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Pell opposes unfair cuts for the arts

WASHINGTON — Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., promises to support the National Endowment for the Arts from unfair spending cuts, but is reserving judgment on President Reagan’s plan to slash federal support for the arts by 12.5 percent next year.

Anne Murphy, executive director of the American Arts Alliance, representing 372 opera and dance companies, theaters, orchestras, art museums and other arts institutions nationwide, made clear, however, that she’s unhappy with Mr. Reagan’s fiscal 1987 budget proposal.

“T he endowment’s current budget of $165.7 million already is insufficient,” she said, “so cutting it to $145 million is unrealistic.” Besides lopping $20.7 million from the art endowment next year, Mr. Reagan wants to cut $14.6 million from the National Endowment for the Humanities, a 10.4 percent reduction from $140.6 million to $126 million, according to sources who spoke on condition they not be named.

President Reagan’s fiscal 1987 budget plan, which he will submit to Congress on Feb. 3, reflects these and other spending cutbacks intended to conform to a requirement of the new Gramm-Rudman budget-balancing law that the federal deficit be trimmed to $144 billion next year.

In 1986, the two endowments — independent federal agencies that underwrite artists, arts institutions, scholarly research and education with government-paid grants — must cut $7.1 million in the arts budget and $8 million in humanities spending. Looking ahead to fiscal 1987, which begins Oct. 1, 1986, Pell and Rep. Sidney Yates, D-Ill., chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee that handles the endowment budgets, said cuts in federal support for the arts and humanities must be examined in relation to Mr. Reagan’s entire budget plan to make sure they are fair.

“I would regret very much any reduction in the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts,” said Pell.