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## Reagan Administration: Funding Cuts News Articles (1981-1982): News Article 63

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# The President, the Congress and the Arts

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swords and shields," he said, referring to Mr. Heston, Ambassador Terra and Dr. Gray. "I just carry the spears." He said it was equally wrong to think that he could control such strong-willed task-force members as Joseph Coors, the brewing magnate, or Roger Stevens, chairman of the Kennedy Center.

"I'm just enormously pleased," Mr. McHenry said. "We have the attention of the Administration in this critical area. They seem to be awaiting our report with great interest. We have a receptive audience. The President is a performing artist. We have an Administration interested in the significance of the arts."

For his part, Mr. Heston emphatically denies the rumor that the task force has already decided to favor the "elite" or establishment cultural organizations, such as the Metropolitan Opera and the Chicago Symphony, at the expense of avant-garde dance and theater companies and small, struggling groups located in poor neighborhoods. "It's a mistake to say that smaller ethnic organizations are not professional," Mr. Heston said in a recent interview. "That gets my hackles up. That's a racist opinion."

His view was seconded by President Reagan's special assistant for the arts and humanities, Aram Bakshian Jr., when he said, "There's an awful lot of special pleading in the arts. I don't see any major setback in the arts or humanities because of the cuts."

"It's too bad," Mr. Bakshian went on to say. "There was a budget policy before there was an arts policy, so the

by an agency equipped to seek private funding is now thought to be impractical. Nevertheless, the Administration will get its chance to install its own Endowment chairmen when the terms of Livingston L. Biddle Jr., who heads the Arts Endowment, and Joseph D. Duffy, head of the Humanities Endowment, expire in the fall.

Second, President Reagan will be asked, this official believes, to play a new, activist role. For example, he could be invited to appear in television commercials broadcast during prime time to appeal for support for the arts, a role an aide says he probably would accept. The President may also be asked to serve as the introducer of high-quality programs on the air, both on the commercial and public-television networks. Such a role would take Mr. Reagan back almost to the one in which he became so widely known, as the host for the General Electric Tele-

tion of the task force, "mainstream" arts — already well supported by the American establishment — will be less affected by budget cuts than the small, socially oriented, often minority-run organizations that are more dependent on Federal assistance than the more established institutions.

At this meeting, of the 35 members of the task force, 18 were present. All were white, all were middle-aged or older. Thirteen were men and five were women.

"It is a cross-section," insisted June Noble Larkin, one of the task-force members and a trustee of the Edward John Noble Foundation. "It has corporation executives, an actress, recipients." When it was remarked that everyone was white, Mrs. Larkin noted that one of the members was Alvin Alley, the black choreographer, but he was absent that day. When it was noted that few of the members

we are committed to the Endowments."

Mr. Heston, and others, suggest that while the two Endowments likely to remain separate — "they have different constituencies," he said — some administrative functions might be combined, and he saw a omen in the fact that both the Arts and Humanities Endowments, now separate buildings, are to be relocated together shortly in the old Post Office building on Pennsylvania Avenue. There also may be some symbolism in the location in that it is between the White House at one end of the avenue and Congress at the other.

It is largely because of Congress that much of the Federal arts spending will be spared. There are more dollars on Capitol Hill, it would seem, than on all of Broadway. One angel is Representative Sidney Yates, Democrat of Illinois, who chairs the appropriations committee on the Interior, which has jurisdiction over the Arts Endowment. Mr. Yates and his allies have fought against the sharp budget cuts that have recommended a spending level of \$157.5 million for the Arts Endowment and \$144 million for the Humanities Endowment for the next two fiscal years, a higher sum than the House reconciliation conference has recommended. The final figure will be determined when the 1982 Federal budget is finally adopted.

"The committee cannot accept the Office of Management and Budget's action," Mr. Yates said, referring to Mr. Stockman's proposed cuts, despite that 16 years of a Federal presence just could not be curtailed so sharply.



The New York Times/D. Gordon

Charlton Heston (left) and Representative Fred Richmond, Democrat from Brooklyn, during recent hearings on Federal support of the arts.

vision Theater.

Third, although there is some interest among task-force members in recommending tax initiatives for artists, such as a tax deduction for donating work to a museum, this proposal is expected to be defeated.

Other ideas that are likely to be discussed and possibly recommended include using the social scene at the White House to encourage formation of a network of arts benefactors and converting the task force into a permanent panel to coordinate fund-raising to compensate for budget cuts.

The recommendations are not binding, but several members said in interviews that they would not have agreed to serve if they thought their recommendations would be ignored, and they added that they had been assured that they would be listened to by Mr. Reagan.

"People on the task force are people who are serious about their lives and have a lot to do," said the actress Margo Albert, a member of the panel. "I wouldn't be here if I thought we weren't being taken seriously."

The task force is made up of 35 people, although it has not been possible to get everyone for a single meeting. A recent meeting was held in an ornate chamber in the Supreme Court building, a magnificent room with a ceiling 30 feet high and with paintings of famous Justices hanging on the walls. The Chief Justice, Warren Burger, entered the room and was introduced as the "host" for the meeting. Mr. Burger welcomed the task force to the Court and said that he was "delighted to see such a cross-section."

But it was not really a cross-section, and it is one of the concerns expressed by some that, because of the composi-

tion of the task force, "mainstream" arts — already well supported by the American establishment — will be less affected by budget cuts than the small, socially oriented, often minority-run organizations that are more dependent on Federal assistance than the more established institutions.

The main job of the task force, Mrs. Larkin said, was to find alternative sources of money for institutions as the Federal role was cut, and so the presence on the panel of corporate executives was therefore appropriate.

"I think the reason the President appointed the task force is that he wanted to make his determinations with as many facts as possible," said Mr. Heston, a fellow-actor who, like Mr. Reagan, once served as president of the Screen Actors Guild. "Until last November, his primary handicap was that he was not being taken seriously because he was an actor. Now people are saying he doesn't care about the arts."

President Reagan's actions, Mr. Heston said, will prove that assumption wrong. "It stands to reason that he is concerned about the arts," Mr. Heston said of the President. "It is his opinion that the Federal Government has a permanent role to play, with the extent to be determined by Congress."

Mr. Heston, like others, attributed the almost 50 percent cut in Federal spending proposed last February in the President's message to the influence of David M. Stockman, the Budget Director, who was striking out in all directions then to find ways to cut the Federal budget by \$40 billion.

"I think 50 percent is an excessive cut, and clearly Congress feels that, too," Mr. Heston said. "It is my opinion that the President feels the 50 percent cut is excessive. President Reagan feels the Endowments have served a useful function. I do, too. We haven't reached any conclusions, but

**'The President feels the 50 percent cut is excessive,' says Charlton Heston. 'He feels the Endowments have been useful.'**

When asked if, as Mr. Bakshian and others in the Administration had suggested, private donations would plant Federal funds, Representative Yates said this would not happen. "Private giving by corporations cannot possibly make up for the cuts," he insisted.

Another indication of the support for the arts in the form of the Congressional Arts Caucus, which, with 149 Senators and Representatives as members, is one of the largest caucuses on Capitol Hill, is that its chairman is Representative Fred Richmond, Democrat of Brooklyn, many other New Yorkers are members, along with champions of the arts from 37 other states. Mr. Heston and Mr. Terra both appeared recently at a meeting of the caucus, both giving their assurances of the President's support for the arts. "I spent months on the campaign trail with Mr. Reagan," Mr. Terra said, referring to his travels with Mr. Reagan, "and my favorite subject when relaxing was the arts."

"The arts and humanities will flourish better in this Administration in any other," Mr. Terra declared. Senator Claiborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Island, who is regarded as the "father" of the Endowments, reassured, saying that his view over the intentions of the task force "were quickly dissipated." So Howard M. Metzger, Democrat of Ohio, said he was encouraged by Mr. Terra's promises, but, of the Administration's intentions to help the arts while curbing the budget, he said, "That will take some doing."

Whatever the findings of the task force, the next step will be up to President Reagan, and then Congress has to act on whatever recommendations he sends to Capitol Hill. Representative Richmond made it clear Congress would cut no more than Mr. Reagan's Administration have made a political error in announcing that it was seeking decreases in arts spending.

"The President is anxious to get himself out of the mess he has gotten himself into," Mr. Richmond said. "This is about the stupidest error you can make."

**'It wouldn't be the end of the world for any art forms if funding were cut,' says the President's special aide for the arts.**

budget cuts got all the attention."

Mr. Bakshian, who is a professional writer and a Republican activist, has an office in the Old Executive Office Building next door to the White House. He said it was wrong to think that the Reagan years would be a time of barrenness for the arts in the United States. "The President and his wife are performing artists, and they feel very strongly about the arts." He could have mentioned, too, that one of the Reagans' sons, Ron, is a dancer with the Joffrey Ballet Company.

The proposed cut in Federal arts spending was made, at least in part, Mr. Bakshian said, because it was a "glaring example of a snowballing program" and because "cuts had to be made somewhere." Federal aid to the arts, he noted, could not be considered part of the safety net of social programs that the Administration had pledged it would not cut. "It wouldn't be the end of the world for any art forms or institutions" if arts funding were cut, Mr. Bakshian said, adding quickly, though, "I'm not in favor of people starving in garrets."

The task force led by Messrs. Heston and Terra and Dr. Gray is due to meet next Sunday and Monday in Los Angeles in what promises to be its most important session to date. The most important matter about which it can make recommendations is whether or not the two Endowments are to be restructured, and, if so, how. No one knows what its recommendation will be, but one well-placed Administration official believes the task force is likely to take the following actions as a preliminary to its final report, once targeted for Labor Day but now expected later next month:

First, the task force is likely to recommend that both Endowments remain as they are. A possible merger of the Arts and Humanities Endowments has been considered, but the consensus of the task force at present, this official understands, is that a merger would create precisely the sort of unwieldy bureaucracy that the Administration has pledged to root out of the Federal Government. Furthermore, the replacement of the Endowments