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Reagan Aides Discuss U.S. Role in Helping Arts and Humanities

By HILTON KRAMER

An important debate on the future course of Government policy on the arts is in progress in the inner councils of President-elect Ronald Reagan's advisers on cultural affairs. The debate is concentrated on the programs and policies of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Its outcome is likely to determine how the two Federal agencies will allocate funds and establish priorities for years to come.

At the crux of this debate is a firmly held belief, reported to be virtually unanimous among otherwise divided Reagan advisers, that the activities of both endowments have been profoundly compromised by politicization and an accompanying lowering of standards under the Carter Administration.

Divergent Conclusions

Yet from this belief two widely divergent conclusions are being drawn. One calls for the adoption of narrower programs designed to meet stricter standards of professional accomplishment. This, in effect, would mean a significant withdrawal from programs of popularization and mass appeal, and a renewed emphasis on programs encouraging high art and professional scholarship.

The other conclusion is more extreme.

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Reagan Advisers Debate Financing of Arts

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It takes the view that the endowments have stayed Hampshire off their in- tended course and that some political and social causes un sanctioned by the legislation brought them into being. As a result, there is now an alter- native but to abolish them altogether.

The committee held the meeting on the theory that the endowment is a core part of the arts. As a result, there is now an alternative but to abolish them altogether. It would, of course, require a vote of the House for a constitutional amendment to abolish the endowment.

Two committees have been author- ized by the President to look into the activities of the endowments and make recommenda- tions for policy. The committee is to be appointed to evaluate the arts endowment is headed by Robert S. Carter, a Wash- ington publicist who organized the National Republican Convention this year and is a former trustee of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington. The committee for humanities endowment is headed by Richard J. Bishirjian, a con- servative writer and editor who is chairman of the department of political science at the College of New Rochelle in Westchester County.

Both committees have been meeting this week with officials of the endow- ments who are scheduled to submit interim reports Dec. 21 and final recommendations Dec. 22.

Conservative 'Blueprint' Until the recommendations are sub- mitted, the President and his team will be the committee for humanities endowment, headed by Richard J. Bishirjian, a conservative writer and editor who is chairman of the department of political science at the College of New Rochelle in Westchester County.

The report states at the outset that recent activities of the endowments are tending to expand politically inspired social policies at the ex- pense of the independence of the arts and humanities. "In redirecting the endowments toward the highest purposes for which they were originally established," it says, "the National Endowment for the Humanities has moved from support of the individual artist to support of social movements and social change." "This is a change from the original concept of the endowment," the report says. "It has been the policy of the National Endowment for the Humanities under the present Administration to take a view of the humanities that embraces popular culture and social-action programs as well as projects of a scholarly nature. It is in keeping with its so-called "progressive" attitude toward the humanities."

"In a major issue in redirecting and reorganizing the agency will be to estab- lish the principle of scholarly excel- lence as the criterion for budgeting and program definition." $200,000 Office-Worker Study handsome critical report on the en- dowments — Michael Joyce, executive director of the John M. Olin Founda- tion, which prepared the report for the Overseas Committee — and several of his colleagues are now members of Dr. Bishirjian's committee on the humanities endowment.

Robert S. Carter, who headed the committee for humanities legislation, said, "I have been asked by the committee to submit a report on the subject of the endowment. I have prepared a report that is in line with the committee's recommendations."

Ford, Democrat of Michigan, has been the leading voice of the committee for humanities endowment. And even Mr. Ford may not be able to avoid the issue of the endowment through the House, for he is under heavy pressure to support the endowment in order to become chairman of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service.

In the Senate, Mr. Pell has been the leading opponent of the endowment. He was chairman of a House appropriations committee on this matter in the 93rd Congress, prior to his appointment to the Senate. Mr. Pell will become ranking minority member of the panel, a post he resigned on March 1.

The committee for humanities legislation has also been active in its own right. It has sponsored bills to create a federal agency to assist the arts, and its chairman, Sen. Claiborne Pell, Democrat of Rhode Is- land, is the ranking minority member of the Senate. Mr. Pell has been a vocal opponent of the endowment in the Senate, and has introduced a bill to abolish the endowment.

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