



AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

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STATEMENT OF FREDERICK BURKHARDT

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before the  
Special Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities of the Senate  
and the  
Special Subcommittee on Labor of the House of Representatives  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Special Subcommittee:

I am most grateful for the privilege which has been accorded me by your invitation to testify on the Bills now before you.

The American Council of Learned Societies, of which I am President, is a federation of 31 national scholarly associations embracing every discipline and field of study of the humanities and many of the social sciences as well. The members of its constituent societies number about 90,000 and include scholars and teachers at all levels and from all parts of the country. As the chief national organization concerned with the advancement of scholarship and teaching in all fields of the humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies has special knowledge of and concern for the problems and needs of the humanities. We have over the years tried in every way possible to meet these needs and solve these problems. Through generous grants from private foundations and through occasional contracts with various agencies of the federal government we have been able to contribute in some degree to the work of individual scholars in the humanities, to the develop-

ment of new disciplines and interdisciplinary activities, to the improvement of scholarly communication, both nationally and internationally, and - in a more limited way, through pilot projects - to the improvement of curricula in the schools. While these activities have helped to show how much can be done, our experience has also convinced us of how much more needs to be done, and has given us some ideas about how it should be done.

I should like at the outset - speaking for myself, for the American Council of Learned Societies, and for the great majority of scholars we represent - to give my wholehearted endorsement to the establishment of a National Foundation for the Humanities and the Arts. Although my testimony will, of course, deal primarily with the academic humanities - the area which I know best and the area with which the American Council of Learned Societies is concerned - I join the distinguished members of the Commission on the Humanities in regarding "the arts, both visual and performing, as part of the humanities and indeed essential to their existence." I shall have more to say about this somewhat later.

I need not, I think, spend much time before this audience arguing that the Humanities and the Arts are important to our

culture and to our country. We need only think of the great civilizations of the past - Greece, Egypt, China, Rome - to realize that what has lived from them, what has been passed on to us and is cherished by us is their creative work - in art and literature, in philosophy and science.

Carthage was a culture that devoted its creative talents to war and trade. It came close to defeating Rome. When, finally, the Romans wiped out Carthage there was nothing left but a pile of rubble on the plains of what is now Tunisia. But when the Huns sacked Rome, Virgil and Cicero, Terence, Ovid, Catullus, and Horace and a host of other poets and statesmen remained a living force and have lived with us to this day.

So too any civilization will be a living force in the world of the future to the extent that it values and nurtures the creative forces of art and the humanities, of philosophy and science.

In science we have done well. Because of their great importance to the defense of this country, the sciences have received great public support, and they have flourished.

But there is now a widespread concern that the emphasis on science, important as it is, has produced an imbalance in our civilization and specifically in our educational system where much of the vast amount provided for support of science and scientific research has been invested. There has been no comparable investment in the humanities and the arts and in consequence the education of our young, including our young scientists, runs the risk of becoming



narrowly technical and shallow and short-sighted - shallow and short-sighted in the sense that there is less and less concern with the larger issues involved in the quality of living, the issues of morality and conduct, of taste and judgment. A lopsided, half-starved educational system is something this country simply cannot afford, however strong in technology and science, however strong in defense and wealth. Science itself will suffer in such a culture.

So we must provide support for the humanities and the arts, support on the national level and on a national scale.

The problems that we are here to consider today can, I think, be organized into a series of four questions. First, should increased support be provided for the humanities in the United States? Second, should the Federal Government join in the provision of such added support? Third, through what agency or agencies, new or at present in existence, should the Federal Government act in this area? And, fourth, if a new agency is to be established, what should be its scope and how should it be organized?

Until quite recently, attention has been focussed on the first two of these questions - on the needs of the humanities and on the relation of these needs to the national interest. And it is proper that this should have been the case, for the burden of proof surely rests on those who advocate increased federal activity in support of the humanities. It was with this in mind that the American Council of Learned Societies joined with the Council of Graduate

Schools in the United States and the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa in establishing the Commission on the Humanities. The Commission, which once founded was quite independent of its sponsors, was asked to survey and report on the current situation of the humanities in the United States and to make such recommendations as, after its investigations, seemed appropriate. Under the able leadership of Barnaby Keeney, the Commission went about its task with great seriousness and diligence. It set up two special committees of its own and, through the constituent societies of the American Council of Learned Societies, it solicited the views of 176 of the country's leading humanistic scholars. After more than a year of work, the Commission submitted its 222-page Report to the three sponsors, each of which has subsequently (and, I might add, enthusiastically) endorsed its findings and recommendations. Some 30,000 copies of the Commission's Report have been distributed in the eight months since it was published and, if we may judge by the frequency with which it has been quoted and cited in newspaper articles, in editorials, in speeches and in the Congressional Record itself, the Report has made a very substantial impact on thinking about the needs of the humanities and about the relation of these needs to the national interest. Indeed, the evidence adduced by the Commission is so impressive and its reasoning so persuasive that I am not inclined here to go over this ground again except to emphasize two general points.

The first is that the undeniable needs of the humanities, particularly in the areas of basic research and advanced scholarship, are

a function of the strength rather than the weakness of humanistic scholarship in the United States in our time. As the Commission said, speaking of the reports that had been submitted to it by the 24 learned societies: "With no exception, they speak of the vitality and richness of American scholarship and look forward to even greater achievements in the future." It is in the name of these greater achievements that support is now urged. Precisely because revolutionary new tools for the analysis and study of languages have been developed, precisely because American scholars are leading the world in the study of such areas as Asia, Africa and Latin America, precisely because splendid new techniques are being introduced into such fields as musicology, literature and the history of art, it is now more important than ever that basic research be supported on a large scale, that scholarly communication be improved, that the publication of the results of scholarship be facilitated, and that the necessary materials and tools be made available to all serious scholars.

My second general point also emerges clearly from the Report of the Commission on the Humanities. It is simply that, in the Commission's words, "we propose a program...for all our people." If what was at stake here were nothing more than the pleadings of a group of scholars who wanted more for themselves, or who were selfishly concerned for the advancement of their own narrow specialties, I can assure you that I would not be appearing before you today. Or, if I did appear, it would be to take the other side. The fact is, however, that the case for support of the humanities is the case for



the preservation and improvement of the very bases of our civilization. As demonstrated by the experience of the Commission - only five of whose members were practicing scholars in the humanities - it is a case that scientists, lawyers, businessmen as well as scholars find compelling. They no less than the scholars recognize how vital it is to understand and to communicate all that man has thought and created and experienced during his life on this earth. It is for this that we depend upon the humanities. As President Johnson wrote last June, "The continued vitality of the humanities and the arts in America is required not only for the enrichment of our lives as individuals, but also for the health and strength of our society."

If attention in the past has tended to be focussed on the questions of the needs of the humanities and the relation of these needs to the national interest, in recent months there has been increasing discussion of the third and fourth questions that I listed a moment ago - the questions that concern the appropriate techniques of federal support. I hope I am not overly optimistic when I conclude from this that there now exists a general sentiment in favor of federal support for the humanities, that the problems that now confront us are not so much ones of principle as of practice, that we have now left the world of "whether" and have entered the perhaps equally complex but to me more exciting world of "how". Certainly there is evidence to support this optimistic view. I would mention here the President's declaration that he looks with the greatest

favor upon the proposal to establish a National Humanities Foundation; the introduction into both Houses of Congress of the several Bills that are now before you; the widespread interest and support that these Bills have elicited; and - as cheering to us as anything that has happened on this front for a very long time - the holding of these Hearings so early in the life of the 89th Congress.

Let us, then, consider the two "how" questions: through what agency or agencies should the Federal Government act in providing increased support for the humanities? And, if a new agency is to be established, what should be its scope and how should it be organized?

I have already said that I am wholeheartedly in favor of the establishment of an independent National Humanities Foundation. I shall try to explain briefly the thinking that has led me to this conclusion.

All of us who are concerned with the humanities have ample reason to be both aware and appreciative of a whole range of federal activities that have been of benefit to the humanities. My own organization, the American Council of Learned Societies, has for example supervised a massive study of Uralic and Altaic languages, has conducted an exchange program with the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and is sponsoring a great new Dictionary of Scientific Biography - all with funds provided by the Federal Government, through three different agencies. Similar examples could be adduced at great length and there seems reason to hope that activities of these sorts will continue to enjoy substantial federal support. Does this not suggest that what is



needed is simply the allocation of more funds through existing agencies and programs?

I think not. In the first place, we should note that in each of the three cases I have just mentioned, funds were provided not in the name of the humanities or of humanistic scholarship, but for some other specific purpose: language teaching (under the Office of Education), international exchange (under the Department of State), and the understanding of science (under the National Science Foundation). Thus the choice of activities within the humanities that are to receive funds is made not on the basis of the needs of the humanities themselves, but rather - and quite properly under existing circumstances - on the basis of the missions of various federal agencies, none of which is primarily, or even directly, concerned with the humanities as such. The result is that federal aid to the humanities has been sporadic, piecemeal and lopsided - a situation that, so far as I can see, will necessarily continue until a decision is made to support the humanities as such.

But, we may ask, does such a decision necessarily involve the establishment of a new, independent foundation? Probably not. Presumably funds for the humanities could be provided through some such agency as the Office of Education or the Smithsonian Institution - and I can assure you that such funds would be welcome. But such a solution would, I believe, fall far short of fully meeting the needs of the humanities for support, and the need of the country for the humanities.

We must realize that when we speak of "support," we are not speaking simply of money. Money, of course, is badly needed - but so equally are imaginative planning, the coordination of activities, a clearing-house for information, and - perhaps above all else - an expression of national concern and regard for the work of humanists. I am sure that we can all think of areas in which the Federal Government has made an enormous contribution with a very small expenditure of funds simply because these other ingredients were present in full measure. It is my hope that this will be the case with a National Humanities Foundation. I do not see how it can come to pass without such a Foundation.

Such a semi-autonomous foundation will have the best chance of commanding the fullest confidence and cooperation from the scholars and artists in its programs. This would be their foundation, directed by their peers, related to their interests and aims in a way that no bureau or agency within the government is at present, or is ever likely to be. This is an important reason why the National Science Foundation has worked so well - the scientists of the country look upon it as an agency governed by scientists in the public interest - it is doing their work, using their criteria and methods, sharing their objectives. No non-scientific organization and staff, however highly competent, could establish this type and degree of professional relationship with the community of creative workers which it serves and which it needs in order to work effectively.

There is another reason for a separate foundation - a reason

mainly symbolical and psychological but nonetheless important.

The establishment of the National Science Foundation testifies to the status of the sciences in our country and in our culture; we should not fail to symbolize in like manner the importance we attach to the things of the spirit. The National Foundation for the Humanities and the Arts would be a dynamic institution dedicated to creative cultural work, a visible, living monument to humane knowledge and action.

The bills before your committee are of two kinds: two would establish a Foundation for the Arts alone; two others would combine the Arts and Humanities in a single agency. The question therefore arises: should the Arts and the Humanities be separated, or joined? I advocate putting them together, because I believe this will result in a stronger agency, and a stronger contribution to our national life, and because I believe that joined together the Humanities and the Arts will strengthen one another. Clearly the Arts and Humanities have much in common, since most humanistic learning deals with the artistic creations of the past in art, music, literature, architecture. In consequence humanistic scholars are better acquainted with the work of the artists of the past than with those of the present. A Foundation which brought artists and scholars, and their concerns, together would have a healthy effect. Many creative artists in turn have little respect for the past, and for scholarship devoted to understanding it. But the best artists have always studied their forebears and had a deep understanding of their tradition, and in this the



study of the humanities has been an essential part of their creative development. Both artist and scholar, furthermore, have a common stake in the education of an audience that is receptive to and capable of understanding the creative achievements of the present, and this is the main educational task of the humanities.

For these reasons, I would argue for a single agency. But that is not to say that the Arts and the Humanities are alike in their nature or ends. They are very different, and require different kinds of training and expertise. Planning and organization of the two should be in separated divisions, budget and staffing should be separate. For this reason I believe there is an advantage in spelling out the separate functions of the Arts and Humanities divisions of the new foundation. But I do not think that the budgets for the two should be established as equal by the legislation. This seems to me to be an administrative matter better left to those who will organize and direct the Foundation. The intent of the present bill, that one branch should not suffer at the expense of the other, can, I think, be carried out without an arbitrary advance formulation.

In even more general terms, I am convinced that the wisest policy in this and in a number of other instances is to leave considerable discretion to the Board and Director of the Foundation. On the question of grants to individual scholars and artists versus grants to institutions, for example, I would urge that the Foundation be explicitly authorized to make grants of both sorts. Perhaps, like the National Science Foundation's Board, it will decide to make only grants of one

sort at first, or perhaps from the outset it will proceed in both ways. This seems to me not to be a legislative question, but rather to be a question of choosing appropriate means at various times for carrying out the functions laid down by the Congress. If the Board is sufficiently distinguished and trustworthy, it should be given the broadest latitude and the greatest flexibility; if the Board is not sufficiently distinguished and trustworthy, then it seems to me hardly worthwhile to establish the Foundation at all.

If a Foundation is to be established, I would very much hope that the legislation will contain no special loyalty provisions for individuals or organizations that might receive grants. This, as I am sure you know, is a matter about which the academic and artistic communities of this country feel very strongly. The kind of discriminatory oaths and affidavits - with stiff penalties spelled out - that have marred other Bills in the past by singling out scientists, students, and other members of the educational community are invidious in that they imply that somehow this part of American citizenry is more amenable to disloyal tendencies or at any rate more in need of attention on matters concerning their loyalty as citizens than is the population at large. There is, of course, no basis whatever for such an inference, and I strongly urge the omission of such provisions.

More positively, both S.316 (Pell) and S.111 (Gruening)[H.R. 2043 (Fogarty) and H.R. 334 (Moorhead)] seem to me to make admirable provision for dealing with the major needs in the Humanities. (So far as

I am competent to judge, this seems true of the Arts as well, but I shall confine my remarks to the area in which I am at home.)

Both Bills would make it possible to provide fellowships to scholars with significant research projects in the humanities. Institutions with plans to strengthen or improve instruction in the humanities, or with interesting projects for curriculum revision, could also be assisted. Libraries could be helped to cope with the tremendous job imposed on them by the great increase in publication, by new knowledge and the need to study and understand new languages and areas of the world. Archives could be helped, collections improved and the problems of ready access and dissemination could be tackled. Support could be provided for work on bibliographies, specialized reference works such as dictionaries and atlases; definitive editions of great works of literature. Institutes for teachers in the humanistic subjects in the secondary schools would be supported, and so would other modes of improving the quality of teaching and what is taught.

There is no doubt in my mind of the tremendous impact such an institution would have on the intellectual and artistic life of our country. In a few years this new Foundation would invigorate the humanities and the arts at every level of our educational system and in our society generally. The humanities and arts would then again attract their share of the best talents and brains, and scholarship would flower, as well as teaching. It is already a great step forward that we are sitting here today discussing this vital problem, a



problem which so many members of Congress have appreciated, as is reflected in the bills that they have sponsored in this session. I am confident that a problem of such importance will not fail to receive the attention it needs from the 89th Congress and that we will emerge with the humanities and the arts restored to a place in our country's culture of equal respect and equal vitality with Science. We live in a scientific culture; we could not escape it or retreat from it if we wanted to. But we must learn how to live in such a culture - and it is time that we gave attention to the quality of life in a world of science.