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11-3-1977

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"Biddle, Livy: Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (1977-1979): News Article 05" (1977).
Biddle, Livy: Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (1977-1979). Paper 9.
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NOV 3 1977 *Exp. 13.500*

NEA NOMINEE SEES LEGAL CHECKS KEEPING POLITICS OUT OF ARTS

Washington, Nov. 2 — President Carter's nominee to become chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts says he's not concerned about charges that the arts are becoming politicalized, because of safeguards written into the law creating the endowment — a law he wrote.

Livingston Biddle, who will

succeed Nancy Hanks as NEA chief, told a Senate confirmation hearing today that the federal role is to encourage, not dominate, the nation's arts groups. This partnership was of deep concern when the endowment was created, he said.

Biddle said words like "elitism" and "populism" are being used to suggest a polarization of the arts. "Some suggest that elitism applies to the quality of our major arts institutions, orchestras, opera companies (and) that populism applies to an opposite and equally separate domain — the state and local organizations which represent the arts at the grassroots," he said.

"I am convinced a very different approach is needed, a different means of defining our cultural goals." He suggested that elitism can indeed mean quality and that populism should connote "access" to the arts across the land. Bridge the two words and they mean "access to the best," he told the Senate Human Resources Committee.

Biddle, deputy chairman of the endowment under its first honcho, Roger L. Stevens, wrote the legislation in 1963 which led to the establishment of the National Council on the Arts.