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State Humanities Committees (1979-1982): Memorandum 03

Alexander D. Crary

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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Senator
FROM: ADC
SUBJECT: Humanities Committees

March 8, 1979

I talked with Livy last week about the State Humanities - their past, present and future. He also filled me in on more of the Berman history.

He feels pretty much as I do that the situation we find ourselves in now vis-a-vis the State Humanities Committees is different enough from what it was in 1965 to warrant a new approach during the upcoming reauthorization.

It is important to realize how fundamentally different the Humanities are from the Arts. They have developed along separate paths partly because of this difference. The Arts have an aesthetic appeal to one's senses. One goes to a dance performance or an art gallery to experience art - to be stimulated by it and to appreciate it. Most of the art disciplines are audience oriented.

The Humanities on the other hand, are study oriented. One really can't measure the 2 areas in the same terms. The Humanities expand and enlighten a person's intellectual life. The term "Humanities" includes the study of literature, language, history, philosophy, jurisprudence, archeology, comparative religion, ethics, cultural anthropology and political theory. These fields are distinct from the Arts and Sciences. As I understand it, the basic goal of the State Humanities Committees is to foster education in and public understanding and appreciation of these areas. In order to do this the Committees fund projects involving a variety of formats including conferences, seminars, workshops, public forums, interpretive exhibits and film and television programming. Each Committee also supports individual research and scholarship but not to the same extent as the NEH. Through these various forums, the Committees reach a large and broad audience. A university may make the application to the Committee but the program they need funding for often reaches a large, non-academic audience. The Arts, being performance oriented can't fail to be more familiar to a wider audience.

Livy and I discussed how the situation has changed since your hearings in 1975.

1. The problem of centralized power, which was so connected with Berman, is no longer a real issue.
2. Variety of programs is no longer an issue.
3. The problem of self-perpetuating committees has dramatically improved and continues to get better.

These were the central issues discussed in the last hearings and should continue to be the focus of close oversight.

The issue of official agency status for the Committees remains.

Here are some thoughts we tossed around:

-- Could the Endowment get the Governors to designate the Committees as the "Official" State Committee? Giving them recognition.

-- Could each Governor serve as "ex officio" on their Committees - or even "officio"? If not the Governor, perhaps the Lieutenant Governor or the Secretary of State.

We felt that one effective way of dealing with this situation would be to announce soon that you will be holding a special oversight hearing on the State Committees in one or two years. This would put them on notice as well as give them a little more time to "get their act together." The issue would not surface during the reauthorization as a rallying point for controversy and the hostile press. Livi felt very strongly that you mustn't open yourself to criticism similar to that of 4 years ago.

You could rally the State people around you by announcing this at the April 10 lunch.

Your remarks could be along this line:

-- Come out and say positive things about the State Programs -how the changes have been excellent but that you are still concerned.

-- The Humanities are still not in the mainstream of our Democratic process where you feel they belong.

-- Make points but without pushing.

-- Point out how your initiatives have proved correct; more is being accomplished now. Can anyone dispute this?

-- Then say you remain unconvinced that there should not be a complete similarity between the "twin" programs. List advantages of similar programs.

-- Close by saying that you will follow developments closely and in this regard intend to hold a major oversight hearing on all aspects of the State Humanities Committees.