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Waiting For the Ax To Fall
Arts Council Girds for Possible Budget Cuts

By Carla Hall

The National Council on the Arts began its quarterly meeting here yesterday as part of a rally, part defense of the National Endowment for the Arts—the agency it advises—which is now threatened with 50 percent budget cuts, the first in its 13-year history.

"We have to make the strongest case for the least reductions," said Council member and folk-singer Theodore Bikel. "We don't fund organizations, we seed them. We give them about 10 percent of their budgets—if that. We disseminate the arts across the width and breadth of this country, and this is a huge country."

At a meeting marked by the appearances of a potentially volcanic conservative/Inflationary Republican transition, the lesson the Council wanted to know was whether or not the Reagan administration would adopt the 50 percent cut—$88 million—a proposal made by David Stockman's Office of Management and Budget.

Robert Carter, the Reagan transition team for the NEA, told the Council at yesterday morning's closed session that the president and White House staff had just been examining the proposed budgets for the NEA and a variety of other agencies.

Carter would not speculate on how much of a cut Reagan would finally decide on, or whether he would propose a 50 percent cut. When Bill Miller, the House appropriations chairman, had talked with President Reagan about the possibility of a 50 percent cut, he had talked about the 50 percent cut for the NEA. It was also understood that Carter was not talking about the Reagan administration's final decision.

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