Arts and Humanities: Background (1975-1995): News Article 07

Ralph Blumenthal

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_5

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_5/22

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education: National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996) at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Arts and Humanities: Background (1975-1995) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.
Cultural Groups Mobilize
To Take On the New Congress

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

Alarmed by growing attacks on Federal support for the arts, cultural groups around the country are mobilizing to press their case directly to the avowedly hostile House Republican leadership. Their message: The arts don’t cost; they earn.

The effort to sell the arts as not just balm for the soul but as a boon to local economies drew representatives of some 50 national arts and humanities groups to a meeting last week in Washington, where they formed a new "cultural advocacy" coalition. Another group set up a telephone number to raise money for messages to Senators and Representatives. The chairman of the President’s Council on Arts and the Humanities, John Brademas, said yesterday that he would make his own appeal later this week.

Around the nation, arts councils and museums and opera and dance companies have begun surveying their benefactors and trustees for well-connected business people, Republican or otherwise, who might have the ear of influential legislators.

Newt Gingrich, the new House Speaker, has made no secret of his antipathy to the long-standing system of Federal grants to arts organizations and artists. He and Congressional allies have vowed to pare if not end the subsidies doled out by the National Endowment for the Arts, which is to distribute $167.4 million this year, down from a high in 1979 of what today would be more than $300 million. Other Government financing programs for humanities and museums are also under critical scrutiny.

There are additional uncertainties in New York State, where the new Republican Governor, George E. Pataki, has yet to put his own stamp on formally reappointing the long-serving chairwoman, Kitty Carlisle Hart, or naming a successor.

"Everybody’s nervous," said Robert T. Buck, director of the Brooklyn Museum, which has received more than $2 million from Washington over the last two years for special programs and exhibits. Though the grant is only a small part of the museum’s $17.5 million annual operating budget, it is considered vital. "We are counting on these monies," Mr. Buck said. "We are planning our projects with their support."

In an effort at solidarity, representatives of the American Association of Museum Directors and about 50 other arts, civic and labor organizations from the United Conference of Mayors to Opera America and the A.F.L.-C.I.O. met last week at the offices of the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies to plan strategy.

"We’re sharing what our Congressional friends are thinking, and figuring out collective ways of communicating," said Bob Lynch, president of the assembly and a former college instructor in poetry and writing.

He said the coalition would portray the arts as a $37 billion industry employing 1.3 million people, or 1.5 percent of the work force, and generating tax revenues of $3.4 billion. Although nonprofit arts groups are routinely misperceived as subsisting primarily on charity, he said, they would make the case of their economic importance.

The arts say they receive little and generate billions in tax revenues.

Photographs by Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Robert T. Buck, director of the, Brooklyn Museum.

The arts say they receive little and generate billions in tax revenues.

The effort to sell the arts as not just balm for the soul but as a boon to local economies drew representatives of some 50 national arts and humanities groups to a meeting last week in Washington, where they formed a new "cultural advocacy" coalition. Another group set up a 900 telephone number to raise money for messages to Senators and Representatives. The chairman of the President's Council on Arts and Humanities, John Brademas, said yesterday that he would make his own appeal later this week.

Around the nation, arts councils and museums and opera and dance companies have begun surveying their benefactors and trustees for well-connected business people, Republican or otherwise, who might have the ear of influential legislators.

Newt Gingrich, the new House Speaker, has made no secret of his antipathy to the long-standing system of Federal grants to arts organizations and artists. He and Congressional allies have vowed to pare if not end the subsidies doled out by the National Endowment for the Arts, which is to distribute $167.4 million this year, down from a high in 1978 of what today would be more than $300 million. Other Government financing programs for humanities and museums are also under critical scrutiny.

There are additional uncertainties in New York State, where the new Republican Governor, George E. Pataki, has yet to put his own stamp on the State Council on the Arts, either of the assembly and a former college instructor in poetry and writing.

The arts committee — a citizens and Government advisory panel to stimulate private and public support of the arts — he said he had also been working on his own to organize "friends of the arts" in support of the two national endowments (arts and humanities) and the Institute of Museum Services, which helps defray operating expenses. Mr. Brademas, who has served as a Representative from Indiana and as president of New York University, said he would speak out on the issue in a program on Thursday at the National Gallery of Art.

For his part, Mr. Gingrich has said that while he supports free exercise of the arts, he does not believe that they should be taxpayer subsidized. In fact, he says, artists would be freer without Federal involvement.

Even managers, benefactors and trustees of large arts institutions that receive proportionately small Federal grants deplore cutbacks or a cutoff, saying the contributions stimulate other giving.

"The N.E.A. validates the arts in

Continued on Page C16"