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Federal Advisory Council to the Arts, United States Arts Foundation: Hearings (August 1962): Speech 09

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Statement of Peter Pollack, Director of The American Federation of Arts, before the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Room 4232, New Senate Office Building, Washington, D. C., at 10:00 A.M. Wednesday, August 29, on Aid to Fine Arts - Bills S 741, S 785 and S 1250

I would like to talk in support of Senate Bill 1250 which is to establish the United States Arts Foundation and to explain our attitude towards Bill S 785, as The American Federation of Arts has experienced in the past two years a State subsidy from The New York State Council on the Arts. As Director of The American Federation of Arts, it is my privilege to serve as spokesman for 340 art museums and art centers throughout the United States, as well as for more than 120 art departments of colleges and universities which are our Chapter members.

The American Federation of Arts in its 54 years has made available to the people of the United States in the smallest towns, as well as in the largest cities, a series of fine art exhibitions which have had a lot to do in educating the American people to an understanding and appreciation of the fine arts. The AFA also helps establish museums and art centers, making available exhibitions at a financial loss, thereby guiding these essential institutions through their beginning days until they are firmly established. In fact, the major reason for the deficit of the AFA has been the program of providing art exhibitions of various kinds to these remote sections of our country which to quote the precise words of Bill S 1250 "would be unavailable to the prospective audience without such assistance."

The American Federation of Arts is the only organization in this country whose membership is open to all the elements of the art world, including artists, collectors, museum workers, scholars

and students, as well as to the general public. And it is because we have made available exhibitions, lectures, slides, catalogues and professional advice to the public through art centers away from the large metropolitan cities, that we recognize what a vital force such education in the arts can become in the cultural life of our country.

The Federal Government in its Bill S 1250 for the establishment of the United States Arts Foundation would perhaps correct the fact that the United States is the only major country in the world which has not given governmental support to the visual arts, but for those calamitous days of the depression when the Government through the Federal Art projects helped preserve and develop the talents of our nation's artists. I am so glad to find that the Federal Government is not becoming interested in art now just as an emergency measure but rather aims to establish on a permanent basis a foundation to develop the cultural welfare of our country.

Federal endorsement in support of the fine arts described by Bill S 785 which calls for assistance to the States for the development of programs and projects in the arts, I can speak about with some experience on this as the AFA has already helped in this kind of a program for the New York State Council on the Arts. The AFA was honored to have been chosen as the preparation and circulation agency by the New York State Council on the Arts exhibition program for the year 1961 and repeated in 1962. Through the \$35,000 made available by the State of New York the AFA was able to assemble more than a dozen different exhibitions which it has sent on tour throughout the State of New York to galleries in small centers, town halls, high schools, libraries, and museums. The

usual nominal fee is \$15 to \$20 per exhibition of three weeks, but for one major exhibition entitled "Forty Artists under Forty," which opened at the Whitney Museum just last month and which is now to be circulated throughout the State of New York at a fee of only \$100. This is about one sixth the fee The American Federation of Arts, which is itself subsidized by its Board, would have had to charge were it not sponsored by the State of New York. An exhibition of this stature and scope, representing the genius of our young painters and sculptors today, would be beyond the means of any but the most well endowed museums in the large cities of our country. I would like to call your attention to the variety of exhibitions the AFA arranged and circulated for the New York State Council on the Arts. Masterpieces of photography, Indian art of the United States, the Story of Architecture in New York State, Hudson River School Paintings, How to Look at a Painting, Masters of American Water-color, Prints by Great Masters, Japanese Prints, just to mention a few. The whole range of art that we can assemble into exhibitions which we demand must not only be stimulating but also must give the spectator an opportunity to see and feel a work of original art of the very finest quality that can be made available to him. It is these desired exhibitions which make themselves felt as factors in the development of the cultural level of a community. The exhibitions the AFA circulates for the State of New York are not of subjects superimposed on the tastes of the spectator. Noteworthy educators, curators and authorities on art the AFA enlists to assemble the various kinds of exhibitions specifically desired by the community. The range is therefore from the historic and the traditional to the experimental and the avante garde, with no more intellectual imposition than there is political control.

Bill S 785 could be one of the most effective ways for a State to develop its individual art program calling on the help of the qualified professional people in the art world within the state and in the nation, so as to consider the specific needs of the people living in the particular state.

The AFA would favor any legislation that would be beneficial to the arts - which would broaden the cultural base among our people. We indeed favor Bill S 1250 introduced by the Honorable Senator Javits to establish the United States Arts Foundation on a federal level. On a state level - Bill S 785 would be, in my opinion, an effective measure in accomplishing its aims.

As for Bill S 741, to establish a Federal Advisory Council on the Arts, I would just like to say that the AFA has supported this measure since it was first introduced in 1955, and has expressed its support strongly each succeeding year. The Federation feels that this legislation is basic, by making available to any agency of the Federal Government the best qualified and professional opinion, in all fields of the arts. One feature of the bill which we believe merits our particular support is the provision that leading national organizations in the various art fields should have a voice in nominating members of the Council. We again wish to record our strong support of this Bill.