
Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

AT HEARING ON S.J. RES. 26, WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES

APRIL 3, 1987

This hearing of the Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities will come to order.

It gives me great pleasure today to convene a hearing on a legislative proposal to establish a White House Conference on Library and Information Services. I introduced Senate Joint Resolution 26 on January 21st of this year and, to date, 35 Senators have cosponsored this legislation. A companion bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressman William Ford.

The last such White House Conference occurred in 1979 and few will dispute how successful it was in focusing national attention on library needs and on building broader public support for improved library services. One significant benefit resulting from that Conference was that LSCA Title III funds were increased by 140% - bringing important additional program monies to the states.

It is time now to take another in-depth look in a national forum at a range of issues that are of critical importance to the well-being of our library community. Three themes have already been targeted for this Conference: library services for literacy, productivity and democracy, and I would encourage additional focal points to emerge before plans are complete.
In view of our present budget crisis, this White House Conference may not be held in 1989 as the current legislation proposes. We must recall that I first discussed the 1979 Conference as far back as 1972 and it was signed into law by President Ford in 1974 - still three years before an appropriation was made and the first state-level conferences got under way. So if more time is needed to organize a meaningful conference, I want to be sure the flexibility is there.

Our task at hand is to authorize this Conference so that the thinking and planning processes can begin in earnest. We must also look seriously at what type of Conference will work best today. In all likelihood, it will be structured very differently from the 1979 Conference - leaner and more focused. If some states do not wish to hold their own state-based meetings owing to scarce funds, we want to give them that option and, at the same time, encourage them to participate in perhaps new and creative ways.

Finally I want to address the issue of cost which has been of rightful concern. If the 1979 Conference were to be replicated in 1989 the total dollar cost has been alleged to be $15 million. It is very unlikely, however, that this earlier Conference will be replicated. What with ten years of technological advances coupled with the flexibility offered by optional state conferences, I would hope that this figure could in fact be reduced. Whatever the ultimate cost, however, I am committed to limiting the federal contribution to $5 million. The future health and vitality of our libraries is certainly worth this investment. As we saw with the last Conference, it took over 4
years to secure an appropriation, but once in hand a meaningful and worthwhile Conference resulted. This again is my aim.

I want to extend a warm welcome to all of our witnesses today and to particularly thank Dr. Boorstin for coming. We all owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude for the superior leadership he has provided as Librarian of Congress and for the support he has given to the cause of libraries everywhere. I welcome your testimony.