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## Museum Services Act (1973): Speech 02

Claiborne Pell

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REMARKS BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL AT THE ANNUAL MEETING  
OF THE MARINE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, MYSTIC SEAPORT, MYSTIC,  
CONNECTICUT FRIDAY, JULY 21, 1972

I am honored and delighted at this opportunity to address this annual meeting of the Marine Historical Association.

I am especially pleased to be here because the goals of your association and the programs of Mystic Seaport closely parallel some of my own principal areas of interest and official responsibility as a legislator and as an individual.

Here at Mystic Seaport you are involved essentially in the operation of a museum, you are involved in education, and you are involved in the relationship between the oceans and our national life.

As Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Education, the Subcommittee on the Smithsonian Institution, and the Subcommittee on Oceans and International Environment, I feel a very real kinship with this association, its members, and its goals.

Based on my work with these committees, I would like to offer a few observations in each of these areas--the museum, education, and the oceans--

all of which have been fused, and focused, and intertwined so successfully here at Mystic Seaport.

First, let me say a few words about our national maritime heritage and its importance to our country today. The United States ranks as one of the greatest maritime nations in history--in terms of Naval strength, ocean commerce, fisheries, ocean research, ocean recreation, ocean resource development, and natural geographic position--no nation overall can compare with the accomplishments and capabilities of the United States.

What is truly remarkable, in the face of our maritime stature, is that so few Americans think of their country as a maritime nation. We are inclined, instead, to think of our country in terms of industrial capacity, its highways, or its prowess in space and aeronautics, and its great achievements in agriculture.

Largely as a result of this lack of recognition of our maritime status, we do not as a nation give sufficient attention to nourishing, preserving, and developing our maritime strengths. Some of our fisheries are in trouble, our American flag merchant fleet has dwindled, and ocean research is badly underfunded,

and the ocean environment is deteriorating.

I am convinced that a major reason for our lack of attention to maritime matters today is an ignorance of our maritime history--a lack of appreciation of how much of the strength of this nation and the character of its people was drawn from the shipbuilding, fishing, sailing, and trading skills and accomplishments of America as a young nation.

The excellent and imaginative programs developed and instituted here at Mystic Seaport are doing a great deal to restore the perspective of the United States as a maritime nation by reminding us of the important role the seas played in the process of building this nation.

I believe in the future we will find greater public interest and support for maritime and oceanographic activities as a result of the Seaport's activities.

Indeed, I believe we already are seeing a rekindled interest in ocean affairs, sparked by Mystic Seaport and other institutions, by popularization of oceanography on television, and by a growing awareness of the environmental importance to man of the oceans.

There is another excellent reason why a familiarity with our maritime past is valuable. We live in a time when many Americans are beginning to search for their origins, as individuals, as ethnic groups, and as citizens of a nation.

There is a growing realization that we cannot really understand ourselves, and judge where we are headed, unless we know where we have been and how we have grown. Mystic Seaport is helping in a very significant way to help meet the need for knowledge of our roots and origins.

Indeed, that is one of the great functions of museums generally. Political scientists and sociologists tell us that Americans have been predominantly a restless people, looking constantly to the future, to tomorrow, and not much interested in yesterday, much less yester-year.

We can be thankful, however, that throughout this nation there have been groups of far-sighted individuals who have made prodigious and persistent efforts to preserve the essential materials of our past.

Scattered across our country are some 5,000 museums containing a

priceless and irreplaceable record of human, natural, and national history.

The record, the artifacts, and the history all are there in our nation's museums.

For many years, however, the very word museum had a stuffy and undesirable connotation. The word suggested dimly lit and dusty rooms.

Walter Pater, writing in 1886, said:

"A museum is seldom a cheerful place--oftenest induces the feeling that nothing could ever have been young."

Or as George Santayana wrote in 1905:

"An artist may visit a museum, but only a pedant can live there."

Clearly neither Pater nor Santayana ever visited Mystic Seaport, or saw the crowds of enthralled school children sopping up the fascinating story of our maritime history through the Seaport's lively and imaginative exhibits.

Obviously, museums are changing. Throughout the country, museums are no longer merely unlocking their doors at the appointed hour. In city after city, museums are reaching out to the people, through the schools, through new activities, through television, through innovative and effective programs.

And the American people are responding. Consider what has happened to museum attendance. In 1960, 200 million visits were made to museums. Five years later, in 1965, there were 300 million museum visits. In two short years, the number of museum visits jumped to 560 million. And in 1970, museums received more than 700 million visitors.

During the decade from 1960 to 1970, the number of visits to museums more than tripled.

But the new popularity of our nation's museums should not be confused with prosperity. The staggering increase in attendance is causing many museums not to prosper, but to falter financially.

I need not tell you that increased attendance means increased costs of operation. And the same inflation that has hit so hard at the family food budget has struck just as forcefully at museum operating costs.

The results of these increased costs are discouraging:

In 1970, according to a survey by the American Association of Museums, 44 percent of the museums in American ran a deficit. Of the museums responding

to the survey, 30 percent charged an admission fee, but even with this additional source of revenue, 46 percent of the museums charging admission fees reported deficits.

The yearly operating expenses of our nation's museums, according to the AAM survey is \$760 million--or a nationwide average of about one dollar a visitor, and that does not, of course, include amortization of the capital investment.

That level of expenditure obviously does not support any luxurious level of museum operation. Indeed, many of our museums are forced to cut corners, and many operate with inadequate and underpaid staffs.

The American Association of Museums study showed that many of our museums are not in a position to compete effectively with other institutions for qualified professional staff. According to the survey, 50 percent of the museums offer no formal staff retirement program, 55.4 percent offer no health program, and 63 percent offer no life insurance program for employees.

Despite the austerity indicated by these statistics, many American



museums are in financial crisis. The traditional sources of finance for museums--private contributions, admission fees, and some state and local government support, have proved inadequate to the growing needs.

I believe there is a strong case for Federal Government assistance to museums. Most of our museums are not purely local institutions of purely local interest. Like Mystic Seaport, they serve and welcome visitors from throughout the country.

The strong educational function of museums is another reason for Federal Government aid to museums. The Federal Government has an acknowledged responsibility in education, and museums are an immensely rich educational resource. Of all visitors to our nation's museums, 59 percent are students--24 percent from elementary schools, 20 percent from secondary schools, and 15 percent from colleges.

The recognition of the need for Federal Government assistance to museums is growing. In 1970, for example, when Congress adopted the Environmental Education Act, museums were specifically included as educational

institutions, and I was proud to lead the effort for that recognition of the importance of museums.

And, in the same year, we were able to enlarge in a modest way the scope of the National Museum Act to provide assistance through the Smithsonian Institution, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

But we do not yet have a broad-gauged program of general assistance to museums. In November of last year, I introduced legislation to authorize such a program. The bill, S. 2837, the Museum Services Act, would authorize a program of grants to museums to help them increase and improve their services, with the grants being administered by an Institute for the Improvement of Museum Services.

Very frankly, I do not expect immediate Congressional action on this proposal. But I do expect the bill will serve to focus attention on the need for action to preserve and improve our nation's museums.

The comprehensive study of our national museums entitled, "America's

Museums: The Belmont Report, " stated:

"America's five thousand museums are among our most precious cultural and educational resources. Their collections, their trained staffs, and their facilities contribute immeasurably to the environment of our nation's life and to educational advancement at every level. "

Mystic Seaport is an outstanding example of the public value of museums.

I wish you well in your continued efforts to serve the public, and I pledge to you my continued support on behalf of museums in the Congress.