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6-9-1966

National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): News Article 06

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Recommended Citation

"National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967): News Article 06" (1966). *National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities (1965-1967)*. Paper 62.

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State Fine Arts Council Urged

A streamlined arts council for Rhode Island operating as an independent state agency was urged last night in Providence by the executive director of the New York State Council on the Arts, John B. Hightower.

"A single agency in the state responsible for encouragement of the arts in the rest of the state could not be more important nor more immediate," Mr.

Hightower told a meeting at the University Club of the private Rhode Island Fine Arts Council.

The primary role for an arts council, Mr. Hightower said, "is expanding the audience for the arts."

Rhode Island already has a state advisory council on the cultural arts, and a newly established state cultural arts commission.

"There is no need for two arts commissions," Mr. Hightower said.

He said a state arts council should operate as an independent state agency, be able to make timely decisions, and set the highest artistic standards possible.

"It should include individuals who are aware and sensitive to the needs of the arts and who are extremely aware of governmental processes. It will need individuals who cannot be politically intimidated," Mr. Hightower said.

Artists should be included among council members, he said, but should not dominate the council.

"We're opening a door on exciting times," Mr. Hightower said. "Arts and politics are coming closer together. The arts have become a public necessity and are recognized as such by legislators."

Arlan R. Coolidge, professor of music at Brown University, was reelected president of the Fine Arts Council.

Other officers, elected yesterday, include Mrs. William Slater Allen, Barnet Fain, Milton Stanzler and Alan P. Maynard, vice presidents; Mrs. Benjamin R. Ebersman, recording secretary; Mrs. Knight Edwards, corresponding secretary; and Mrs. Ernest L. Shein, treasurer.

An 'Exploratory' Group

Sen. Nero Defends Arts Commission

Sen. Pat Nero, D-Cranston, said last night that recent criticism of his bill creating a Rhode Island Cultural Arts Commission is not justified because the new commission is simply an "exploratory" body — "nothing more than a task force."

Senator Nero made his remarks in response to an editorial in Tuesday's Evening Bulletin questioning the need for a new commission and contending that "the cultural commission would be taking over the duties of the advisory council," possibly "to control the arts for political purposes."

Senator Nero said the state's Advisory Council on the Cultural Arts and the new commission "do not overlap."

He said members of the new commission — five of whose nine members are to be state legislators, with the other four members being appointed by the governor — "don't have the power to appropriate; they don't have the power to mandate; and they don't have the power to administer."

Senator Nero said "there is absolutely no disagreement between the General Assembly and the governor" over the establishment of the commission.

The new group, he said, "is assuming a responsibility that is independent of any responsibility imposed on the Advisory Council," whose task is limited to carrying out "just those ad-

visory duties pertaining to the administration of state and federal appropriations" for the cultural arts. It was not the legislative intent to give the Advisory Council any further duty, he said.

The commission, on the other hand, is an "exploratory" group "directed to inspire local committees to create and direct their own cultural and artistic progress; to coordinate, assess, encourage and facilitate more effective use of our cultural and artistic resources in Rhode Island; to promote and stimulate public understanding of the importance of our state's cultural institutions; to stimulate and facilitate performances throughout our state by out-of-state professional artistic organizations; to encourage the practice, teaching and performance of the arts; to develop the use of educational TV to promote the arts; to promote opportunities for further study to promising students in the arts; and to assist the arts in the acquisition of public building facilities."

The senator concluded that the "nature of the duties to be performed by this commission lends itself to the need for legislators to be included as members of this commission, and in no way is it intended to control the arts for political purposes."

He also disagreed with the editorial's argument that the commission bill "was rushed through at the end of the session and never got explained publicly."

"This is incorrect," Senator Nero said. "The act was introduced in early April and did not become law until five or six weeks later, having received ample publicity, and at no time was there any opposition to the bill expressed by a single person."