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Sub-Grants (1989-1990): Correspondence 09

Patrick J. Smith

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OPERA NEWS

1865 Broadway, New York, New York 10023 / Tel: (212) 582-3285

89 JUN 28 AM 11: 1

26 June 1989

Representative Sidney Yates
2234 Rayburn
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Yates,

For the last four years I have been Director of the Opera-Musical Theater Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, a post I left last February to become Editor of OPERA NEWS. While at the Endowment I had the honor of testifying before you on several occasions, and this has led me to write you now, in relation to your published suggestion that the Endowment not be allowed to make subgranting grants. I believe this decision, if taken, could have grave consequences.

I will only speak of my former Program in this regard, as it is the one I know best. In Opera-Musical Theater, while we make few subgrants, those that we do make are very important. I will concentrate on only one of these as representative. Each year, the Opera-Musical Theater Program gives a grant to the National Institute for Music Theater for fellowships for young singers (FY 87, \$108,500.; FY 88, \$106,000.; FY 89, \$106,000.). We have been making these grants for years, and indeed the Institute itself was founded by Roger Stevens (as the National Opera Institute) so that the Endowment could make grants to opera, since originally there was no opera program at the Endowment.

While at the Endowment I made an informal study of the results of the Endowment's taking over of these fellowships. I was extremely reluctant for the Endowment to do so, because of the crucial shortness of funds, but my reluctance increased when I realized that the Program would more than likely have to add a full-time staff member (we are only five in the Opera-Musical Theater

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Program) and another one- or two-day panel of three to five members to handle the application load and make funding recommendations to the National Council. We determined quite conclusively, to our satisfaction, that such a course was not in the best interests of the Endowment, the field or the taxpayer, and would in fact cost the taxpayer more money than the system in use. It should additionally not be forgotten that these grants are matching grants, so that the sum available to young singers is doubled.

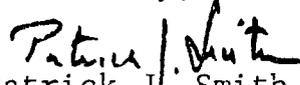
We continually monitor the National Institute (and other sub-granting institutions) in the process of its efforts. We have consistently found that the National Institute is efficient, knowledgable and cooperative, and in fact has more expertise in this area than does the Endowment.

I have concentrated on a single grant in order to highlight the problems that would occur should such grantmaking be curtailed. As you can see by this example, those that would suffer would not be the institutions but the artists, and especially the young artists at the beginnings of their careers. I do not believe that such a decision would be of value to the field.

The Endowment must work, to some extent, with other organizations to gain maximum value and efficiency from the taxpayer's dollar, and a decision to eliminate subgranting would have not only unfortunate immediate results but would, I am convinced, lead to less money being channeled to the various fields.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,


Patrick J. Smith

cc: Representative Ralph Regula
Senator Claiborne Pell