Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Memorandum 01

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MEMORANDUM

October 11, 1995

To: Senator and Tom
From: PDW
Re: Floor Speech on Scheduling Time for S.856

Attached is a draft of the speech you proposed to deliver expressing your distress regarding the partisan bickering over the arts and humanities and your desire to have the leadership schedule a time to consider Senate Bill 856 to reauthorize the two Endowments. I suggest that you deliver it early next week for two reasons:

1. The arts staffers on the Subcommittee will be making a big push over the next week to get the reauthorization moving; and

2. The timing will help offset any concern from the arts and humanities communities that they have been neglected or abandoned when the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act were included in Senate Bill 143.

I realize that the text I prepared is a bit long, but I think that it is important for you make a major speech at this time. I am sending over the draft now so that you have time to make changes.
STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I find it both ironic and disheartening to be standing here thirty years after the establishment of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities -- thirty years distinguished by success in preserving and nurturing the arts and scholarship of our nation -- defending the very principles upon which the legislation was created. As one of the founding sponsors of the legislation authorizing the National Endowments, I am deeply concerned about the future of these extraordinary agencies.

I am told that the old arguments no longer work. Opponents dismiss the overwhelming evidence that a national infrastructure results in greater public access to our culture. They gloss over the fact that American creative excellence influences the way we are perceived as a nation and remembered when the history of our civilization is documented. They ignore the many studies which demonstrate how the arts have stimulated local economies by revitalizing downtowns areas, attracting tourism and providing jobs and taxable income.

Yet, who can deny that Americans of all ages from every corner of the country have a tremendous thirst to learn, enjoy and participate in the great diversity of our nation's culture? The public is aware that the Endowments have brought a great value to millions of Americans. The voices acknowledging this are no longer silent, but are being heard in increasing numbers. And what the people seek is not to be found in the commercial marketplace. Throughout the ages, the great legacies of art and scholarship have been created, sustained and preserved with some form of patronage. They should not now be expected to pay for themselves.

I am proud when our American artists are recognized for
their excellence with invitations to demonstrate their work abroad. I am equally proud when a child remains in school and improves his grades as a result of the positive experience he has had with a school-based arts program. The National Endowment for the Arts fosters American creativity just as the National Endowment for the Humanities stimulates learning. I firmly believe that regardless of our differences of wealth, race, religion and political belief, our cultural development binds us together, develops our character as Americans and establishes our common heritage.

The Endowments were founded and have been sustained over the years with bipartisan support. Hearings before the full Committee earlier this year demonstrated that the trend can continue. What has happened to this bipartisanship elsewhere in Congress? Why has the divisive tactics of a few led to so much time being devoted to such a small amount of money?

While critics eager to further polarize our parties have focused on a very few controversial grants, perhaps they have missed the fact that the Arts Endowment Design Program led the way in convening a design panel to plan the post-bombing redevelopment of downtown Oklahoma City. Perhaps they did not know that a world-class American dance company performed in their home town or that young members of a string quartet gave a series of workshops in their schools. Perhaps they are unaware that many grateful constituents remember the role of both Endowments in bringing hope, joy, inspiration, knowledge and healing to their own communities.

Perhaps, too, the critics did not notice the valuable changes in the agency’s procedures instituted by National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Jane Alexander last year that go a long way towards addressing the public’s concerns by strengthening the Chairman’s oversight of Endowment grantees and
making the Endowment respond more effectively to the needs of the people. I fully understand that many Americans are troubled when they hear of works distasteful to them that are funded (or rumored to be funded) in part with their tax dollars. Nevertheless, while the Endowment has awarded well over 100,000 grants, fewer than 40 have resulted in any controversy. The remaining 99.96% of all grants made are testament to the Endowment’s success.

As each of my colleagues know from their own constituents, the public’s investment in a relatively small Endowment grant is often the key to stimulating the release of large amounts of state and local funds and private contributions. Unlike most federal programs, the National Endowment for the Arts initiatives leverage $12 non-Federal dollars for each Federal dollar invested. Similarly, the National Endowment for the Humanities stimulates an average of $70 million in private support annually. In all probability, this money would never have become available to the recipients without the initial Endowment recognition. Donors look to the Endowments for leadership when they decide how to allocate their funds, and it is these private funds that guarantee the survival of the best of our country’s arts and scholarship. In short, removal of the national recognition and the stimulation of partnerships offered through federal grants will dramatically reduce all forms of state and local cultural support.

Can we not move beyond the ideology of a few? Last July, the Committee on Labor and Human Resources voted 12 to 4 in favor of an amendment in the nature of a substitute to S.856 to improve and extend the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965, the Museum Services Act, and the Acts and Artifacts Indemnity Act. The Committee Report reaffirms the Government’s commitment to, and interest in, supporting arts and humanities projects throughout the nation well into the future. After four
hearings and lengthy debate, the committee determined that the agencies do provide valuable service to the American public and should be maintained.

October is National Arts and Humanities Month. Let us use the occasion to reflect upon the eloquent words of President Kennedy delivered shortly before the Endowments were founded:

I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization that full recognition of the place of the artist... I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business and statecraft. I look forward to an America which will steadily raise its standards of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of its citizens.

I believe that the National Endowment for the Arts has been remarkably successful in furthering this ideal. Arts is no longer the privileged domain of a relatively few practitioners and connoisseurs; it no longer exists in a remote and rarefied atmosphere. It can no longer be considered as incidental or peripheral to our way of life. It is central to the life we cherish and to the beliefs we hold; for as a nation we are reaching toward maturity, and the surest sign of maturity lies in the growing expression of an indigenous and creative national culture.

The Arts Endowment provides critical assistance in creating and presenting our nation's music, theater, dance, literature, painting, sculpture, photography, film and video, design arts and folk arts. Without this funding, many popular programs would simply not exist, let alone be made available to millions. Even the very limited funds appropriated for the Endowment help keep ticket prices reasonable, thus enabling lower income citizens,
young people, the elderly and the disabled to gain access to our common culture.

The Humanities Endowment has supported and preserved the work of an extraordinary group of scholars and historians, and stimulated a wide array of new scholarship -- all of which has served to expand our nation’s collective knowledge of history, literature, philosophy, languages and religion. Many know of the agency’s role in sponsoring thrilling interpretive exhibitions and informative films on public television. It has also helped to fund such diverse projects as a dictionary of American language, an encyclopedia of bioethics, the publication of George Washington’s papers, the distribution of the Civilization series to 2,000 colleges, the microfilming of over 600,000 brittle books and repair of 100,000 additional volumes, training for conservators, summer seminars for teachers, the introduction of various new technologies to the classroom, and repairs to museum, library and school collections damaged by Hurricane Andrew and the Midwest floods.

Parents and teachers know the importance of arts and humanities curricula; and studies confirm that they teach young people creativity, increase self-discipline, develop analytical and communication skills, and are a critical means of passing on an understanding of American culture and civilization to the next generation.

I urge my colleagues to stop using the Endowments as pawns in an ideological war and move to reaffirm the Government’s support of the arts and humanities. It is very important that we act on the reauthorization of the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities Act of 1995 this year and I fervently hope that our leadership will schedule a time to consider bill S.856 as soon as possible.
STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, thirty years ago today on September 29, 1995, I was proud to witness President Lyndon Johnson sign into law the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act which established the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. That historic occasion marked the beginning of a process to preserve America's cultural heritage and to broaden access to millions of our citizens in every corner of the country, Americans who would otherwise not be able to hear a symphony orchestra concert, see a dance or theater production, or experience a great museum exhibition.

By any measure, the Endowments have been a magnificent success. People are participating in our culture in record numbers. The Endowments have made a difference in the lives of millions of children and their families. A cultural infrastructure has solidified and grown. In 1965, where there were 46 nonprofit theaters, there are over 425 today. The numbers of large orchestras has doubled, opera companies have increased six-fold, and there are ten times as many dance companies now as there were 30 years ago. In 1965, there were five state arts agencies; today every state has a vibrant public arts agency, and there are now community arts agencies in over 3,800 cities, counties and towns. Individuals who have received NEA and NEH support early in their careers have gone on to spectacular achievement, earning numerous important prizes and awards, and creating works that will prove to be an enduring legacy from the second half of the 20th century.

In my own state of Rhode Island, the Endowments have supported a "Music in our Schools" program in Providence, a folk and traditional arts apprenticeship program and the nationally-acclaimed Trinity Repertory Theater; aided the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design in renovating its painting and sculpture facilities; and provided
funds to a team of scholars at the Rhode Island Historical Society to edit the papers of Revolutionary War General Nathaniel Greene for publication. Also funded was a partnership between the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the U.S. Department of Education to integrate theater, music and design into the curriculum of the Davies Career and Technical High School which has shown to improve overall discipline and attendance at the school.

As further testimony to their success, the small investments in American culture made by the Endowments has stimulated an extraordinary amount of private dollars. Since 1985, NEH matching funds have leveraged almost $1.4 billion in third-party support for the humanities. Each federal dollar invested by NEA leverages $12 non-federal dollars.

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Endowments, we are celebrating our belief in a vigorous, democratic, far-reaching culture. The federal government has a strong role to play in transmitting our nation’s greatest artistic and scholarly achievements to the generations of the future. As the present custodians of American culture, we must continue to do so. It would be a tragedy for the 30th anniversary celebration to be marred by a reluctance to re-authorize the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities.