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Independent Corporation Weighed as Arts Agency

BY GRACE GLUECK

A plan to replace the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities with an independent agency similar to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has been under discussion among White House officials. The idea, which stresses private support for the arts, comes in the wake of the Reagan Administration's proposal to cut the budget of the Endowment by 50 per cent, and is still only in the talking stage.

Aram Bakshiari Jr., special assistant to the President in the Office of Public Liaison, in the areas of arts, humanities, education and culture, said yesterday, "It's my understanding that there has been some internal discussion of the idea, but there's no hard, fixed policy proposal."

And Robert S. Carter, head of a pre-election Reagan transition committee to evaluate the arts endowment, acknowledged that there have been "informal" conversations on the subject, but said that there has been no unannounced step taken to discuss the idea with Congress, which would have to pass enabling legislation. "We think that Congress will carry through our proposal for a 50 per cent budget cut, and the eventual establishment of a $100 million annual cap for the Endowments," he says.

A Study May Be Coming

Other Washington officials, who have heard versions of the discussion but would not comment for the record, say that the Administration talks have centered on establishing a task force in May to study the structure and function of the two Endowments. What the task force would primarily consider, however, for recommendation to Congress in the fall, would be the setting up of a private nonprofit organization similar to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It would receive Federal and private support, as does the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, to administer arts and humanities funding.

Neither Mr. Bakshiari nor Mr. Carter would discuss the purpose of such a task force or who might serve on it, "attributed to the Administration. The Reagan Administration is known to be concerned that under the Carter regime, the Endowments had become highly "insular." An arts corporation would presumably be run by a Presidential appointed board of directors, each serving a six-year term, who in turn would designate a chairman from among their ranks. This differs from the Endowment structure in that their chairman are appointed by the President, and are not members of Presidential appointees, each serving a six-year term.

Another View of Isolation

In addition, unlike the Endowments, which are financed annually by Congress, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is financed by Congress on a two-year basis. For these reasons, proponents of the corporation idea believe that arts financing would be more insulated from political interference under the structure of a corporation.

However, the members of the Endowments' advisory councils are also appointed for six-year terms by the President, so the case would be made, say those who favor retaining the Endowment structures, that a board of directors appointed by the President, and reappointed from time to time as their terms expire, has no more insulation from political pressure from Congress.

"The National Endowment for the Arts is a very diverse group of private citizens and a chairman appointed by the President," says a Senate arts supporter and head of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, "and it might be to attract private money.

And Robert S. Carter, head of a pre-election Reagan transition committee to evaluate the arts endowment, said, "This is a way we might be able to move arts budgeting to Congress, which would have to pass enabling legislation." We think that Congress will carry through our proposal for a 50 per cent budget cut, and the eventual establishment of a $100 million annual cap for the Endowments," he says.

Dissolution of the Endowments, a procedure that would require action by Congress, would also allow the Reagan Administration to get rid, in one fell swoop, of programs and personnel such as the Expansion Arts Program, which finance projects for minority, blue collar, rural and low-income communities that are distinctive of the arts, including the arts, humanities, education and culture.

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