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# Federal Advisory Council to the Arts, United States Arts Foundation: Hearings (August 1962): Speech 02

Jacob K. Javits

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From the office of:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 29, 1962

SENATOR JACOB K. JAVITS, (R-N.Y.)

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR JACOB K. JAVITS AT THE HEARINGS CONDUCTED  
BY THE SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE ARTS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE  
ON LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE, AUGUST 29, 1962  
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### FEDERAL AID FOR THE ARTS

For fourteen years as a member of the House, and as a member of the Senate I have been sponsoring and working for legislation for Federal assistance to the arts. It is therefore especially gratifying that these hearings are being opened.

It is noteworthy that some of the greatest long-range benefits to U.S. prestige abroad have come from our cultural exchange agreements involving tours by such world-famed personalities as Marian Anderson, Van Cliburn, Helen Hayes and Louis Armstrong. American artists who participate in these programs, often at a personal financial sacrifice, have rendered magnificent service in sharing our country's culture and promoting good relations with other countries. This has become urgent now when the arts have become a factor of national prestige in the competition between the Communist bloc and the Free World, particularly in the newly developing nations.

Their success emphasizes the need to develop a cultural base in depth within our own borders and for Congress to concern itself with the problem of broadening the basis of our cultural institutions and activities. The difficulties faced by our famed cultural institutions were dramatically illustrated last year by the labor dispute that threatened for a time to black out the Metropolitan Opera House for an entire season. At that time I urged the Secretary of Labor, Mr. Goldberg, to intervene and in a letter pointed out to him:

"The Met is a national institution and a national heritage, and is so regarded throughout the world. It is as fully identified with the United States as the Bolshoi is with the Soviet Union, and it would have constituted a serious blow to our international prestige had it failed to open its season because of financial difficulties. A free society must show its capability for preserving its finest values without totalitarian authority."

There is no doubt that the Federal government is becoming more and more aware of the need to concern itself with the broad level of our cultural and artistic resources and their development. During the 1960 Presidential campaign, both candidates supported a national program of aid to the arts, and the President in fact expressed full support for a "Federally-supported foundation," the very proposal which is embodied in my bill (S.1250), one of the subjects of the hearings.

In October 1960 the then Senator Kennedy said: "I am in full sympathy with the proposal for a Federally-supported foundation to provide encouragement and opportunity to non-profit private and civic groups in the performing arts. When so many other nations officially recognize and support the performing arts as part of their national cultural heritage, it seems to me unfortunate that the United States has been so slow in coming to a similar recognition."

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The United States Arts Foundation which I propose would help make possible live performances and exhibits in areas which could not otherwise receive and support them. It would depend on box office and there would be government subvention - not subsidy - therefore the public would continue to be the final arbiter of taste. It would stimulate a revival of the arts in entire regions through the work of private non-profit groups, municipalities and state agencies able to operate because of the subvention available under the Foundation to cover the difference between costs and admissions. It is noteworthy that such admissions are free of Federal income tax - as the result of efforts in which I participated made some time ago. The U.S. Arts Foundation would bring about wider dissemination of the performing and visual arts and, within the framework of free enterprise and voluntary association, expose many more people and more places to the best in American culture than any other measure now before the Congress. It would also help in the development and training of new talent in the arts' fields.

This is a conservative proposal, providing only \$10 million a year from the Federal government for the entire country, but it is most important as a first step in obtaining from the Federal government some recognition of its responsibility for the encouragement of American culture. Spent in conjunction with matching funds from interested and producing public or private agencies in the performing and visual arts, this modest Federal appropriation could stimulate the creation of as much as \$50 million a year in non-government activity for the arts.

The U.S. Arts Foundation would be authorized to accept donations and utilize the services of volunteers so that a minimum of appropriated funds would be required. It would function through panels or committees composed of artists and representatives of education and the general public who would judge the artistic worth and cultural significance of submitted programs to determine whether they qualify for support by the Foundation.

There are functioning arts foundations along these very lines in the United Kingdom and in Canada, and they have proved strikingly successful. New York State has pioneered in the forward looking step of establishing a New York Arts Council to operate within state boundaries, and several other states have followed its example by setting up similar state agencies.

At present, outside of a dozen of so large cities throughout the country, there is little in the way of the performing and visual arts -- yet the difference between providing and not providing these cultural benefits is in monetary terms often minute. This is indeed one case where a drop in the bucket can help quench the cultural thirst of 180 million people.

Expressions of support for this legislation have come to me from a great many people in the academic and artistic world, among them the first lady of the American theatre, Helen Hayes; Ralph Bellamy in his capacity as President of Actors Equity; the noted composer Richard Rogers; the President of ANTA, Peggy Wood; John Brownlee, President of the American Guild of Musical Artists; Erich Leinsdorf, music consultant for the Metropolitan; the famed impressario Sol Hurok; the great operatic sopranos Rise Stevens and Mimi Benzell; and many of those who will be testifying here in the next few days.

My legislation has the support of Anthony A. Bliss, President of the Metropolitan Opera Association, who wrote me on February 17, 1961, as follows:

"I appreciate your informing me that you propose to reintroduce a bill to create a U.S. Arts Foundation which, as I understand it, is substantially similar to the one introduced by you and Senator Clark in 1959. As president of the Metropolitan Opera Association,

the bill such as you propose is of the greatest interest.

Traditionally in this country, encouragement and support of the performing arts has been a private affair, with local and Federal governments assisting only in the main to the extent of certain tax advantages or some subsidization for visits to other countries in connection with cultural exchange. Such a situation, certainly in the case of opera and ballet, is historically unique. It has resulted in a limitation of the American performing arts program out of all proportion to our wealth and to the interest both actual and potential, of our people in such a program. Particularly, it has tended to limit the development of performing arts programs to the centers of concentrated wealth.

A program, therefore, such as you propose which appears similar in character to that presently operative in England and Canada, would, in my opinion, contribute much to placing America where it belongs- in the forefront of the performing arts."

I believe the U.S. Arts Foundation can enable us to look forward to the day when our nation will be served by theater, opera, ballet, music, painting and sculpture and all the other arts available in all sections of our land, so that no populated place is culturally starved. The world will honor us for it and the soul of America will be enabled to grow in keeping with the growth of our culturally creative capabilities.

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