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Appropriations (1996): Speech 01

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President. I rise in support of the partial restoration of funds to the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. These fine agencies have sustained disproportionate and unreasonable cuts over the past two years. This erosion must stop.

As co-author of the legislation that created the Endowments thirty-one years ago, I have felt like a proud father as both Endowments have served the guiding principles upon which they were conceived. Overall, their programs have been remarkably successful. There has been overwhelming evidence of the positive impact of the arts and humanities on education, the economy, urban renewal and cultural pride. It is important that two Endowments are funded sufficiently to be able to continue their worthwhile and extremely effective endeavors to improve the quality of life for all Americans.

Mr. President, I am by no means alone today in favor of continued federal funding for the arts and humanities. There is a strong bipartisan commitment. Earlier, Senator Jeffords and I circulated a letter signed by 31 Members that expressed their support of appropriations for the NEA, NEH and IMS in FY'97 at current or slightly increased levels, and I ask that the letter be included in the

record. Other Members have spoken with us subsequently regarding their support.

The American public remains solidly and strongly behind federal support for the arts and humanities. A recent Harris poll found that a 61% majority of Americans (to 37% saying “no”) would be willing to be taxed \$5 more in order to pay for federal financial support for the arts. These people believe the arts to be important and would sorely miss them if they were not there.

In Rhode Island, the restored Humanities funding means quite literally survival for an extremely important project that provides fascinating information to all Americans, not just the residents of my state. With NEH funding, the Rhode Island Historical Society is reassembling the Papers of Nathanael Greene from over 100 libraries and collections scattered around the country, and is currently preparing the tenth of a total of thirteen planned volumes. Nathanael Greene, you will recall was a Rhode Islander sent by George Washington to liberate the South -- a task he accomplished with distinction. If work on the Papers stops now, it will be the history of Georgia and the Carolinas that would not be published. Interestingly, while Greene was alive, Congress promised to publish his daily letters and orders. How poignant that we fulfill this promise now!

As I enter my last days as a United States Senator -- thirty-six years among wonderful colleagues -- I urge Congress to support the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum Services at a level where they can fulfill their potential and continue to bring American culture to all Americans. I hope to hear that the issues that are preventing the reauthorization of the programs of these agencies will be resolved amicably in the 105th Congress.