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4-24-1976

Arts and Humanities: Reauthorization (1973-1976): Speech 01

Michael Newton

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Recommended Citation

Newton, Michael, "Arts and Humanities: Reauthorization (1973-1976): Speech 01" (1976). *Arts and Humanities: Reauthorization (1973-1976)*. Paper 4.

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Statement by
Michael Newton, President
Associated Councils of the Arts

Democratic Platform Hearings
Kansas City, Missouri
April 24, 1976

On behalf of Associated Councils of the Arts (ACA), a national association of six hundred arts organizations, most of which are community and state arts councils, I urge you to add the following commitments to the banner which the Democratic Party carries into the 1976 election.

1. We will support an appropriation for the National Endowment for the Arts in the amount of \$180 million for the coming year.
2. In times when national unemployment reaches 6.5% we will support an appropriation of \$30 million to put unemployed artists and arts personnel to work in the creation of art for public enjoyment following the precedents set by the WPA artists program.
3. We will ensure that, in the current updating of our nation's copyright law, the rights of performing artists in the use of their work are adequately safeguarded.
4. We will correct those inequities in the tax laws that unfairly penalize artists, notably the illogical ruling that denies the same tax relief to an artist that is available to a collector.
5. We will ensure that the Office of Education restores its arts and humanities budget so that the next generation of American children will have an opportunity to experience the life-enhancing power of the arts.

The past decade that has seen the assassination, attempted assassination and maiming of so many of our leaders; a deeply divisive war that ended in ignominious defeat, searing divisions between generations, and ending with the humiliation of us all in Watergate has numbed the spirit, confidence and joy of our nation.

In testifying before the House Subcommittee on Select Education last year, Louis Harris, the public opinion analyst and chairman of ACA, said: "The number of Americans who feel left out and estranged just staggers me. It makes me feel so sad. I literally want to weep over it. We asked in 1966, "Do you tend to feel, or not, left out of things going on around you?" Back then, nine per cent of the American people said, "Yes, I tend to feel left out of things going on around me". Do you know what this figure is today in 1975 in this country? Forty-one per cent of people eighteen years of age and over say, "I tend to feel left out of things

going on around me " .

What has this to do with the arts? What has it to do with the five commitments that I ask you to include in the Democratic Party platform? It is simply this. Our society is changing. Today we are entering a post-industrial era. Not only has ours become increasingly a service economy but more and more people are seeking out experiences to satisfy their aspirations. Change is all about us. The demands of our people are not now for more or longer cars as much as for creative and fulfilling experiences. When Louis Harris asked people in the two national surveys of public opinion that he has carried out for us "What do the arts mean to you?", they chorused back: "Arts are life. They are a reflection of life". These same people told us that they are attending more arts events: a total of one hundred and three million people in the first year of the survey.

Last year, 93% told us they rate the arts and cultural facilities as important to the quality of life, while 85% said they felt that museums, theatres and concert halls are important to the business and economy of their community. Our fellow citizens are not just talking, they are doing. More than two in three people (68%) are engaged in some arts and crafts activity such as painting, drawing, playing a musical instrument.

It takes money to meet that demand. Like libraries, churches, schools and hospitals, the arts cannot operate on earned income alone. If they were to attempt to do so, they would price themselves out of the range of all but the very rich. Where does the money come from? Most still comes from the private donor and that giving is on the increase. Some is now coming from state arts councils, some from cities and counties and a modest share from the federal government. Our request is that the federal share be increased from its present level of \$82 million to a full \$180 million next year.

Yet the source of the arts is the creative artist. You may have a public hunger for the arts and well-run museums and orchestras to present the arts, but without the living, creative artist there is nothing but the legacy of the past. Experience with funding under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) in many communities this past year has shown the public service potential for enriching community life of artists employed for the public good. The CETA employment opportunity has also made obvious (or brought to light) the rate of unemployment among creative artists and other arts personnel. In Seattle, five hundred qualified applicants sought fifty artists' positions under the program; in San Francisco, three thousand artists applied and only one hundred and forty were hired; in North Carolina five qualified applicants appeared for every position that could be filled under the State Council's Third Century Artists program.

At ACA's national conference last year in Cleveland, one of the speakers gave a talk on ways in which artists can live and work. Do you know what that talk included? It included descriptions of unemployment insurance, food stamps, volunteer legal services. The artists present said it was helpful as a guide to what they have to do, not, please note, what they want to do. How much better it would be for us and for the artists if that public money could be used to hire artists to work for the public good, creating murals that will give joy to us and to generations yet unborn,

creating poems to help us see our world afresh, writing music for America to sing. Some of this world's resources are in short supply, some are finite but some are infinite because they are renewable. Of such is the human spirit and of such is artistic talent. Let's put it to work.

I offer the services of our organization to help in drafting the language to cover the other important requests in my testimony that affect copyright, the tax laws and education.

Briefly we are concerned that in copyright the current legislation provides no safeguards for the performing artist whose work is reproduced time and again on television, the radio or on juke boxes. The current bill does much to bring the fifty-year-old copyright legislation up-to-date but it leaves the performing artist unprotected as if the technological advances of the last fifty years had never taken place. We applaud the bill offered by Congressman George E. Danielson (D-CA) as equitable to all interests.

There are, too, some curious anomalies affecting the artist in the tax area. First is the IRS ruling whereby an artist who contributes his work to a museum or other charitable institution may only deduct for tax purposes the cost of the materials involved in its creation while a collector may deduct the true market value of the work. For the artist the deduction could be \$10, for the collector \$10,000. Similarly current changes in the allowance for deductibility of one's home as a place of business may work specific hardships on the artist who teaches or has other jobs and must combine his home and his studio in order to produce his creative work.

Our Americans and the Arts studies show us there is an absolute correlation between a child's early introduction to the arts and his life-long degree of interest in the arts. Yet, in the approximately six-billion-dollar budget of the Office of Education, there is not one single substantial line-item dedicated to the arts. This was not always the case. We believe that the Office of Education should return to its earlier practice of jointly funding arts-schools projects with the National Endowment for the Arts.

I am an American not by accident of birth but by choice. I came to this country and indeed to this city, Kansas City, nineteen years ago. I was drawn by America's sense of adventure, of hope and of infinite possibility. I was mindful of what Scott Fitzgerald had once said: "that while France is a nation and England is a people, America is a willingness of the heart". In the intervening years, some of that hope and confidence is gone. Hope and confidence are born of looking beyond oneself, of awareness of the potential of life. If the arts have any function it is to allow us so to spend our days that we are not blind and deaf to the incredible richness of our lives.