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Cap on NEA Funding Defeated

By Jacqueline Trescott

Washington Post Staff Writer

A House subcommittee agreed yesterday to extend the legislative life of the federal arts and humanities agencies for two years. And the panel robustly considered, then defeated, an amendment to freeze federal arts funds to states that cut their own funding after receiving a federal increase.

As a sign of increasing concern over the accountability of arts funding, Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Wis.) introduced the amendment, which would give Congress more of a watchdog role in the transfer of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts to the states.

When NEA was reauthorized in 1990, Gunderson recalled, the money going directly to the states was increased from 20 percent to 27.5 percent, and 7.5 percent of funds targeted rural and under-served programs. But Gunderson charged yesterday that many states are using the federal dollars to "offset reductions in their own funding for the arts."

In fiscal 1992, he said, NEA gave Florida \$575,000, a 20 percent increase over its fiscal 1990 grant, and then the state cut its own

funding for the arts by 29 percent. Gunderson's amendment would keep the state federal grants at their previous level if they turned around and reduced state spending.

"It was not our intention to shift the burden of funding state arts programs from the states to the federal government," Gunderson said.

Rep. Pat Williams (D-Mont.), chairman of the subcommittee on labor-management relations, voted against the amendment; he said some of the points Gunderson raised were interesting, but he wanted time to study the statistics. New Jersey's Marge Roukema, the subcommittee's ranking Republican, also voted no.

Wholehearted support came from Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio), who said the amendment would put "a little bit of teeth into the language without being onerous. It is entirely fair." But it was defeated by a vote of 13 to 7.

Gunderson said he will submit the amendment again next week when the full Committee on Education and Labor considers the reauthorization of NEA, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Institute of Museum Services. "I am not giving up," said Gunderson. "We don't penalize [the states], but we don't reward them."