Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Speech 19

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Mr. President, some have questioned who benefits from the funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. In recent years the Endowment has made a significant effort to encourage applicants from all states, regions and communities. Since assuming the Chair of the Endowment, Ms. Jane Alexander has carried the message around the country that the Endowment is here to support cultural programs in all communities of our nation. The success rate of applicants from less populous states is often much higher than for applicants from the large states. For example, less than one-quarter of the applications received from California and New York are funded. In contrast, 40% or more of the applications received from Alaska, Delaware, North and South Dakota, West Virginia and Wyoming are successful in receiving funding from our Arts Endowment. Thirty-one other states have 25 to 40% of their applications funded.

Another program of note is the Arts Endowment’s Underserved Communities Set-Aside Program which specifically supports projects to broaden public access to the arts in underserved rural and inner city areas. $8.7 million is currently set aside for this initiative. Thus, Mr. President, the arts play a unifying role in our society, incorporating the heritage of many groups and individuals and providing bridges for understanding, creating a distinctly American culture. Federal support preserves America’s cultural heritage and broadens access to the arts to a greater audience so that not only the elite but all citizens can enjoy the arts. Providing assistance to artists and arts institutions allows cultural institutions and performing arts groups to keep ticket prices low and to offer educational programs and services for the disabled. Further, the NEA supports projects central to American history and culture, including, for example, the Buffalo Soldiers Memorial at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Mr. President, the Arts Endowment, particularly under the new leadership of Ms. Alexander, is making its best efforts to bring the arts to as many communities around the nation as it can, given its limited funding, and I urge the conferees to support Ms. Alexander in her continuing attempt to succeed in this attempt.