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Bicentennial Observance (1976): Correspondence 05

John D. Rockefeller III

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bcc: Jack Harr
Gary Knisely

30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10020

Room 5600

Circle 7-3700

July 23, 1976

Dear Mr. Quie:

There is a provision in the Senate version of the Arts and Humanities authorization bill with which my name has been associated. It concerns the Bicentennial Era. As the House-Senate Conference Committee meeting on the bill nears, it occurs to me that it might be helpful if I were to send you and Mr. Perkins background information concerning the bill as I see it.

My interest in the Bicentennial has stemmed from a belief that we should celebrate it in a serious and substantive way as well as a festive one. I believe that the concept of the Bicentennial Era is genuine and legitimate, that the period between the 200th anniversaries of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution will be as critical for us as the corresponding period was for our forebears.

As I have understood it, the core idea of the Bicentennial Era "challenge grant" proposal is to support the movement toward greater citizen participation in community affairs across the nation. The steady shift of responsibility and resources to the local level is creating a growing partnership between local officials and community groups which is beginning to typify American democracy at its best. I see this trend as an antidote to the apathy and alienation we have heard so much about in recent years.

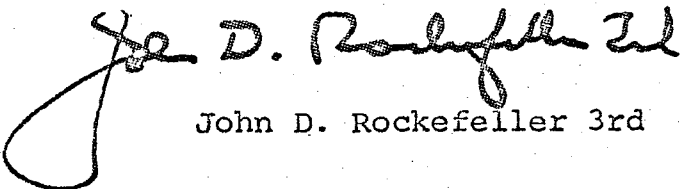
It would seem to be most desirable for the Federal Government to support this movement directly even if only on a modest basis. By its very nature, the program would be diffused broadly throughout the nation, would help to strengthen democratic institutions, and would help find new ways to solve difficult social problems.

I should point out that there is a growing constituency for a program of this kind. It consists of countless and varied community groups, and also many national organizations serving as a resource for the local groups. These include not only long-existing organizations such as the National Urban League and the League of Women Voters, but also new ones such as the Citizen Involvement Network, the National Self-Help Resource Center, and the Alliance of Neighborhood Governments. I also know that there is strong support for this idea among distinguished leaders, men such as Father Hesburgh of Notre Dame, William Friday of the University of North Carolina, and Frank Stanton of the American Red Cross.

I recognize that this provision is but one in the bill before you and that there are difficult problems to resolve. It may be that the Conference Committee will find a method other than the "challenge grant" provision to actively support citizen participation. Indeed, the matching requirement will make it difficult for the program to fully succeed; hence it would actually be much better to place it on a direct grant basis. Here my trust is in the judgment of the Conference Committee. In writing as I have, I only wish to convey my personal sense of the importance of the central idea.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John D. Rockefeller 3rd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and end.

John D. Rockefeller 3rd

The Honorable Albert H. Quie
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D. C. 20515