

1964

## National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): Speech 09

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# CLAIBORNE PELL

(D -R. I.)

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NEWS RELEASE - After 8:00 p. m.  
Saturday, April 11th, 1964

## SENATOR PELL URGES HOUSE PASSAGE OF NATIONAL ARTS LEGISLATION

Senator Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) tonight urged wide public support of national arts legislation on which hearings are scheduled to begin in the House of Representatives next week.

Speaking at a banquet meeting of the National League of American Pen Women, at the Statler Hilton Hotel in Washington, the Rhode Island Senator said the pending legislation is vital if the United States is to fulfill unmet needs in its national cultural life.

"I am convinced that our country is capable of producing a new cultural renaissance," Senator Pell declared, "but I also believe that to make this development a reality, stimulation must come from our government itself."

The legislation for which he seeks support is H. R. 9587 which would establish a National Council on the Arts to advise the Federal Government on cultural matters, and a National Arts Foundation which would administer Federal grants on a matching basis to support local cultural undertakings.

Senator Pell chaired a Special Senate Subcommittee which approved the identical bill last Fall. The measure was passed by the Senate on December 20th.

The Senator said that the House has been reluctant to act favorably on such matters in the past and he warned that the present bill might die in the House "unless all interested expend their best efforts in its behalf."

Mr. Pell said that the \$10 million expenditure authorized by the bill would be "a modest sum" in terms of our total national budget, and in terms of the cultural welfare it would engender.

SEE SPEECH ATTACHED

ADDRESS BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL BEFORE THE NATIONAL  
LEAGUE OF AMERICAN PEN WOMEN AT THE STATLER-HILTON HOTEL  
APRIL 11th, 1964

THE NEED FOR NATIONAL ARTS LEGISLATION

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity of addressing the National League of American Pen Women on the occasion of your gathering here in Washington.

Your distinguished organization has contributed in high degree to artistic achievement; and it is on the subject of the Arts in the United States that I would like to direct my remarks this evening. I am convinced that our country is capable of producing a new cultural renaissance; but I also believe that to make this development a reality, stimulation must come from our government itself -- through the impetus of enlightened legislation which I feel has too long been postponed.

The United States is sometimes criticized for placing undue stress on material values. It is said that, although we have made enormous strides in inventiveness, in the fields of mass production and business expansion and technological advancement, we are lacking an emphasis on cultural progress. Certainly, as a Nation we have grown rapidly, and our growth has often been accompanied by tangible, material advantages: new cities and skyscrapers, new industries, houses, automobiles, improved methods of communication, even new ingenious gadgets for the lady in the kitchen. The list is virtually endless. In all seriousness we have pioneered in an enormously wide variety of endeavors, and we have achieved a standard of living that is unsurpassed in the world of today.

It seems to me that we have reached a point where we can truly benefit from this high living standard in our cultural life. In fact, throughout the country we are witnessing a great new surge in this direction.

As one example of this, the number of museums in our country has increased from 1,500 to 5,500 during the past 30 years -- and these museums are visited annually by close to 200 million people. As a somewhat indicative sidelight, it is interesting to note that nearly twice as many people go to museums in the United States today as attend baseball games; but it is

also indicative of our times that numbers of these same museums are struggling with serious financial problems. Endowment funds are no longer adequate. Private philanthropy, on which this country has traditionally depended to support its cultural efforts, simply is not sufficient to meet new demands.

At hearings toward the close of last year before the Senate Special Subcommittee on the Arts, which I had the privilege of Chairing, it was pointed out that the unmet needs for cultural undertakings in the United States total \$320 million. One witness, Mr. John D. Rockefeller, III, put it this way: "As new institutions spring into being in response to new demands for wider availability of the arts, deficit financing is bound to multiply. The rate of expansion is so rapid that neither private philanthropy nor subscription plans can keep up with the burgeoning requirements. It seems obvious to me," said Mr. Rockefeller, "that only by enlightened government action at the municipal, state, and national levels, can the gap between inevitable needs and present resources be appreciably narrowed. The need is real," Mr. Rockefeller concluded. "It is pressing. It concerns the whole aim and purpose of life."

Here in essence is the crux of the problem -- and, indeed, of the crisis in our cultural development which we now confront.

On the one hand, just as museums have grown numerically, so has there been growth in other cultural enterprises. Less than 15 years ago there were only 8 community arts councils scattered throughout the United States. Today there are approximately 90. Art is no longer limited to a relatively few practitioners, experts and connoisseurs. It can no longer be considered incidental or peripheral to our way of life. All through our country there is a desire to enjoy and participate in a great diversity of art forms: in music, painting, sculpture -- in literature and composing, and the work of the pen with which you are so familiar. There is a wish to learn, appreciate and understand. This desire is wholly new in the breadth of its appeal. It springs from increased leisure, from improving education, from the higher living standards I have mentioned.

On the other hand, we see young writers struggling today to make ends even come close to meeting. Only established writers, the relatively few, make a decent livelihood from their work. Ninety per cent of our musicians make less than \$5,000 per year -- scarcely a living wage. The Metropolitan Opera Association, the fine orchestras we have in such centers as Washington or Philadelphia, or Boston or Providence, in my own State of Rhode Island -- all these and others are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves from season to season. Right here in Washington we have seen our fine symphony orchestra crippled by a strike by musicians who need higher wages. In the realm of the theater the same precarious situation holds true. Rising ticket prices are not the answer. Many theaters are closing down -- often because it is more profitable for the owner to raze the building and set up a parking lot on a traffic-crowded metropolitan corner. And many American artists are leaving this country to seek satisfaction for their talents abroad. I am all for cultural exchange; but none of us, I'm sure, enjoys seeing this country subjected to possibilities of permanent cultural loss.

These are among the findings disclosed during the five-day hearings before the Senate Special Subcommittee on the Arts. As artists yourselves, as friends of the arts, I am sure they are familiar to you. Yet I stress them tonight as reasons for the legislation now before the Congress.

Very briefly, this legislation would provide for the establishment of a National Council on the Arts, numbering 25 private citizens qualified in artistic attainments and knowledge; and a National Arts Foundation, numbering 21 similarly qualified private citizens. I stress the word "private," for the members or trustees of these two bodies would be independent of other governmental functions.

The Council would serve in an essentially advisory capacity. One of its chief duties would be to propose methods for the encouragement of private initiative in the arts. The Foundation would administer grants on a matching basis to nonprofit professional groups engaged in or concerned with the arts in the United States, and to the individual states.

A total of \$10 million would be appropriated through this legislation -- half of it going to the groups involved; and the other half, or \$5 million, to the states, so that each state would receive a maximum of \$100,000 for use as it saw fit. The nonprofit groups, sharing the remaining \$5 million, would have similar freedom with their programming and planning.

Now as we all know, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein, \$10 million is \$10 million. A rose is somewhat less expensive. But -- quite seriously -- is that such a large sum, when we are talking about the cultural vitality of our country, when we are speaking of a potential renaissance and of the growing financial crisis in the arts described by witness after witness at the Senate Subcommittee hearings -- and when we are talking about a national annual budget of close to \$100 billion, of which \$10 million is only 1/100 of 1 per cent? To me it is a most modest sum in this frame of reference. Moreover, it is a sum which I believe would return many times its initial investment, as I will demonstrate for you a bit later.

First, however, let me say that I was most gratified when the Senate, just before Christmas, passed this legislation of which I am a co-sponsor and for which I served as floor manager. It is now before the House of Representatives, which, as you may know, has been reluctant to pass such a bill in the past. Indeed, legislation in support of the arts has had an extremely rough time in the Congress. Beginning prototypes of the legislation go back some 15 years. Only once, in 1956, did the Senate pass a bill to establish a Federal Advisory Council on the Arts, requested by President Eisenhower. That bill subsequently died quietly in the House despite this Presidential support -- and the bill I am discussing with you this evening may meet a similar fate unless strenuous action is taken and unless all interested expend their best efforts in its behalf.

Another way of considering the \$10 million appropriation is that it would mean no more than 5 cents annually on a per capita basis. Five cents per person per year.

Let's take a quick look at this small sum in relation to some of the countries where American artists are finding rewarding recognition for

their talents abroad -- some of the nations of Free Europe, for instance.

Here we will find patterns of governmental support for the arts already well established -- and dating back, as in the case of the Comedie Francaise in France, to the year 1804. And, discounting the fact that our standard of living is higher than European levels, we will also find that on a per capita basis governments in Europe are spending far more than 5 cents annually. Great Britain spends double this amount, France four times as much -- and Austria almost 30 times as much.

In 1961 -- as reported in a recent study of European countries undertaken with the cooperation of our State Department and officials abroad -- Austria allocated some \$10 million from its national budget (its budget was approximately 1/50th the size of our own) to support its five major theaters, its museums, its music programs, art academies and literary undertakings. In Austria government grants go to writers and composers; poets and painters are sent abroad to study and to assimilate new ideas. In addition, the Austrian government spent \$9 million to house its renowned Salzburg festival and has supported this festival with an annual grant of \$350,000. The opera house in Vienna had to be entirely rebuilt after World War II. Another \$10 million was paid by the Austrian government for this project. You might say that this would be roughly comparable to a \$500 million expenditure in the United States.

In France major governmental support goes to the Opera and Opera Comique, to the Comedie Francaise, to the Theatre National Populaire, to the Theatre de France, to the development of regional drama outside of Paris, to music conservatories, and to stimulate the production of original plays by beginning new companies.

The Federal Republic of Germany aids the arts on a scale similar to France, with close to a \$10 million federal budget allocation. Remember that in West Germany the total population is approximately one quarter the size of our own. But this sum represents only a small part of West Germany's cultural allocations. The study indicates that almost \$60 million is given to cultural enterprises through the local state, or Laender budgets.

Greece is another outstanding example of governmental support for

the arts. The study I have referred to shows that in Athens alone 25 theaters, aided by the Greek government, are in operation. Among them they produce over 100 plays a year -- and a high percentage of these are of American origin. The Greek government has established a revolving fund from which qualified producers can borrow, at no interest rate; and they have up to two years to repay the loan. Incidentally, the study reports a top price of \$1 for theater tickets in Athens.

Italy is still another nation in Free Europe which supports artistic progress on a federal level. In fact, if we were to compare our own proposed appropriation for the arts with Italian budgetary allocations in the cultural field, we would have to increase our appropriation almost 13 fold to make the totals equal. In other words, our appropriation would be \$130 million rather than \$10 million. Throughout Italy theaters and opera houses destroyed during World War II have been rebuilt, all at government expense. Perhaps the most famous Italian art institution which receives governmental assistance is the La Scala Opera in Milan; but theaters and opera houses are also supported in such cities as Rome, Florence, Naples, Venice, Bologna, Genoa, Turin, Trieste and Verona.

All this leads us to the conclusion that Europeans consider governmental support for the arts as fundamental to cultural vitality. There is very little feeling in Europe that governmental assistance imposes restrictions on creative ability. Quite the opposite is true. Europeans point to the numbers of imaginative and often controversial productions which have flourished through the procedures of cooperative effort they have established. And they emphasize that the various commissions of qualified private experts they have set up have the freedom necessary to engender creativity, rather than stifling it or making it conform to any particular pattern of thought. They also stress the criteria of excellence to which their commissions and private bodies subscribe. As many as 200 rehearsals for a given performance are not uncommon in Europe, almost six times as many as our own Metropolitan Opera has been able to afford.

Let us look also for a moment at the Arts Council of Great Britain, credited with stimulating the cultural growth of that nation to its current



high position in the world. Composed of leading representatives of the British arts world, this Council functions with a government grant of approximately \$5.6 million. It has encouraged a wealth of enterprises, from literary activities to arts festivals and associations, to the Royal Opera and the famous Royal Ballet; to almost 50 theatrical groups and repertory theaters, including the celebrated Old Vic. The Council's roots go back to the dark days and travail of World War II, when the British government recognized that there was a need for cultural inspiration over and above the stringencies of a wartime budget.

Speaking of wartime stringencies, an interesting footnote to history is contained in the fact that the Comedie Francaise is still governed in part by a decree drafted by Napoleon in the midst of his 1812 debacle on the Russian front.

And speaking of the Russians -- not in 1812, but today -- it is evident that they are attempting to conduct a massive assault on the cultural front, world-wide. Not long ago the Central Party journal, *Kommunist*, stressed in an article that cultural contacts are an important Soviet weapon in the international arena, and that these contacts now extend to more than 100 countries. As we all know, the brand of culture which emanates from Moscow is subject to rigid controls. Art is given very little freedom within the Soviet Union. Yet we must keep ourselves well aware of what the Soviets are seeking to accomplish, and above all we must make certain that our own cultural life grows free of stagnation or limitation. We must make sure that we develop in the United States a cultural renaissance and not a cultural vacuum.

I believe that the legislation I have outlined can bring us, in significant fashion, closer to the goals we seek. Covering as it does the whole spectrum of American art, I believe it is the most comprehensive legislation ever to come before the Congress in the arts area.

These are among the benefits which I see stemming from the legislation -- provided, of course, it is passed:

• The matching-grant concept will foster additional private support for the arts. The New York State Council on the Arts has already given us an example of this. From an initial state appropriation of \$50,000 and

over a three-year period, almost \$400,000 was derived from private sources to help finance new cultural activities which the Council has initiated. Over this three-year span, the ratio became almost 1 to 8 between the first state allocation and subsequent private financing.

I would like to add here that the matching-grant concept is altogether different from a direct subsidy. The keynote is partial assistance and mutual cooperation -- somewhat different from European practices and in keeping with our own principles. At our subcommittee hearings, artists repeatedly emphasized that they would welcome this form of governmental help, because it is in accord with the traditions of our democratic process and would establish the needed partnership between the Government and the individual citizen.

. Furthermore, I believe this legislation will help decentralize the arts in the United States, so that they will no longer be concentrated only in large cities, so that eventually each citizen may have a better opportunity of enjoying and participating in them.

. It will also increase the exposure of our citizens to creative and interpretative excellence, so that they may appreciate, assimilate and learn.

. The National Council and the Foundation each will bring together the best talents in the country to plan how best to develop our cultural growth. This has never been more important.

. The legislation will give to the American artist the recognition he yearns for, so that he will no longer need to seek elsewhere for higher satisfaction.

. It will also help enable our artists to experiment on occasion, and not feel the constant necessity of adhering to what at a given moment is commercially acceptable, or appealing to a particular fad or fancy. Just as it does in the field of science, so in art experimentation acts like a catalytic agent for the creative mind.

In sum, therefore -- can we not afford in this prosperous nation of ours 5 cents per person per year for our cultural welfare and well-being?

The Congress has already approved funds for the construction here in Washington of a cultural center named in honor of our late President,

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who did so much during his remarkable lifetime to enhance artistic achievement. But to fulfill the potentials we possess, our cultural resources must now be nourished throughout the whole of our land, in every state. The legislation I am describing is not in itself a panacea, but I am convinced it can open new and better avenues for the future.

I am urging all those interested to utilize their best efforts to support its passage; and I speak to you at a timely moment, for hearings are scheduled in the House next week, beginning on Monday. I would suggest that if you are favorably disposed, you write or communicate your views to your appropriate Congressman. The bill's number in the House is H. R. 9587.

Title I of this bill provides for the establishment of a National Council on the Arts; Title II of the same bill provides for a National Arts Foundation.

I have given you some of the reasons as to why I believe this legislation would be beneficial. Let me conclude with another, perhaps more important than all the rest.

Our most needed scientific explorations, our scientific research, for which we spend billions of dollars annually; our billions spent to maintain the position of strength we require in the world; our billions spent to provide the physical amenities of a better life for our citizens -- all these will mean very little, if the culture of our people stands still or, worse yet, is allowed to erode. For ultimately, what we pass on to our children and to the world must not be material values, but creative values.

I have touched on material aspects earlier. They have an important bearing on our life -- not so much from inside our society, I think, as outside of it; for we are in conflict today with the materialism of totalitarian forms of government, which by definition stifle creative thought. We must contribute to the world something better than this, something more lofty, something in tune with free men, something to inspire them. In proportion, as the best in our cultural life grows and is nourished, so will we give to our people what they are searching for and need, so will we demonstrate still another failure of Communism to meet a human need; and at the same time we will give to the world a meaningful heritage.

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