Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Speech 20

Claiborne Pell

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I oppose this amendment. The Endowment's panel system is best calculated to bring to bear the talents and perspectives of experts and laypersons from communities around the nation. The high turnover rate among panelists now mandated is meant to ensure that the widest variety of values, and professional philosophies, reflecting the vast diversity in our nation and even in any given area of the arts, are given voice in the Endowment's funding decisions.

Mr. President, if we attempt each year to reconfigure the Endowment's procedures radically because one or two controversial grants have slipped through the process, we are far more likely to damage the Endowment's attempt to make appropriate funding decisions than to do it any good. Ms. Alexander has only been at the Endowment's helm for a short time, and I am of the mind that we need to give both her and the reforms recently instituted at the NEA more time to work effectively.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. President, I rise in strong opposition to this amendment. The five million dollars this bill already rescinds from the National Endowment for the Arts will do serious harm to cultural endeavours all around our nation, but particularly to those communities around our nation which have the least access to our cultural institutions, organizations, festivals and other events.

Our nation's Arts Endowment provides critical assistance for cultural works and presentations in music, theater, literature, dance, design arts and folk arts around the country. This year, in my own state of Rhode Island, the Endowment provided funds to renovate painting and sculpture facilities in the Museum of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design, supported an after-school arts education program for minority neighborhood youth in the fourth and fifth grades, and funded the Trinity Repertory Theater, one of the nation's premier theaters.

I understand that in this era of fiscal economies many programs are being scaled back, but this amendment is an unwarranted and disproportionate attack upon a small agency whose job it is to develop and spread American culture beyond those individuals affluent enough to afford it on their own. Uncharacteristically among federal programs, Endowment dollars multiply and foster national support for the arts. Yearly Endowment grants draw matching grants of approximately $1.4 billion from private, state and local patrons.

This tiny investment in our nation's culture makes a statement to ourselves and to the world that we view the development of American culture and its availability to our citizens as of significant importance. The few dollars the Endowment provides to local and national theatre and dance companies, symphonies and folk arts festivals allow them to raise the funds that ensure their survival. Mr. President, we cannot afford to deny Americans access to their own culture.