Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Speech 07

Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I rise in strong opposition to this amendment. The five million dollars this bill already rescinds from the National Endowment for the Arts will do serious harm to cultural endeavors all around our nation, but particularly to those communities around our nation which have the least access to our cultural heritage.

Our nation’s Arts Endowment provides critical assistance for cultural works and presentations in music, theater, literature, dance, design arts and folk arts around the country. This year, in my own state of Rhode Island, the Endowment provided funds to renovate painting and sculpture facilities in the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design, supported an after-school arts education program for minority neighborhood youth in the fourth and fifth grades, and funded the Trinity Repertory Theater, one of the nation’s premier theaters.

I understand that in this era of fiscal economies many programs are being scaled back, but this amendment is an unwarranted and disproportionate attack upon a small agency whose job it is to develop and spread American culture beyond those individuals affluent enough to afford it on their own. Uncharacteristically among federal programs, Endowment dollars multiply and foster national support for the arts. Yearly Endowment grants draw matching grants of approximately $1.4 billion from private, state and local patrons.

This tiny investment in our nation’s culture makes a statement to ourselves and to the world that we view the development of American culture and its availability to our citizens as of significant importance. The few dollars the Endowment provides to local and national theatre and dance companies, symphonies and folk arts festivals allow them to raise the private funds that ensure their survival. Mr. President, we cannot afford to deny Americans access to their own culture.