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Museum Services Act (1984): News Article 04

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Senators explore museum services at Pell hearings

By Ruth Dean
Washington Star Staff Writer

For a few moments yesterday, Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., and Sen. Jacob Javits, R-N.Y., turned a Senate re-authorization hearing into a mutual admiration society as they explored the prospects of how senators can use their influence to press the nation's museums into round-the-clock community service.

When Kennedy asked Institute of Museum Services director Lee Kimche if the 5,300 museums to which IMS gives operating grants were involved in community outreach programs, she replied, "not as much as we would like." Then she told him about a successful venture that brought New York educators and museum directors together for the first time that has resulted in educational programs which have benefited that city's children.

"Fine," beamed Kennedy who offered to "take the opportunity on my own and contact various school boards and museum directors in my state to initiate these community relations."

Javits enthusiastically endorsed Kennedy's "excellent point which I'll emulate, in fact all the committee members here might emulate. We can be very influential. And it won't cost us any money."

George C. Seybolt, IMS board chairman and former director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, cautioned it could pose some "knotty problems." Museum directors, he explained, can often employ "lofty language" not easily understood by children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

But this logic failed to dissuade the senatorial museum missionaries. "There are certain museums that lend themselves to children's interests," offered Kennedy. And Javits maintained that "subliminal perception — exposing kids to fine arts through our museums" is enough to "have a lasting effect on their lives."

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Javits even went one step further. Recalling the libel suit brought who worked in time for the King Tut exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he maintained, "museums should not be closed one hour out of 24, as long as you have swing shifts.

When a worker finishes his shift at midnight, he should be able to visit the Met. Be bold, assertive," he advised the IMS witnesses. "You're really a bunch of wimps."

The discussion, in the subcommittee on education, arts and humanities chaired by Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., almost obscured the earlier quandary over where the Institute of Museum Services will make its future home. The matter has engaged the IMS board in much dialogue with Pell, who strongly favors the Smithsonian as its eventual destination. Alternate proposals favoring giving the Met museum status — a move favored by Javits — or letting it become part of the newly sents by Javits or letting it become part of the newly

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