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Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I rise in opposition to this amendment. The amendment suffers from the same problems as most content restrictions on what type of expression our society can or cannot support. While I might well have voted against the particular grant at issue here on the basis of its quality, to my mind restrictions of this nature invariably do more harm than good. These restrictions inevitably end up excluding cultural expression that is truly worthy of support, while often not ensuring that all controversial art is eliminated. Thus, the fundamental criterion for support of American creativity ought to be a work of art or scholarship's excellence. In order to best address this issue, the pending reauthorization of the NEA provides that both laypeople and experts review grant applications and provides for extremely stringent examination by several levels of review both inside and outside the agency on every grant.

I also take note that over the last year Chairman Jane Alexander has instituted a series of most valuable changes in the agency's procedures. The agency will no longer accept applications from organizations, other than the state arts councils, which subgrant Endowment funds out to other projects. In addition, the Endowment will now require that progress reports be submitted before the release of the final third of a grant award. Permission from the agency will be necessary before a grantee can modify its activities from those approved by the Endowment. These changes give the Chairman greater oversight over Endowment grants and I believe they will go a long way towards addressing the concerns of many of our citizens.

I believe that general restrictions on the content of works of art or performances do not accord well with our longstanding American tradition of free expression and paying tribute to excellence. I hope my colleagues will reject this amendment.