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## Kerr, John Hoare (1978-1984): Memorandum 06

Livingston L. Biddle Jr.

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NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR  
THE ARTS

WASHINGTON  
D.C. 20506



A Federal agency advised by the  
National Council on the Arts

M E M O R A N D U M

TO : All Endowment Staff and All Parties Concerned

FROM : Livingston L. Biddle, Jr. *L.B.*

DATE : April 6, 1978

SUBJECT: Rotation Policy

We have had a number of discussions among Program Directors and some time now to react to my earlier statements regarding a rotation policy for our Program Directors.

These statements, I believe, relate in logical sequence to the changes I developed upon becoming Arts Endowment Chairman last November.

The appointment of three Deputy Chairmen -- rather than the one in previous years -- was motivated by a desire to make the Endowment as responsive as possible, in our major areas of interest and endeavor, to the changing and mounting needs of the arts and the growing demands on the Endowment.

I believe in a concept of renewal from the fields of the arts we serve. We are a Federal agency. We have immense responsibilities to keep the arts evolving. Perhaps of all areas of Federal involvement, our agency is among the most sensitive, for we deal with freedom of expression, with qualities of imagination, awareness, and the evolution of new insights and perceptions.

Traditionally, the Endowment has served as a catalyst in accord with its legislative mandate.

The Federal role should never be dominant. Its leadership should not be static. Its leadership should not be based on a concept of irreplaceability. It, too, should be refreshed from time to time by change.

With respect to the Chairman, the Council, and the panels, rotation is a part of our historic development and basic philosophy. And I believe this philosophy should apply to the positions of our Program Directors. In some important respects their positions are the most sensitive of all. No Chairman, no Deputy, no single Council Member, no panelist, can be fully knowledgeable in all fields of the arts. The Program Directors, however, have a special responsibility, a special proximity to the major art forms. Special reliance is placed on their abilities. The principle of rotation, in my view, would be incomplete without their involvement in the process.

This, then, is a matter of principle and philosophy to which I am committed. Stated another way, I believe no one in the areas I have mentioned -- Program Director, Council Member, panelist, Chairman -- should serve at the Endowment forever. You all know my views about my own term of service. I announced them at my nomination hearings to the Senate and I have oft-times repeated them -- if my job has been excellently carried out, I would hope for consideration for a second four-year term then, but I would consider it improper to serve longer.

And, if there is to be a principle of rotation, I believe it should be fairly applied. I also have said many times it should be flexible enough to mitigate against any possible individual hardships and to allow for maximum individual contributions to the Endowment and to the arts.

I have used the period of "five years" as a kind of benchmark for future guidance. Some have interpreted this to mean an arbitrary time limitation. Nothing could be further from my intentions. An arbitrary procedure runs counter to them.

Within the principle of rotation, I believe there should be considerable flexibility. Five years is only in most general terms a guide, in no way a determinant. A shorter or longer term should certainly be possible. In some cases a longer term could be highly desirable. Each program area and its leadership should be carefully assessed year by year. No arbitrary kind of uniformity should apply.

But we should all be clear that I believe rotation is of fundamental value to the well-being of the Endowment and to its responsiveness to our constituencies. Flexibility is desirable. But, to me, the principle of rotation is of basic importance.

I reviewed these matters with the National Council on the Arts, and with other leaders in the arts before stating my own deep convictions.

In the weeks ahead each program will be addressed separately. We will be seeking much valuable guidance from the various arts fields, and the help and guidance and understanding of those most involved at the Endowment, and of all those who work together here. Those most involved at present know they have both my high regard and lasting appreciation for the value of their work.

It is my intention that as this policy and procedure develops the Arts Endowment will become an increasing resource for all arts fields and that those who work here, when they leave their particular program areas in the future, can go forward toward broader horizons of interest to themselves and of service to others, in some cases, possibly at the Endowment itself.

All Endowment Staff and All Parties Concerned -4-

Finally, rotation should not affect continuity. Special care will be taken to avoid any disruption of Endowment program activity.

I have not put these thoughts on paper before, wishing to hear carefully all sides of the issue, but I believe it is now appropriate for me to express these opinions to you all.