Reauthorization: S. 2724 (1990): Correspondence 18

Lynne V. Cheney

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The Honorable Sidney R. Yates  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515  

Dear Congressman Yates:

I read Jack Neusner's letter to you regarding his  
proposed curtailment of NEH's museum program (and, by analogy,  
the work of IMS) and, in all candor, I find it quite unpersuasive.

First, Mr. Neusner's letter greatly exaggerates the  
actual degree of duplication between NEA and NEH programs.  
It is true, as Mr. Hodsoll's letter points out, that a  
few of the fifty exhibitions from the years 1984-86 which  
were open to the public as of May 1987 also received funding  
from the Arts Endowment. But the actual overlap is only  
seven exhibitions, or 14 percent of the total -- a figure  
which does not suggest, to my mind, a large amount of duplication.  
Indeed, I have to point out that even in those few cases,  
we and NEA are funding very different components of the  
project at hand. Unlike the Arts Endowment, our concentration  
is always, as Mr. Hodsoll also points out, on the historical,  
philosophical, or social aspects of the exhibit. Mr. Neusner's  
plan, were it to be carried out, would seriously impede  
many art historical exhibitions, since the Arts Endowment  
rightly puts its priority (as Chairman Hodsoll explains)  
on support for living artists.

To turn to another issue raised by Mr. Neusner, like  
the NEA, the NEH also makes extensive use of matching funds.  
However, we do not think that it would be desirable or  
entirely fair to smaller institutions or those located  
in states with few private foundations to require matching  
funds for every grant. But while we do not make the use  
of these funds obligatory, we nonetheless encourage such  
 attempts to draw upon the private sector; and we frequently  
offer combinations of outright funds and treasury matching  
funds. We think that this technique is a good one. In  
the long run it helps promote private contributions to  
humanities institutions while it enables institutions in  
the short term to build on their existing strengths.
Let me also add that our "Museums" program is not exclusively for museums and surely not just for art museums. Its full title is "Museums and Historical Organizations," and we would not want to see any shift in programs between our agencies that might undermine the help we give to museums or organizations other than art museums.

I am forced to conclude that Professor Neusner has uncovered a non-problem. Moreover, his proposed "solution" would almost certainly antagonize the entire museum community and would, I'm afraid, create serious inequities if it were ever implemented.

Thank you for taking the time to look at all this, and thank you also for stating so candidly to Mr. Neusner that you were not prepared to agree with him without soliciting my views and those of Mrs. Shepherd and Mr. Hodsoll. I will also share this letter with Mr. Neusner, Mrs. Shepherd, Mr. Hodsoll, and Senator Pell.

Sincerely,

Lynne V. Cheney
Chairperson

cc: Senator Claiborne Pell
   Francis S.M. Hodsoll
   Jacob Neusner
   Lois Burke Shepherd