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2-25-1981

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Recommended Citation

Vick, Karl, "Reagan Administration: Funding Cuts News Articles (1981-1982): News Article 31" (1981).
Reagan Administration: Funding Cuts News Articles (1981-1982). Paper 43.
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Budget may clip arts' wings

By KARL VICK
The Minneapolis Star

President Reagan's proposed cuts in federal funds to the arts and humanities have Twin Cities cultural groups grumbling, counting their change and vowing a fight.

Very few appear blasé about the prospect of 50 percent whacks into the budgets of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, which might shut off \$2 million to Minnesota groups.

Most representatives of local arts organizations say the cuts will diminish their vitality and weaken their services—and cripple at least one office.

"I am sympathetic to fighting inflation and there have to be cuts," said Cheryl Dickson, director of the quasi-federal Minnesota Humanities Commission, the body perhaps most vulnerable to Reagan's chain saw. "But this is a punitive cut."

What Dickson and her colleagues resent even more—and resist—is being proclaimed as examples of "welfare for the wealthy."

"I think that's what [Reagan's] implying, and we here in Minnesota know that's not true," said Donald Schoenbaum, managing director of the Guthrie Theater. "Studies show we get our audience from the entire community, from one end of the spectrum to the other. One-third of our audience is students; its average age is 30. Sixty-five percent are under 35. These are not elite."

But, most would agree, opera is elite. Chuck Fullmer of the Minnesota Opera Company agreed, but added: "What I use the [federal] money for is the people who work for us, and they don't have much money."

"We're not a charity," Schoenbaum said. "It's not that we take and don't give anything back. We generate money."

Arts and politics

A 1978 study tabulated by Johns Hopkins University determined that 10 representative Twin Cities arts organizations directly generated \$28.6 million in area spending during that fiscal year. The figure

included spending by the organizations, ticket purchases and ancillary consumer spending on the likes of baby sitters and after-theater dining.

The study also followed the money spent on arts as it churned through the local economy and found "secondary economic effects" totaling \$57.2 million. Bill Driver, managing director of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Arts Alliance, sheds no tears. "If you get your money politically, you're going to lose it politically," he said.

"It's very inefficient to subsidize the arts through institutions. It's very efficient to subsidize the arts through people, because the people are the ones who stimulate the economy through ancillary spending."

The focus of Driver's Arts Alliance is people. Its voucher program invites low-income people to pay \$1.50 for a voucher good for \$3 off the price of a theater or concert ticket.

On the other hand, when Driver recently fine-tuned a new and improved discount-ticket program, he asked the arts endowment for \$25,000 to help pay for it.

The arts have a reasonably strong lobby on Capitol Hill—both in general, with the American Arts Alliance and the American Council for the Arts, and among specific disciplines, including the American Symphony Orchestra League, the American Museum Association and the Theater Communications Group.

"They're very strong, powerful voices and they're very unified voices," said Mary Sulerud of the Minnesota State Arts Board. "They predate these broad-stroke, umbrella organizations."

Schoenbaum is the only Minneapolis artsocrat on the executive committee of the American Arts Alliance, possibly the most prominent of the lobbying groups. He described a committee meeting held Monday in Washington as "hopeful" but would not elaborate.

Arts groups survive by persuasion. Forced to beg to survive, they created a new form of intramural warfare called "grantsmanship" and deployed it against the endowments, private foundations and publicity-minded corporations. Now expect them to assault Capitol Hill.

'Unbelievable'

"You can lobby any government agency," said Julie Duke, development director for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. "But the National Endowment for the Arts is not as easily manipulated as government officials. People are going to be calling in old debts."

It helps that Capitol arts fans were reported to be incredulous at Reagan's proposals.

"It's totally unreasonable, unbelievable, and I don't think it will happen," said Rep. Frederick W. Richmond, D-N.Y., founder of the 124-member House "arts caucus." Rep. Sidney Yates, D-Ill., called the proposal "much too drastic a cut, and I don't think Congress will go along with it." Yates heads the House subcommittee that appropriates money for the endowments.

Even the Reagan transition team's adviser on arts, Robert S. Carter, has been quoted as saying the cuts probably will be less severe than planned.

The president would cut the arts endowment from \$159 million to \$88 million and slice the humanities endowment from \$152 million to \$85 million. Spokesmen for both endowments said no decisions had been made on where the cuts would be made. A humanities endowment public information official said they would be "selective."

The endowments themselves are arguing to improve their stakes, but not in public. Asked to what extent he sought to trim the 50 percent cut, a congressional liaison for the arts endowment sighed and said: "You're putting me in the position here of attacking the administration I am a part of. That's a position I do not want to be put in."

The arts endowment sent 109 grants totaling \$4,098,326 to Minnesota groups in 1980, while the humanities endowment approved 38 state grants totaling \$1,324,581.

If the endowment cut every local grant by the suggested 50 percent, the current budgets of various Twin Cities arts organizations would suffer shortfalls ranging from 0.5 percent to 10 percent. A clearinghouse for arts funding, such as the Minnesota Humanities Commission, might be lopped in half.

Private fund lever

But whatever size hole is punched in a budget, the puncture is expected to grow rapidly into a serious tear. Raw data indicates that federal arts aid spurs gifts from private donors.

According to Livingston Biddle, chairman of the arts endowment, philanthropic support for the arts grew only from \$199 million to \$205 million from 1955 to 1965, the 10 years before the endowment was created. In the 10 years following, private support grew from \$205 million to \$2.7 billion as federal grants often were made contingent on matching funds from other sources.

Perhaps noting the dramatic increase, Reagan spokesmen have said they expect private interests to pick up the slack from government aid. Schoenbaum finds that "sort of insulting to the private sector here, because they do support the arts, generously and extensively."

Every area arts fund-raiser agreed that private donors need prompting. Most interviewed chose the same metaphor. Federal money, they said, is a lever to pry loose private donations.

What's more, groups looking to fill dollar gaps left by cutbacks in federal aid will find that an already intense competition for private dollars will increase further.

"I don't think any arts and humanities organizations in the state are heavily dependent on federal money. Most would say 3 to 5 percent," Dickson said. "But what we can't overlook is the cumulative effect. It amounts to millions, and where is that going to be made up?"

Here is a rundown on the level of federal support for local arts organizations:

- Minnesota Public Radio gets two program grants from the arts endowment. The nationally broadcast "Prairie Home Companion" receives \$40,000 of its \$250,000 budget from the endowment. MPR won \$27,000 to start "St. Paul Sunday Morning," set to debut next month.

However, MPR President William Kling emphasized that the proposed cut to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, effective in 1984, would kill all programming by National Public Radio. Kling said member stations, not willing to give up the likes of "All Things Considered" and "Morning Edition," would choose to pay NPR to continue producing them. That would cost Minnesota Public Radio about \$240,000 in current dollars, Kling said.

- The Guthrie Theater budget of \$5.4 million relies on an arts endowment grant for \$225,000, or 4 percent. "This is not going to put the Guthrie Theater out of business, but nevertheless it's a big chunk of money," said managing director Schoenbaum. Federal support makes possible annual regional tours of Guthrie productions.

- The Minnesota Opera Company relies on the arts endowment for 20 percent of its \$1 million budget. The grants, totaling \$203,750, include \$93,750 for the commission and production of a new opera, which "we'd have to consider cutting out," said executive director Fullmer.

Another \$25,000 grant partially supports the \$85,000 touring program. If that disappeared, Fullmer said, "Certainly we would stop going to many smaller communities."

Nonetheless, Fullmer also expressed something akin to relief at the cut. "I kind of feel maybe we've become too dependent on that" grant, he said. "Our percentage is probably as high or higher than anybody's. Maybe we'll have to be a little creative in our fund-raising."

- The Minnesota Orchestra has a \$225,000 arts endowment grant this year for operating expenses, a small percentage of its \$8.3 million budget. If the cuts go through, the orchestra would either have to find additional revenue or cut back programs and services, said Development Director Dave Ferner.

- The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra depends on arts endowment funds for \$120,000 of its \$2.7 million budget. "I'm not worried about us, because it's not life or death with us," said development director Duke.

- The Minnesota State Arts Board received a \$500,000 basic grant to distribute as it sees fit among statewide applicants. Were that money cut, Minnesota artists would see state aid essentially cut as well, inasmuch as Gov. Al Quie has recommended only a small increase in the board's legislative allocation over the next biennium, and that to compensate for inflation.

Still, Sulerud was optimistic that the board might see its share of federal dollars grow—even as the total amounts of aid lessen—because of Reagan's stated intention to give states the privilege of allocating national funds.

- The Walker Art Center reports that 11 percent of its \$3.2 million budget is from federal grants: \$241,000 from the arts endowment and \$94,000 from the humanities endowment. (Of the arts grant, \$47,000 underwrites statewide performance of the Merce Cunningham dance troupe.)

- The Minnesota Humanities Commission, a clearinghouse for federal humanities grants, is the formal state affiliate of the humanities endowment. Of its \$424,000 budget, \$399,000 is endowment money.

Director Dickson acknowledged that "humanities" is a slippery label. "It's difficult to see where the money is going," she said. Sometimes the commission helps interpret the arts by paying for an exhibit catalog, "and then it's an arts program. Sometimes we explain

the concept of eminent domain [as it did during the powerline controversy], then it's education."

- COMPAS is a St. Paul umbrella for community service arts projects, including historical theatrical productions, direct aid to artists and special projects involving arts and elderly people. Of its \$700,000 budget, \$33,000 comes from the arts endowment and \$16,000 from the humanities endowment.

But Executive Director Molly LaBerge emphasized that "a high percentage" of its budget involves contracts with other groups using federal money. Until Friday, that included the Interior department. The agency notified LaBerge last week that all funds for its urban parks program had been impounded, so a \$25,000 grant to establish an arts program at a home for the handicapped at St. Paul's Lewis Park bit the dust.

- The Children's Theater Company has a \$50,000 arts endowment grant that accounts for less than 2 percent of its budget. "We were going to ask for more money," said an administrator. "I imagine we can kiss that goodbye." If the cuts came, he said, the theater "would not have to lop a program."

- Playwright's Center, with a budget of \$270,000, had only \$9,900 in arts endowment funds this year, of which just \$3,000 went toward operating expenses. But, "we've been growing each year, our key is that we were growing," said Managing Director Ted Crawford. Now the center probably will not get a "challenge grant," in which the endowment guarantees a dollar for every three raised from private sources.

- The Minnesota Dance Theatre has only \$20,000 in arts endowment funds in its \$1.2 million budget, but some of that money helped support the company's touring. Dancers, more than most artists, learn in front of an audience, said General Manager Beverly Semon. "We must go on tour to ~~have good performing artists,~~" she said. The touring aid is "only indirect support for us, but it's enormously important."

- The Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts every year gets more than \$1 million in operating funds from the Hennepin County park and museum fund. What Resource Development Vice President Dick McIntosh calls "the guts of the operation" rely on federal money for less than 2 percent.

But the society, which operates the Institute of Arts and the College of Art and Design, does approach the arts and humanities endowments to fund exhibits and other projects. For example, each endowment contributed more than \$50,000 for the Vikings exhibit. Also, the society this year won a \$35,000 grant from the Institute of Museum Services, a small bureau of the Department of Education, which Reagan already has ordered eliminated.