

1989

Sub-Grants (1989-1990): Correspondence 06

Geoffrey Platt Jr.

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Princeton University The Council of the Humanities
122 East Pyne Building, Princeton, New Jersey 08544-5264

Senator Claiborne Pell
335 Russell Senate Building
Washington DC 20510

by fax: 202-224-4680

Dear Senator Pell,

Perhaps you remember the little cottage at 116 Mercer Street in Princeton in which, I believe, you once lived. We met at one of your reunions some years ago and I had the pleasure of showing you the cottage which we now own.

I write to express my concern about an issue in the House which I believe raises some substantive and procedural questions. As you may know, an amendment is under discussion to restrict both the NEA and the NEH from making "re-grants", or to impose restraints that would make this process very cumbersome. The amendment raises in my mind the important procedural question of whether such a proposal conflicts with the work of the appropriate authorizing committee but I believe it also raises vital substantive issues for all of us concerned with the humanities.

I write with special urgency both as the Chairman of Princeton University's Council of the Humanities and as the Director Designate of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. All our institutions in the humanities need the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the flexibility to develop independent programs and policies. The overwhelming majority of Centers and Institutes in the humanities that have enjoyed NEH support have acted responsibly and thoughtfully over the years. To penalize them because of episodes resulting from NEA grants seems especially unfortunate. The effects on some of these institutions will be disastrous if a prohibition is placed on NEH re-grants. The Center I will head for example depends on NEH and matching funds for over half of its projected 1990/91 fellowship budget. Our operations might be crippled by such legislation.

The NEH has a crucial role to play in American higher education by supporting high quality programs and individual projects in fields such as literature, philosophy, history, religious studies and moral and ethical values. Diversity in

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shaping and selecting those projects is crucial, and deeply consistent with our American tradition of decentralization and pluralism. It is also cost efficient, since Centers such as the National Humanities Center apply their endowment income, matching gifts and other non-governmental funds to make NEH grants go as far as possible. I take very seriously the estimate that the elimination of the re-grant program would raise administrative costs at the NEH by approximately one million dollars per year.

The NEH also has a crucial role to play in institution building. Its support of a small number of well-designed centers such as the National Humanities Center helps build independent institutions that in the long-run will have greater and more long lasting effects on the invigoration of teaching and scholarship than grants for the support of individuals. This institution building carries forward our national tradition of diversity and resistance to excessive centralization. The re-grant program is vital for this long range goal.

I hope that you can find ways in which restrictions on the NEH's re-grant program can be avoided. Your leadership on this, as on so many other matters, can make a great difference.

Sincerely,



W. R. Connor
Chairman
Professor of Classics
Director Designate,
National Humanities Center

26th June, 1989