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## Reagan Administration: Funding Cuts News Articles (1981-1982): News Article 22

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# The Washington Star

## The Endangered Endowments

However strongly anyone favors cuts in the federal budget, there's sure to be a "yes, but" somewhere along the line, complete with good reasons for making exceptions. Such as support for the arts and humanities.

It's still true that the soul needs nourishment as much as the body. It's still true, too, that the finest flowerings of the human mind and imagination don't necessarily do well in the marketplace. Likewise that few other governments expect opera companies and ballet troupes and poets to live on the money their products bring in. All over the world, state subsidies tend to make the difference between the artistic and intellectual institutions that prosper — or even survive — and those that don't.

Thus it's hard not to wince at the thought of a 50 per cent reduction in the federal money that goes to the Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. The last decade has seen an unparalleled renaissance of cultural creativity and public responsiveness to it in the United States. People stand in line to get into museums. They go out in the rain to hear quartets play obscure baroque music. It would be a pity to go back to the way we were before World War II when only a comparatively small elite knew or cared much about such things.

Here, as elsewhere, though, the problem is to choose between desirable goals. And to be committed, as we are, to giving the

president's economic program a fair shake means to be willing to make sacrifices for it.

The consolation prize, if these drastic cuts go through, is that such a large and loyal constituency has grown up around artistic and cultural enterprises in this country in recent years. There is a momentum about them that is likely to survive anything the Washington budget trimmers can do.

This, of course, is the administration's rationale. We fear history does not quite validate the assumption that foundations, corporations and rich patrons will fill the funding gap for any really deserving project or group. Think of how much trouble the National Symphony has had staying alive, even in the heyday of the Endowments.

At the same time, it is reasonable to suppose that the changed signals coming from the White House and the Hill will reactivate private sources of support for the arts and humanities. There is no question but that the ever-growing role of government in underwriting activities once sponsored by private community initiatives has wilted any number of once-thriving charities and philanthropies.

Here again, the over-riding consideration is the need to restore American economic health. Until somebody comes up with a more promising plan, the new administration deserves a chance to test its theories.