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Ewald B. Nyquist

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Statement by

Ewald B. Nyquist
President of the University of the State of New York
and Commissioner of Education

Before the

Committee on Labor and Public Welfare
Special Subcommittee on the Arts and Humanities
United States Senate
Claiborne Pell, Chairman

Thursday, July 19, 1973
10:00 A. M., EDT
Washington, D. C.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

I am Ewald B. Nyquist, President of the University of the State of New York and Commissioner of Education. I am grateful for the opportunity of appearing before your Subcommittee to testify on the role of museums in the educational system, certain problems which they confront, and more particularly, the Museum Services Act, S. 796.

On June 19, 1956, when President Eisenhower signed the Library Services Act (Public Law 597, 84th Congress), he stated in part, "It shows promise of leading to a significant enrichment of the lives of millions of Americans . . . " This program, now called the Library Services and Construction Act, is serving us well. There is a need to view our educational resources as a macro-educational system extending far beyond the formal educational agencies of school and colleges. It includes, in addition to our public libraries--museums, performing arts centers, historical societies, research laboratories, radio, television, VISTA, the Peace Corps--and much more. One belief of mine is that we must not confuse learning with education or education with schooling.

The majority of cultural institutions are victimized by their own success; they are faced by a rapidly rising clientele without a commensurate increase in financial support. In three decades, museum visits nationwide have increased 1400 percent, from 50 million annually to 700 million. In Fiscal Year 1971, the over 100 museums in New York State received 27 million visits. In the same period, almost five million visits were made by students to museums as a part of organized school

groups. Furthermore, these museums provided organized services to over 900,000 persons through their various adult education programs.

A recent study in New York entitled, "Arts and the People--A Survey of Public Attitudes and Participation in the Arts and Culture in New York State", points out that not only the rich or the highly educated value and esteem our cultural institutions. But, these feelings are shared by many people up and down the economic scale and in every region of the State. According to the study, the public wants more cultural facilities in their neighborhoods and find their lack of such facilities a major problem, outranking such highly publicized issues as inadequate housing, poor schools, and insufficient parks. The strongest dissatisfaction was expressed by non-white interviewees, a full 72 percent of whom criticized this deficiency.

There are two purposes to education: One is to help young people learn a living, career preparation, if you will, and secondly, to help people learn how to live a life: a creative, sensitive, and humane life. Or, stated another way, as a famous man once said: The primary purpose of education is not to teach you to earn your bread, but to make every mouthful sweeter. Just as the Hebrew sages have claimed that man does not live by bread alone--thus emphasizing to us that we live by ideals and spiritual renewal and values--so have they also remarked that where there is no bread there is no Torah--thus reminding us that we must also be practical, that there are practicalities which must limit our idealists.

The recognition that museums are indeed so great an educational resource leads at once to concern for their present and future financial and program stability. Historically, museums have depended upon private philanthropy, but for a variety of reasons, this source of funds is no longer sufficient. Even the Smithsonian Institution, "The Nation's Attic" and one of the most diverse and representative of our cultural institutions, was initiated by private philanthropy.

In New York State, and this is true throughout the United States, the greatest source of public funds available to museums is from local government, that is from towns, cities and counties. In proportion to the total budget of museums, state funds in New York, as elsewhere, are a small factor in their operations. This is the case in spite of the fact that New York State devotes more state money to museum support than any other state and has for several years been a recognized leader in the state support of cultural activities. In New York State, local government funds cover about 20 percent of the operating costs of museums. State funds distributed through the New York State Council on the Arts provide about three percent of the total operating costs of the state's museums and the two National Endowments contributed an additional two percent. Thus, about three-quarters of the operating costs of museums must be met from private sources or from income derived from museum activities.

The Bill, the Museum Services Act, points out a special need as did the Library Services Act. State and local government finances are being

stretched to assist. Present Federal mechanisms through the Endowments and other programs are being of little additional assistance. I must question whether yet another Institute in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare will help to achieve a cohesive approach to easing the financial burden borne by museums. Rather, we need to make a "mesh" of things.

Whatever the nature and amount of government assistance to museums, the fact remains that museums must have additional funds if they are to maintain an adequate level of operational and program activity. The financial support required to meet the need will have to come from all levels of government as well as private sources. Ideally, these additional funds should be directed first to aiding museums to maintain or improve their basic operations. A recent and exhaustive study of museums in New York conducted by an affiliate of Louis Harris Associates clearly shows that the first and most urgent need is for larger and more qualified staffing; second is the need for more space and physical facilities. In third place is the need for more programs.

The New York State Education Department and the Board of Regents have been aware for some time of the problems I have noted here, that is of the mismatch between the public use and the public support of museums, and of the need to close the widening gap between operational requirements and the funds available. In January of this year, I described this problem to the New York State Commission on Cultural Resources and also directed the staff of the State Education Department to prepare a plan to help meet

these museum needs. Such a plan has been developed in close cooperation with the New York State Association of Museums.

Essentially, this plan provides for state funds for properly registered and accredited museums in proportion to the amount of their net operating income exclusive of any local, state, or Federal funds already received by the museums. The total sum involved in this plan (\$5,000,000 annually) would amount to eight percent of the total operating income of the museums raised from all private sources. This would be an important step forward, and has the unanimous support of the museums in the state. This plan to provide continuing operating support, as distinct from project aid, is similar to a system which in New York State has provided state funds for the operation of libraries for 23 years and a more recent plan of the same sort to provide operating aid to educational television stations. The library aid program has proved very successful, and there is every reason to anticipate success for the museum plan if it were to be adopted by the state government.

New York State, first through the Council on the Arts and now in addition in the form of the Regents Proposal, is striving to meet its obligation. However, broad Federal support will be required if museums are to play their full educational role. We believe that the benefits of museums are shared by all the people and by all levels of government alike, and therefore, all must share in the responsibility for their continued performance.

The aid programs of the National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities, particularly the former, are assisting museums to carry out specific programs. A limited amount of National Endowments for the Arts support does go toward projects which relate to basic museum operational needs. The amounts available for this purpose are however insufficient to the need. Thus, I want to express my firm support of the intent and general provisions of this proposed legislation, at the Federal level, as being directed toward an unsatisfied need. Speaking on behalf of the Regents and the State Education Department, I have repeatedly expressed our concern for the availability and quality of educational experiences that transcend formal learning. Because museums are essential to a full and balanced education, ways and means must be found to assist them to develop exhibit programs, professional staff and modern methods as well as sufficient facilities. We believe that the major current need is to improve the routine operational competence of museums through public financial support. S. 796 can produce a significant and lasting benefit in this area.

Finally, let me close with a quote from the position paper, Culture and Education, issued by the New York State Board of Regents in January of this year, which I am appending for the record.

"There exist in this . . . Nation . . . two great educational networks desperately in need of financial support. The network of schools, universities, and related facilities, both public and private, represents the central instrument for the accomplishment of the educational process. The character and purpose of the various kinds of institutions which comprise this network are too well known to detail here. The financial crisis which confronts the various components of this network is equally well known.

"The other network is that of the cultural institutions. Although these two networks share a common purpose and responsibility to society--the education of people--they have done their work separately and independently. There is very little acceptance of the fact that cultural and aesthetic values really are the stuff of education and that they represent learning experiences which belong in the lives of young people--to say nothing of adults. It is for this reason that the arts continue to suffer a low priority in education and remain largely in the category of frill, after-school activity, or enrichment. Logically, the practical and humanistic knowledge taught by the school-university network is inseparable from the knowledge which is imparted through the network of cultural institutions. Because both of these networks serve essentially educational purposes, many of the difficulties confronting both, particularly their financial needs, must be viewed as parts of a single problem of the gravest concern to the future of education . . ."

I wish to extend to you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of this Subcommittee, my appreciation for the opportunity you have extended me to present my remarks to you on this most important subject.