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President's Committee (1994): Speech 03

John Brademas

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OPENING STATEMENT OF DR. JOHN BRADEMAS
CHAIRMAN
PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON THE ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES

I want to extend a warm welcome to all of you whom President Clinton has selected to serve on the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

You are an outstanding group of men and women about to embark on an exciting day and an important mission.

I am greatly honored that the President asked me to chair this committee, and that he has named to it such an extraordinary group of people.

With your help and active participation, I'm confident that the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities will fulfill its promise.

Of course, we are all delighted that the First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, has graciously agreed to serve as Honorary Chair of the Committee.

The prestige of our Committee and the backing of the White House can, I feel sure, influence private philanthropy in our country and encourage greater support for the cultural life of the nation.

A VITAL PARTNERSHIP

As President Clinton said in naming all of you to the Committee, "The Federal, state and local governments together provide only a small percentage of the support essential to our cultural life. These appointments underscore the vital partnership between the government and the private citizens who do so much to enrich and preserve the arts and humanities in our country."

At a time when our society faces new and profound challenges, when we are losing so many of our children, and when so many people feel insecure in the face of change, the arts and the humanities are fundamental to our lives as individuals and as a nation."

Our Committee can create partnerships with other Federal departments and agencies, as we are already doing with the Department of Commerce, to promote cultural tourism, and with the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development--the last three in order that arts and humanities organizations will have access to the new prevention programs in the Crime Bill the President has just signed into law.

Please remember that with so many senior members of the government on our Committee, we also function as an interagency task force on the arts and the humanities. Indeed, I'm very pleased that so many of the government members of our Committee are with us today and I'm delighted that Secretary of the Interior Babbitt has asked Roger Kennedy, Director of the Park Service, to serve; that Secretary of the Treasury Bentsen has asked his Assistant Secretary for Tax Policy, Leslie Samuels, to join us; and that Secretary of State Christopher has designated my former colleague in the House, the Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, Tim Wirth, to be a member of the Committee.

Let me say that we are here to assist -- and not to duplicate -- the mission of the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum Services.

MISSION OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE

Now the mission of the President's Committee is to advance public understanding of the arts and the humanities, and to establish new partnerships between the private sector and Federal agencies to address critical issues facing cultural life in the United States.

The arts and the humanities and their power to inform and uplift our lives and help the country's diverse population understand and communicate with one another should be at the center of everyday life, not at the margins.

In the next two--I believe, six!--years, our Committee has an opportunity to take on some compelling issues and exciting projects, ones that can contribute both to enriching the nation's cultural life and society at large.

THE COMMITTEE'S AGENDA

Working with the White House, we have developed an ambitious agenda for the Committee. We can succeed with this agenda only if all of you are committed and active.

I think it important here to note that whatever projects we decide to undertake will need to be privately funded. So as you go through this exciting day, please think about what you can do to advance our work.

Today we'll be talking about how the Committee can help reverse the downward trends in private funding for the arts and the humanities.

This Administration will do everything it can to support cultural life, through the personal advocacy of the President and the First Lady, through events at the White House, through support from other departments of the government and by maintaining adequate requests in the Federal budget.

I think it safe to say, however, that with continuing efforts to reduce the deficit, and in light of the controversies in Congress, our arts and humanities agencies are not likely to win a big increase in their budgets.

In my judgement, we should be able to build the groundwork for increasing those budgets.

VALUING ARTISTS AND SCHOLARS

All of us know that artists and scholars are not valued enough, nurtured enough. All of us know that many cultural institutions, whether large and established or small and community-based, are in economic crisis and that that condition affects the access of people to their offerings. Indeed, the economic situation of the arts and the humanities is in many respects so fragile that the loss of even a modest government grant or support from a private donor can mean a crisis. So we must take seriously our mission to stimulate private sector giving.

Private contributions have been especially difficult, outside higher education, to attract to the humanities. We are exploring with the NEH and the Federation of State Humanities Councils a challenge grant to help state humanities councils increase their fundraising for annual operating support.

PUTTING THE ARTS BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

You will also hear today about the efforts of the government to improve educational standards and to put the arts back into the classroom. The National Endowment for the Arts and the Department of Education have forged a partnership to demonstrate how the arts fit into the National Education Goals approved in the Goals 2000 legislation Congress passed this year, and to get national standards—voluntary standards—in the arts adopted by every state. We endorse this effort as a necessary foundation for all other efforts to reach children.

President Clinton will also ask our Committee to pay particular attention to what happens to young people when they are not in school: to use the power of the arts and, through the humanities, of ideas, to offer young people creative alternatives to destructive urges...To give them "safe havens"; places to go where there are caring adults and where they can experience the joy, discipline and positive self-expression that training in the arts and the humanities offers.

You will hear as well about government partnerships, some of which the President's Committee has already initiated.

For example, the Committee staff was asked by the Department of Commerce to write one of the eight new policy papers about the National Information Infrastructure--better known as the Information Superhighway. Our staff worked together with the NEA, NEH and IMS to produce a report, "Arts, Humanities, Culture on the NII," which was released by Secretary Ron Brown on September 7. And there are many significant projects that can come out of that policy review.

I personally hope that our committee will also give attention to how we can encourage more international exchange among artists and humanists. What we may call "cultural diplomacy" often precedes economic exchange and improves the political climate in foreign affairs. I believe that if we imaginatively address cultural diplomacy, we can help this Administration and our country in other parts of the world.

The Department of Commerce has also encouraged a partnership for cultural tourism, to publicize cultural events in the United States in markets abroad. The Department is encouraging cultural organizations to take part in the 50 state conferences on tourism that will lead up to the November 1995 White House Conference on Tourism. And our Committee is urging the organizers of the conference to include a session on cultural tourism.

Much of what we do, of course, and what we seek to encourage, can be advanced by an effective media plan.

ENHANCING PUBLIC AWARENESS

There are several ways we can work with radio, television and publications to enhance public awareness of the arts and the humanities. For example, we've already been working with National Public Radio to develop a national book club on the air. We'll discuss more ideas later at our meeting where I hope to draw on the considerable expertise of this Committee.

During the course of the day, our Executive Director, Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, will report to you about some other activities that she and the staff began by way of developing an agenda for the next couple of years.

Before we plunge into the agenda, let me say a word about the Committee. The President has named a Chairman and three Vice-Chairmen--Peggy Cooper-Cafritz, Cynthia Perrin Schneider and Terry Semel--who comprise a small executive committee. The authority for our Committee comes, of course, from the President--and our agenda is shaped by his and the First Lady's mandates, which you will hear this afternoon.

ELLEN McCULLOCH-LOVELL TO SERVE AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Now I should like to introduce the Executive Director of our Committee. She has, in my view, a superb background for her important responsibility--nine years as Director of the Vermont State Arts Council and then ten years as Chief of Staff to the distinguished Senior Senator from Vermont, Patrick Leahy.

I have myself, in the relatively short time we have been working together, been impressed by her energy, her intelligence, her judgment and her dedication to the purpose that brings us together today.

Now all of you bring tremendous experience to the Committee, and there is always room for new ideas. By the end of today, I hope to be able to create working groups to deal with the items on our agenda as well as a working group to develop any ideas that emerge from this meeting.

I will ask each working group to articulate the objectives of the project it recommends; identify those government, corporate or non-profit partners with which we will work to carry out the project; and indicate how it will be financed.

We will move ahead on those projects to which the White House has agreed. When new ideas are developed, I will review them for approval with our Honorary Chair, Hillary Clinton.

We should have a great day together. More important, I believe that working together, we can accomplish something of significance for the President of the United States and for the people of our country, for what we do in the arts and the humanities tells who we are as a people. Our educational and cultural institutions are indispensable to the quality of our lives, the strength of our communities and the vitality of our democracy. For the arts and the humanities to thrive now and into the next century, we must have the support of both the government and the private sector.