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J. Thur.
March 26, 1981

Prominent Arts Figures Warn Congress on Cuts

By JOHN CORRY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 25 — Representatives of the arts warned Congress today that if the Reagan Administration carried out its proposed reductions in the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts, the quality of life in the nation would decline.

Those appearing before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior included Jerome Robbins, James Earl Jones, Patti LuPone, Jean Stapleton, John Williams, Eliot Feld, Ming Cho Lee and Robert Rauschenberg. They had gathered perhaps not so much for the meeting of the subcommittee as they had for a demonstration of the arts militant.

At least one member of Congress responded positively. "The fundamental question is whether Government will continue to support the arts," Sidney R. Yates, Democrat of Illinois and chairman of the subcommittee, said. "What is at stake here is the recognition of the importance of the arts in our way of life."

Mr. Jones, his rich voice rising above the crowded hearing room, said, "I know of no other human endeavor that so reflects on the state as the arts." In particular, he pleaded for the continuation of subsidies to nonprofit theaters.

"I'm not sure the Government knows what it's created out there," Miss LuPone said, meaning the audiences she had played to in regional theaters. Miss LuPone, who starred in "Evita," said that she had learned her craft while on tour with the Acting Company in nonprofit theaters.

Largest Budget Cut

The National Endowment for the Arts now has a budget of \$158 million, which the Carter Administration had proposed increasing to \$175 million. The Reagan Administration, however, wants to cut it to \$88 million, which, proportionately, would be the largest single cut in any Government agency. The Administration has suggested that increased voluntary giving by corporations and foundations would make up the deficit.

Two witnesses who represented large corporations, however, disagreed. "If the Federal Government gives authority to the notion that the arts are merely frivolous diversions to be indulged in good times but abandoned in bad times, I strongly suspect that the private sector will not be disposed toward heroic efforts to pick up the shortfall," Edward M. Block, a vice president of American Telephone and Telegraph, said.

Kenneth Albrecht, a vice president of Equitable Life Insurance, warned that "the corporate community is not an endless source of funds, any more than the Federal Government is."

Nonetheless, the chief attractions at the hearing were the people from the arts. In a kind of enlightened self-interest, they pleaded, sometimes emotionally, for Government support.

'Cameo' Witnesses Called

"Let's be sure we tighten our belts around our stomachs, not around our hearts and souls," Maurice Abravanel, the conductor, said. Mr. Abravanel appeared as what was called a "cameo" witness, testifying in support of symphony orchestras. Other "cameo" witnesses, each preceded by someone who was supposed to be the main speaker, testified in support of theater, dance and opera. Mr. Yates, in fact, called the hearing "a production."

"We're a bunch of movers, and not used to words," said Mr. Robbins, who



The New York Times

Patti LuPone

led the dance delegation. He was followed by Carmen de Lavallade, who, waving her arms rhythmically and bouncing up and down in her chair, apologized for not being able to sit still.

"We must put our energy to work," Miss de Lavallade said. "We're not just an amusement; we're big business."

Urges Shorter Submarines

Eliot Feld, of the Feld Ballet, said that the \$5 million loss to dance companies that the budget reduction would entail would be "a calamity." He suggested that, with nuclear submarines costing approximately \$1 million a foot, it would be in the national interest to build slightly shorter submarines and give the savings to dance.

Some witnesses testified that a cut in the arts budget would make the arts more, not less elitist, forcing arts companies to raise their ticket prices and forcing new companies that had not built up a constituency to close. Other witnesses said that support from the arts agency gave their companies the sanction they needed to go out and raise funds from corporations. Implicit in all the testimony was the fear that Government would withdraw entirely from the arts.

Mr. Yates, who has been a leader in the campaign to lessen the reduction in the arts budget, said he feared the same thing: "I believe that this reduction is the first step toward Government eliminating its support of the arts." He also said that funding for the arts, which once enjoyed bipartisan support, was now becoming a political issue. Subsequently, Thomas Loeffler, a Texas Republican, said he was sure that whatever the cut in the arts budget, the private sector would take up the slack.

"I'm wed to the arts," Mr. Loeffler said, declaring that he would do everything he could to preserve them. Challenged by Mr. Yates, however, he declined to say that he would favor continued Government support.