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Museum Services Act (1984): News Article 03

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Museum unit votes to stay under HEW administrative wing

By Ruth Dean

Washington Star Staff Writer

It was a little like a poor family being forced to throw a beloved teenager out of the house because "there were too many mouths to feed." But in this case, the child's wish to stay home prevailed.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare can scarcely be compared to this poor family, but from its gargantuan yearly budget, the miniscule Institute of Museum Services gets its administrative funding. With its qualitative grants structure having to share computer space with formula-funded agencies, it is getting to be a headache.

So the ultimatum — if it could be called that — came with dispatch Thursday when IMS director Lee Kimche received a department proposal from acting secretary Hale Champion for action on the future status of the IMS at yesterday's IMS board meeting.

HEW said it would like an answer by noon yesterday, so museum directors from all over the country hassled over the suggestion that in its upcoming congressional re-authorization, the IMS elect to leave HEW and transfer to independent status, such as that enjoyed by the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities.

Word went back to HEW from the board for an extension to an afternoon vote, so the board could have lunch and a word of advice from their "legislative parents" who brought them into being. They may have been somewhat dismayed by Sen. Claiborne Pell's reiteration of his favorite sentiment these days — that IMS "belongs in the Smithsonian," a third alternative that Rep. John Brademas (who followed Pell to the lecturn) said he didn't feel quite so passionate about.

Since the Smithsonian said it didn't want IMS when it was first suggested, Pell said he felt the Institute was still fledgling enough to stay under HEW's wing for another three-year re-authorization. But he will "continue to press, vigorously, firmly" for the Smithsonian idea.

Brademas, whose House Democratic Whip duties have not diminished his support for the arts, also opted for IMS staying with HEW for now. "There is a Department of Education (under HEW where IMS is now), and it should be clear judgment where you ought to be." With a grin, he added, "I'd be less than candid if I found it easier to suppress my enthusiasm about your going to the Smithsonian."

So, when the museum contereers headed back to their meeting, their vote was almost predictable. At first they hesitated — "it's like kissing your beloved goodbye," demurred board chairman George C. Seybolt, with the chair's suggestion someone might make a move to temporarily table. But some board members had more positive views. One of them felt it was time they were on their own.

Another prevailed with a compromise type resolution which, though it expressed appreciation for HEW's suggestion for independence "for the long haul," stated that IMS "in its present state of development, would prefer to stay with HEW for the near future." It was approved without dissent.

The next big question then will be how HEW will get the proposal to the Office of Management and Budget and back in time for the Senate re-authorization hearing on Thursday at which Senator Pell will hear IMS testimony.

Chances are, they'll have to talk around it, judging from the remarks of another luncheon speaker yesterday. Rep. William D. Ford, chairman of the Postsecondary Education subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee, said his committee is "22 days into re-authorization hearings" on the higher education bill "and still hasn't got the administration's education bill from OMB."