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Cuts Slated for Public Broadcasting, Arts

Public TV, Radio Fear Loss of Quality

Public broadcasters say the determination of President Reagan to cut the national budget presents them with a dangerously fuzzy subsidy picture.

The reductions in broadcast funds would severely undermine the 1967 congressional mandate to provide quality programming as an alternative to commercial network television and radio, the broadcasters say.

At least one bill (HR 3512 — H Rept 97-29) passed by the House calls for a 35 percent cut in 1983 money, which critics contend would mean the end of National Public Radio, the producer of such critically acclaimed shows as "All Things Considered." (*Supplemental appropriation, Weekly Report p. 844*)

Advocates of the cuts say the doom-day predictions are exaggerated and that national priorities require trimming aid to public broadcasting.

"Taxpayers as a whole should not be compelled to subsidize entertainment for a select few," the administration said in an April budget message.

A report by the House Republican Study Committee, a legislative research group financed by conservative GOP members, charged that public affairs shows "are increasingly coming under justifiable attack for one-sided presentation" and many have a "decided liberal undercurrent."

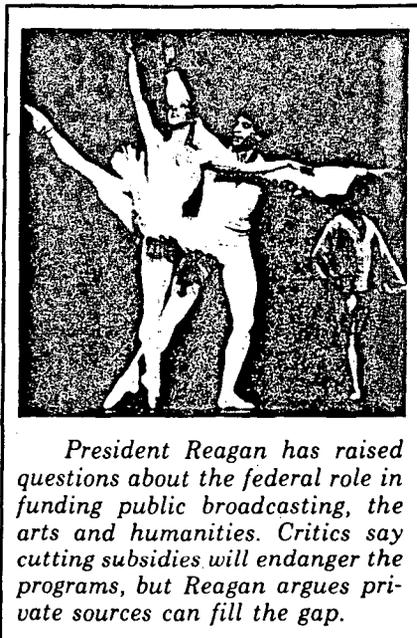
Congressional supporters of public broadcasting say subsidies are needed to continue educational and cultural diversity. That was why, they say, Congress created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in 1967 (PL 90-129) to disburse federal aid to public stations. (*Congress and the Nation Vol. II, p. 297*)

They credit the aid with having helped non-commercial broadcasting expand so that public television now is available to 90 percent of the U.S. households with television, while public radio is accessible to 65 percent. Public broadcasting received 27 percent of its funds from the federal government in fiscal 1979, with the rest from state, business, private or other sources.

However, supporters of public broadcasting concede that the anti-spending mood in Congress will probably mean some cuts, although perhaps not as much as Reagan wants. A bill reported by the Senate Commerce Committee (S 720) accepts Reagan's proposed reductions while a House Energy and Commerce Committee bill (HR 3238) is more generous. (*Detail of bills, box, p. 933*)

But both measures are designed to create what one

(continued on p. 932)



President Reagan has raised questions about the federal role in funding public broadcasting, the arts and humanities. Critics say cutting subsidies will endanger the programs, but Reagan argues private sources can fill the gap.

Arts Said to Become Province of Rich

President Reagan is counting on business to play Medici to U.S. artists and scholars if Congress approves his plan to slash federal arts and humanities funding by 50 percent.

But critics of his plan say business cannot fill the gap left by a federal pull-out, and the arts once again will become the province of the rich.

Among the first victims of severe subsidy reductions will be the performances in small cities and rural areas which could not finance or attract top caliber artists on their own, arts advocates say.

Performers already have pleaded in word and song to House and Senate committees to save the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and its sister agency,

the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), from the proposed cuts.

At a March 26 hearing of the Senate Appropriations Interior Subcommittee, opera diva Leontyne Price sang to the tune of "God Bless America":

*Save the performing arts, arts that I love.
Stand beside us and guide us
Through the night with those funds from above...*

The Reagan administration argues that the need to cut government spending requires a reduction in federal funding for the endowments. The grants, instead of spurring private donations, have supplanted them. The private sector should take more responsibility for supporting the arts, administration spokesmen say.

President Carter had asked for \$175 million for the NEA and \$169 million for the humanities endowment for fiscal 1982. Reagan requested \$88 million for the arts agency in fiscal 1982; \$85 million for NEH.

In addition, Reagan on May 6 named an arts and humanities task force to examine ways to restructure federal cultural programs.

The administration also may seek fiscal 1981 rescissions of roughly \$30 million for each agency.

Although there is general congressional support for both agencies, key members of funding and authorizing committees indicate there probably will be some cuts, although possibly not as much as Reagan proposed.

In addition, some members have expressed criticism of NEA and NEH policies that could lead to funding changes.

(continued on p. 934)

Arts and Humanities

(continued from p. 931)

Catalysts vs. Substitutes

Currently, the NEA awards grants to individual artists, as well as to ballet or theater companies. The NEH gives grants to individual scholars and to libraries, universities and museums.

Recipients in both cases are first recommended by a panel of their peers. They then are screened by the presidentially appointed national councils overseeing each endowment and finally selected by the chairman of the agency. (*Background, 1979 Weekly Report p. 464*)

Spokesmen say the grants lend a "seal of approval" that helps spur private giving.

They contend they already follow Reagan's prescription of relying heavily on private funding. About 28 percent of the humanities endowment's federal funds and 95 percent of the arts endowment's are matched with private money.

But the administration insists the endowments have replaced, not stimulated, private giving. The federal government should not be the nation's primary cultural arbiter and funder. Individuals, businesses and the states should do even more to support the arts and humanities, administration aides say.

"If indeed the endowments provide a 'Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval,' is that a legitimate [government] role, to decide what is art and what isn't art?" asked Aram Bakshian Jr., special assistant to the president.

To answer that and other questions, Reagan on May 6 named actor Charlton Heston and University of Chicago President Hanna H. Gray to head a task force to make recommendations by Labor Day on restructuring federal cultural programs.

The group also will consider whether to convert the endowments to a federally chartered, government-funded corporation similar to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Bakshian said the corporation would be "more of a fund-raising and less of an accrediting group" than the current endowments.

In announcing the task force appointments, Reagan emphasized his "deep concern for the arts and humanities in America." Nevertheless, the need to make painful cuts throughout government places the arts and humanities low among funding priorities, spokesmen said.

"The point is, a 50 percent cut from the endowments wouldn't mean anybody is going to starve to death," said Bakshian, referring to the impact of cutting the cultural programs compared to reducing funds for the needy.

Reviews From the Hill

Opposing the arts, say lawmakers, is much like opposing motherhood.

"I'm for artistic excellence but I'm glad to see the sun come up every morning, too," commented Rep. Ralph S. Regula, R-Ohio, a member of the Appropriations Interior Subcommittee that has jurisdiction over NEA and NEH funding. Regula favors some cuts for the endowments.

The House Education and Labor Committee, which also has jurisdiction, will consider reducing their authoriza-

tions to comply with budget reconciliation requirements to cut \$12.1 billion in budget authority in fiscal 1982.

Paul Simon, D-Ill., chairman of the Postsecondary Education Subcommittee, which will markup the plan in early June, is against a 50 percent cut. So is Sidney R. Yates, D-Ill., chairman of the Appropriations Interior Subcommittee, which has scheduled markup in June.

Despite their support for the endowments, Simon and Yates will probably be forced to make sizable cuts.

"There aren't very many alternatives," said an Education Committee aide. "If you don't cut it there," other programs will have to be reduced instead, he said.

An aide to Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Interior Subcommittee, said the senator had not taken a stand on the proposed reductions. Markup is tentatively set for July.

Meanwhile, the Senate Labor and Human Resources Education Subcommittee put the endowments through a roller coaster ride of cuts and restorations.

First the subcommittee approved a 25 percent cut for the two agencies in its fiscal 1982 reconciliation recommendations. Then it decided to make \$9 million and \$12 million fiscal 1981 cuts in the arts and humanities endowments, respectively.

However, subcommittee Chairman Robert T. Stafford, R-Vt., announced he would try to restore the 1981 funds during full committee markup June 9 and 10.

The Agencies' Defenders

Members of the National Council on the Arts, a presidentially appointed body of 26 private citizens that oversees the NEA, have launched the most visible lobbying effort to protect federal funds for the arts. New York theatrical producer Hal Prince announced May 12 that he and some other council members would fight the administration's recommendations.

Though technically administration spokesmen, the agencies' chairmen — Livingston L. Biddle Jr. of the arts endowment and Joseph D. Duffey of the humanities agency — are fighting the cuts. Both are Carter holdovers slated to leave their posts in the fall.

Biddle and Duffey say the grants are catalysts, not substitutes, for private gifts.

Between 1955 and 1965, the year the endowments were created, private contributions to cultural institutions rose only slightly, from \$199 million to \$205 million annually, Biddle said. Since 1965, private donations have soared to \$2.7 billion annually, a spurt that Biddle attributes directly to the federal funding. (*Background, Congress and the Nation II, p. 722*)

The endowments' total budgets have risen dramatically since 1965. In fiscal 1966, the NEA had a budget of \$2.5 million and awarded 141 grants. By fiscal 1981, the endowment was handing out 6,000 grants with a budget of \$159 million.

Also, each federal dollar is matched by an average of five private dollars, an NEA spokesman said.

Sometimes the average is exceeded. For example, the St. Louis Symphony raised \$8 million privately to match a \$1 million endowment challenge grant even though challenge grants require only three private dollars for every federal dollar.

Duffey, Biddle and others also attack allegations that the endowments fund questionable projects.

Some humanities projects, for example, have been criticized for being frivolous. Coming under attack were



A black ensemble group performs with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

certain amateur oral history projects in which individuals record their experiences. One mentioned in a *New York Times* article involved people chronologically listing their favorite songs and junk foods during their lifetimes.

Duffey defended oral history programs as a way for the humanities to reach out from the ivory tower and into the lives of immigrant and indigenous groups.

"After all, Plato was writing oral history," Duffey said.

Biddle also moved to counter charges of elitism.

Rep. Regula, for example, complained about "a maldistribution in the system" that steers most arts grants to New York. Regula said a cultural block grant to the states might solve the problem.

Biddle conceded that New York gets about 20 percent of the arts endowment's funds, but added, "Anybody who studies the arts recognizes New York is still the international [cultural] center."

Private Giving

Corporation spokesmen say they cannot pick up the nation's cultural tab in the wake of reduced federal arts funding.

"Decidedly not," responded Robert W. Bonine, vice president for community relations at Pillsbury Corp. in Minneapolis, which contributes to the arts primarily in the Twin Cities area. Out of \$3 million set aside for charity, Pillsbury gave about \$600,000 to the arts last year.

According to the Business Council for the Arts, business gave \$22 million in 1967 to arts groups; by 1979, contributions had grown to \$436 million. The council is composed of 146 corporations with arts donation programs.

Still, corporate arts donations are only a fraction of total business charitable contributions.

Less than 30 percent of all corporations have a program of contributing to charities or other groups. Of those, 10 percent to 15 percent give to the arts, according to Edward M. Strauss Jr., council president. The council has not taken a position on the Reagan recommendations.

Strauss and other spokesmen warn that while corporate donations have increased steadily, arts groups cannot expect an immediate bail-out.

"In the near term, no way; over the long term, it's a possibility," said Edward M. Block, vice president for pub-

lic relations for the American Telephone & Telegraph Co. (AT&T).

Robert Thill, AT&T secretary for contributions, said educational and social service groups escalated demands for aid after their program cuts were proposed. They have "been bringing requests in by the wheelbarrow," he said.

Moreover, business spokesmen said firms generally donate within their own communities rather than nationally.

The Reagan administration maintains that a potential reservoir of private and state donations lies untapped.

"There are more dollars out there and not just from corporations," contends the White House's Bakshian. He cited one community that raised \$15,000 in pledges for its local symphony after just 15 minutes of radio appeals as an example of how quickly money might be raised.

Bonine said that the arts would still make out better than other budget-battered groups. "Patrons of the arts have far more money . . . and will be able to raise money more easily than human services organizations," he said.

Arts for the Rich?

If the Reagan budget cuts go through, the United States will return to an era "when arts were the province of the few," Yates said in an interview.

And it is "back to the old idea of being a starving artist in a garret," said Anne Murphy, executive director of the American Arts Alliance, which represents opera, theater and dance companies.

Endowment supporters say they have brought the arts and humanities to people who previously had no access to them. One \$5,000 arts endowment grant, for example, went to the University of Southern Mississippi to help two local communities start their own choruses.

The humanities endowment, in addition to funding scholarly works like *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, also supported *Odyssey*, a twelve-hour public television series on anthropology and archeology.

According to Biddle, the NEA will have to reduce its grants by roughly 2,000 next year. Moreover, individual programs will be reduced sharply. The theater program may eliminate nearly all grants except to professional theaters. Among the theater areas that could be cut are training, touring, script services and residencies for playwrights.

NEH officials said they are uncertain how many of the 2,300 grants awarded annually will be eliminated.

Corporate spokesmen say they will be reluctant to support smaller, more innovative programs without the endowment's "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," as Bonine put it.

But "If there is no federal money, the one thing that would not disappear is the black-tie concerts" in the big cities, said the alliance's Murphy. "What would disappear is touring [ballet companies and symphony orchestras] and concerts in the schools."

Endowment advocates say their grants have helped spawn some world-renowned artists. Novelists John Irving, author of "The World According to Garp," and Maxine Hong Kingston, whose "China Men" won an American Book Award, are only a few of those who received grants at formative stages of their careers.

But Bakshian and others contend that with or without the endowments, great thoughts still will be thought, great paintings still will be painted.

"I don't know of any great works that were postponed" because of a lack of government support, Bakshian said. ■

—By Laura B. Weiss