Duffey, Joseph: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (September 9, 1977): Speech 04

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Let me refresh memories in this regard.

On November 13, 1975, at joint hearings between the Senate and House on the reauthorization legislation we are considering today, I said — with respect to the State Humanities programs:

"A program of state humanities committees such as the present one, while it may have advantages, still carries with it the problems of the anointing by some Federal official of chosen people within the state who must pay very close attention to a Washington base. It is like a laying on of hands..."

Now this program began when the Humanities Endowment -- not some other agency, the Humanities Endowment -- asked a small group of people, two, three, four, five, to form a committee. They were selected by the Endowment. They were hand-picked. And they, in turn, recommended others until they had their committee established... And each committee made up its own particular regulations regarding membership. And it was a self-perpetuating body, emanating from a Washington base, a Washington source.

And I might add that I have yet to receive one letter critical of Dr. Berman, the Chairman, or of the Humanities Endowment from any of those committees, or their members... And, in contrast, the State arts councils and their members -- who owe basic allegiance to their States, not to Washington -- are 50 potential critics,
who often make their opinions known. To me they are a great balancing force. They are the force which prevents the possibility of Federal domination -- a possibility which I see clearly developing on the Humanities side -- a possibility which we who started this program eleven years ago most feared.

We might agree that some good things can happen under a benign dictatorship -- but if it becomes unbemign, WATCH OUT.
It is certainly true that State Arts Councils are involved in the political process in their States. But to me this is a strength, rather than a weakness.

It means that the Arts have entered the mainstream of political life.

It means that twenty per cent of National Endowment funds which go to the State Arts Councils are helping to build up a Federal State partnership which has had immensely successful results.

The State Arts Councils were created by the States.

The Humanities committees were created by the Executive Branch in Washington.

Would we want a Senate or House of Representatives that stemmed from an Executive Branch appointive process?

Certainly the State Arts Councils are subject to change and movement... But that is the way the political process works.

That is its strength.

Do we not change our membership?

Do we not compete for the positions we hold? Do we not seek to improve our nation through the political process?

I repeat once again: The State Arts Councils -- only 20% of the total of funds involved -- has through the political process and through direct involvement with State governments -- proved immensely successful... State funds for the Arts have grown from $4 million to $60 million in 10 years... 1,000 community arts councils have been developed.
The equating of State humanities committees and religious groups seems such a far cry from what we had in mind at the outset, as to be ridiculous.

(But remember Mr. Quie comes from a strong Calvinist background, and may actually believe that the Humanities with their moral overtones are church-like.)
It would seem to me that the Humanities have culled through their lists to come up with some conspicuous examples that may represent all they have, in this regard, to offer.

I would not recommend challenging this in detail -- but I will have in my briefcase the Humanities committee lists we had for the Hearings, and with which they supplied us... A glance at a few pages will show the preponderant bias or tilt toward academia.

State Arts Agencies are not at all as represented by this Humanities paper.

I have some figures to refute this allegation. They are attached to this.

At the Conference, I would say simply that the allegation does not agree with your understandings...And that you will ask for a rebuttal from the Arts Endowment.

Otherwise, it seems to me we tip our hand that we did get a copy of the Berman letter, and came prepared to rebut it in detail.
Again the phrase "politically tainted" suggests strongly Berman's basic bias against involvement with the political process... It seems to me he is very vulnerable here — when he is dealing with the very people who created and continue him in a political sense... And when he himself was appointed through the political process.

Major opposition to the Senate legislation comes, as far as our office is concerned, from the Committees who want to be continued... The suggestion that the opposition comes from segments of the people who have no direct connection with the State committees is just about as far from true as I can imagine, at least from our experience.
The mission of State Committees

This section alleges that the Senate instructed NEH to develop experimental programs in each State and inserted language calling for "particular attention to the relevance of the humanities to the conditions of national life."

This latter phrase was inserted, not by the Senate, but by the House in 1968.

The Senate called attention that year to the need for more "public programs" in the Humanities. Neither body specified that the States carry out exclusively programs devoted to public issues. Neither side referred to Public issue programs.

And the public programs envisioned by the Senate were certainly not relegated to State programs.

The effort was to get the Humanities out to the people.

To make them more relevant to national life.

The greatest relevance they can have, it would seem clear, is to have them in the mainstream of political life, as with the Arts...