

1976

## Arts and Humanities: Program Funding (1976): Speech 01

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, MARCH 10, 1976

## REGENTS ADOPT STATEMENT

## IN SUPPORT OF LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS

Commissioner of Education Ewald B. Nyquist today released a statement adopted by the Regents at their February meeting concerning the financial needs of libraries and museums in New York State.

The Regents statement draws attention to massive cuts already sustained in the budgets of New York City's libraries and museums, and in cultural institutions in other cities throughout the State as well. It deplores the "meat-axe" approach towards libraries and museums which has been used so far and asks for a reordering of priorities to sustain these vital services.

"The cultural institutions of New York State are... a part of the educational complex available for the use and enjoyment of New York's citizens. As such, they constitute a major and growing concern of the Regents in developing a balanced and economical set of alternative educational opportunities in New York State."

The Regents action was prompted by reports of budget cuts and reductions in service forced on libraries and museums throughout the State. In addition to cuts in New York City, severe problems are cited in Yonkers, Nassau and Suffolk Counties, Buffalo, and Utica.

The paper cites rising attendance at libraries and museums, as both institutions assume a new educational role of providing citizens with the most readily

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available means of improving their knowledge, sharpening occupational skills, and finding help in retraining. "Radical pruning of their programs through closings, massive staff cuts, and reduction of vital programs is counterproductive to free use of alternative educational opportunities."

In light of the critical situation, the Regents propose: immediate reconsideration by the New York City and Yonkers administrations of the low priority given to library and museum programs; consideration by the legislature of the Regents earlier proposal for increased State support for libraries totalling less than \$10 million; increased efforts to gain private financial support for public libraries; and continued efforts by the State Education Department to encourage inter-system cooperation and consolidation of library programs to stress economies and reduce duplication.

A copy of the complete statement is attached.

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Regents Statement  
In Support of Libraries and Museums

The three public library systems of New York City and a major share of the regular budget of the major museums are funded by the tax dollars of the City and the State. The increasingly stringent fiscal plans for city finances have exposed a "meat-axe" approach toward libraries and museums. These institutions are always subjected to first-order cuts and maximum reductions. Since 1970, the service rendered by the Branch Libraries in the three boroughs served by the New York Public Library has been reduced by 50%. Now, new slashes have been planned which, if implemented as proposed, will close 33 of the 83 branches of New York Public in the next 18 months. This is not a problem for New York City only, but is simply the extreme of a Statewide trend already affecting other population centers, such as Yonkers, Utica, Buffalo and Nassau-Suffolk. It seems to be the pattern of the future, unless priorities can be reordered.

The cultural institutions of New York State are, by tradition and law, a part of the educational complex available for the use and enjoyment of New York's citizens. As such, they constitute a major and growing concern of the Regents in developing a balanced and economical set of alternative educational opportunities in this State.

Museums increasingly are emulating libraries by taking on a major role in the continuing education of adults. As in all depressed times, library attendance nationwide is rising as

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people, especially the unemployed, adopt the most readily available means of improving their knowledge, sharpening occupational skills and finding help in retraining - all leading to self development and in many cases, re-employment.

Museums are now recognizing and fulfilling educational obligations - not only for self-development, but also for community upgrading. New needs have arisen to which the traditional educational system cannot be totally responsive. Their satisfaction requires the use of new or additional educational methods and resources available through museums and libraries. Radical pruning of their programs through closings, massive staff cuts and reduction of vital programs is counterproductive to free use of alternative educational opportunities.

Municipal administrators must recognize, either intellectually or viscerally, that a major segment of our population depends on cultural resources not only for emotional or intellectual stimulation but also as resources to make better communities and to make people better members of their communities. Our current and future culture can only be diminished, for example, by the drastic reductions projected with State Emergency Financial Control Board approval. They will contribute as well to the foreclosure of the right of the individual citizen to attempt to reverse or improve his present economic state through low-cost self education.

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In light of this critical situation, the Regents urge:

1. Immediate reconsideration by the administrations of New York City and Yonkers and by the Emergency Control Board of the low priority assignment they have given libraries and those museums which receive major city funding.
2. Consideration by the legislature of the Regents' proposed legislation for increased Statewide support of libraries - a total added expenditure of less than \$10 million to meet in part the loss of support through inflation since the last increase in aid was granted by the legislature in 1973.
3. Increased efforts to gain private support for public libraries, especially in New York City where the need for such support is greatest.
4. Strong support by the New York Congressional delegation and by the Governor's Office for timely Federal funding for the scheduled White House Library Conference of 1977 and the preceding Governor's Conference on Libraries tentatively scheduled for April 1977.
5. Continued and broadened efforts by the State Education Department to plan and encourage inter-system cooperation and consolidation of library programs so as to stress economies, reduce duplication of resource acquisition, and promote improved services. The present retrenchment must be balanced by planning to meet future needs of the entire State.