Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Speech 06

P. D. W.

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MEMORANDUM

January 25, 1996

To: Senator
From: PDW
Re: NEA Statement

Attached is the draft of a statement on the Arts Endowment as you requested. I am awaiting some additional information from the NEH and will submit a draft statement on that agency next week.
Mr. President, I strongly oppose the effort to defund the National Endowment for the Arts. Playing games with the budget appropriations in this manner is contrary to the nation's welfare. The intent to incapacitate and slowly dismantle the agency by obstructing the planning and grantmaking processes appears to be a deliberate attempt to terminate federal support for the arts and to deny Americans access to their cultural heritage.

Some may believe that the arts will be able to generate the local support necessary to sustain themselves, but I am fearful the opposite will be true. Local dollars are already stretched to capacity. Major arts funders such as The Rockefeller Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts in Philadelphia and the James Irvine Foundation in California have stated publicly that foundations will not and cannot replace Federal funding. Corporate giving has declined in recent years despite economic growth and there is little, if any, reason to believe that will change. The commercial entertainment industry continues to resist investing in the source of much of its talent. Further, removal of both the national recognition and the stimulation of partnerships offered through federal grants will produce a dramatic reduction in state and local support.

The Rockefeller Foundation surveyed 40 foundations and found every donor but one unable to increase their cultural portfolios. Dr. Alberta Arthurs concluded her report of the study by stating "The cultural situation we have created in the last 30 years is a dense and delicate balance of private and public interests and funds. If this is to be disturbed, what will replace it?".

Opponents of the Arts Endowment know that a replacement is unlikely. The cry to "privatize" is but a code word for "eliminate". These are the same people who advocate for
new tax laws that would end deductions for individual and corporate contributions to the arts.

The National Endowment for the Arts has been remarkably successful in furthering the ideals for which it was created. The arts are no longer viewed as the privileged domain of a relatively few practitioners and connoisseurs; they are no longer considered as incidental or peripheral to our way of life. Every single community in our country now has access to its indigenous and creative national culture. Without Arts Endowment funding, many popular programs simply would not exist, let alone be made available to millions of Americans in all parts of our nation. The major arts institutions serving well-to-do patrons in urban areas will survive, but how many children, elderly, disabled, inner city and rural dwellers will be able to participate? How will new audiences gain access to our common culture?

Targeting the Arts Endowment is not about balancing the budget. It is about throwing out the solid arts networks built over 30 years because of unease caused by a few controversial grants. The Arts Endowment has already cracked down on such grants, and it has certainly borne its fair share of cuts. Recently, the agency eliminated 47 percent of its staff positions and reorganized its administration and grantmaking to adjust to a 40 percent reduction in its budget. Anything more would severely damage the availability and accessibility of countless arts programs in communities nationwide. It must not happen.

I would urge my colleagues to stop playing politics with the Endowment, honor the appropriations that both Houses have passed, and enact a bridge that will enable this agency, already hampered by severe funding reductions, to get on with its valuable work in an orderly fashion.
STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I rise in strong opposition to the latest Republican effort to defund the National Endowment for the Arts. Playing games with the budget appropriations in this manner is both underhanded and contrary to the wishes of the majority of Americans. The intent to incapacitate and slowly dismantle the agency by obstructing the planning and grantmaking processes appears to be a deliberate attempt to terminate federal support for the arts and to deny Americans access to their cultural heritage.

Some may believe that the arts will be able to generate the local support necessary to sustain themselves, but I am fearful the opposite will be true. Local dollars are already stretched to capacity. Major arts funders such as The Rockefeller Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts in Philadelphia and the James Irvine Foundation in California have stated publicly that foundations will not and cannot replace Federal funding. Corporate giving has declined in recent years despite economic growth and there is little, if any, reason to believe that will change. The commercial entertainment industry continues to resist investing in the source of much of its talent. Further, removal of both the national recognition and the stimulation of partnerships offered through federal grants will produce a dramatic reduction in state and local support.

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