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If Congress Cuts Arts and Humanities Budgets, Private Support Could Fall, Too, Critics Warn

WASHINGTON

If Congress agrees to President Reagan's proposals to cut in half federal support for the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, resources in the private sector may also dry up, say spokesmen for cultural institutions.

That would defeat the Administration's avowed purpose of shifting the responsibility for supporting cultural activities to private, state, and local sources, they say.

"The Administration's proposed cuts will, in my opinion, have a domino effect on all funding for the arts," Rep. Frederick S. Richmond, Democrat of New York, told the House Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education last week.

"If the federal government cuts back 50 per cent, so will the state governments and so will local governments. The ultimate economic impact may reach \$1.6-billion very quickly," said Mr. Richmond, the founder of the Congressional Arts Caucus.

The Reagan Administration's budget for fiscal 1982 requests only \$88-million for the National Endowment for the Arts and \$85-million for the National Endowment for the Humanities, down from the \$159-million Congress appropriated for the arts endowment this year and the \$151.7-million provided for the humanities endowment.

In proposing those cuts, the President said that the expansion of federal aid to the arts and humanities had reduced "the historic role of private individuals and corporate support" for those areas.

A Spur to Private Support

Attacking that assumption as "baseless," Rep. Paul Simon, Democrat of Illinois and chairman of the House postsecondary panel, said that "far from supplanting private and cor-

porate dollars, this federal money is a spur to private and corporate support that otherwise would not exist."

James M. Banner, Jr., chairman of the American Association for the Advancement of the Humanities, told the House panel that the proposed cuts would "cripple" the very programs that were designed to encourage private contributions—the endowments' "challenge grants," under which the agencies match money that arts and humanities projects raise from nonfederal sources.

Henry L. Marsh, mayor of Richmond, Va., told the House panel that the arts endowment's matching grants spur contributions from corporations by providing potential donors some assurance of the quality of projects.

Rep. John N. Erlenborn, Republican of Illinois, voicing concern about the endowments' role, said, "In effect, one needs the government's stamp of approval to be successful in obtaining private support."

Mr. Banner said it was unrealistic to expect the private sector to take up the slack if federal support for the humanities was drastically cut.

Scholars would have an even harder time than artists in finding alternative sources of financing, said George W. Bonham, executive director of the Council on Learning and editor at large of *Change* magazine.

"From time immemorial, the arts have more naturally found their set of private and public angels," Mr. Bonham said. "The humanities are a far less public and less dramatic expression of human talent. To develop a new anthology of Moslem culture may be crucial to our better understanding of that culture, but there are precious few private-sector agencies to fund such enterprises."

'Devastating' to State Councils

The proposed cut in support for the

humanities would have a "devastating" effect on the state humanities councils that distribute much of the endowment's aid, said Betsy K. McCreight, president of the Federation of Public Programs in the Humanities and chairman of the West Virginia Humanities Council.

She said few if any state councils would receive more than \$200,000 under the Reagan budget.

The cutbacks would be particularly hard, she said, on larger states such as California and New York, where funds would be cut by more than 70 per cent.

Ms. McCreight predicted that state councils would have to reduce their efforts to expand humanities programs in smaller communities.

"The only sort of program which has any likelihood of being mounted by the 52 state councils would be the circulation of pre-packaged national programs to the largest cities in each state," she said. Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia both have councils, as well as each of the 50 states.

Arts and humanities advocates argued that the endowments had been asked to make a disproportionate sacrifice.

Said Lawrence W. Towner, president of the Newberry Library of Chicago, "It does not seem to me to be equal and in due proportion, when the two endowments' budgets are slated to be slashed so drastically, that almost in the same breath, the President should call for \$2.5-billion for a new bomber."

Representative Simon said the Administration's argument that cultural activities should be a low federal priority during hard economic times is "especially appalling when one examines the Defense Department budget, which includes \$52-million for support of military bands."

—JANET HOOK