because on the one hand, while they're separate,~~ *an art;*
I think it was Barney Bikini who said: If you can do it, it's the arts; if you study it, it's the humanities - or words to that effect. They still are under the joint roof, and they're still somewhat tied together like Siamese twins. In this regard, we in R.I. are particularly lucky because we have a chairman of the committee on the ~~arts (humanities?)~~ *in the federal program* there who has come out of the political process, understands the political process, and has her group plugged into the state ~~in a remarkable way.~~ *humanities working in*
Here I'm speaking of Judge Florence Murray. There are other states - and this is the vast majority - where the situation is not that well-chosen. I would like, ~~perhaps,~~ *perhaps* to see more interplay between the arts committees and the humanities committees, than has been the case in the past. *com*

which concerns me
Keenleyside former president of Brown and first full-time chairman of the Humanities Endowment

an excellent or councils which I would like to see developed, fortuitous.

For instance, ~~even~~ in our own state, do you have any joint sessions together, or any interplay?

VERMEL: We've had no joint sessions, and we have, on occasion, combined in funding a project. I meet regularly with the director of the humanities committee but, in fact, no. That's a very interesting idea - to have joint sessions.

PELL: I would think sometime it might be a good idea. I know how hard it is to get busy people to give up time. How many meetings a year do you have, do your Council members come to?

VERMEL: Well, we have a monthly Council meeting, and we usually have interim committee meetings.

PELL: What percentage of your Council members comes to the meetings?

VERMEL: It's a good percentage; we have a quorum most meetings. We've had to re-schedule one - maybe two - meetings a year because of lack of quorum.

PELL: What is a quorum?

VERMEL: Seven out of twelve.

PELL: Out of twelve ... that's ~~pretty~~ ^{very} good, and ~~As~~ I recall, our Council members are all designated by the Governor. Are they all approved by the legislature, too?

VERMEL: Yes, by the senate.

PELL: They're confirmed by the senate. Is there ~~any~~ insurance that the names will rotate - in other words, are they permitted to serve more than one term, or not?

VERMEL: They're permitted to serve two consecutive terms, and then they may not serve again until, I believe, two terms have gone by.

PELL: A term is how many years?

VERMEL: Three years.

PELL: ~~I'm not sure if the humanities committee has the same rules or not.~~

VERMEL: I'm not familiar with their rules.

PELL: ~~I don't think so~~ I think those ^{procedures} sound very sensible and very good.

VERMEL: It's very hard holding onto our talent, though, because this is a council that works, and works very hard.

PELL: Right. By the same token, it's a small council - it's a small state - but it's a small council. It should be possible to find, on a rotating basis, a different 12 people or a different four people, the way it works out, each year.

VERMEL: Right. It's very interesting ... we grew from nine to twelve last year by a legislative amendment, and also picked up nine new Council members because appointments had been allowed to lapse for so long. That meant that for the first several months last year, we were working with people who were virtually unknowing about the activities of the Council. They've come together magnificently. It's a very, very enterprising, hard-working, thoughtful group of people, and I enjoy working with them.

PELL: When and where do they meet?

VERMEL: All over the city of Providence, mostly, because we don't have our offices in Providence right now. Therefore, we don't have a conference room. We're hoping to move very soon.

PELL: But do you have a more regular place, or do you just meet in different members' offices?

VERMEL: Well, more or less regularly we're in the Old Stone Bank conference room ...

PELL: And now that you've been in existence for some time, have some of the people who have been off for two consecutive terms come back on?

VERMEL: No, they haven't as yet.

(HERE THERE IS A GAP IN THE TAPE. THE SENATOR MADE A STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT GOOD PEOPLE IN THE FIELD SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO RETURN TO IT WHENEVER POSSIBLE).

Pell: I would think that would be well worth considering. Someone who has served the council well and then been away from it for the required time period could return with new perspectives and enthusiasm. It's a good thought with which to conclude.

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Arts council taking grant applications

The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts is accepting applications for institutional support, special project and touring grants to be awarded during fiscal year 1977.

Institutional support grants are available to major non-profit Rhode Island arts organizations to help them meet regular operating expenses. In fiscal year 1976, \$171,000 in institutional support grants was awarded to 12 recipients, including Trinity Square Repertory Company, the Rhode Island School of Design's Mu-

seum of Fine Arts and the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra.

Deadline for applications is Aug. 15.

Special project grants are made to non-profit arts organizations in Rhode Island for specific projects or activities. In Fiscal Year 1976, \$38,000 was given to 24 organizations under special projects.

Deadline for applications is Aug. 1.

Touring grants are given to local performing groups or to local organizations which sponsor performances by touring groups. In fiscal year 1976, \$5,850 in touring grants was awarded to four performing groups, including the Puppet Workshop and the Barrington Boys' Choir.

Guidelines and applications are available from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, 4365 Post Rd., East Greenwich.

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