

September 4, 1974

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
KENNEDY CENTER

MRS. HANKS: Good evening.

You know, I can't help but be amused because the President of the United States just asked me if I would introduce him. (Laughter)

He is, as you know, a wonderful friend of the arts in the Congress. And, as you also know, Mrs. Ford is so much with us and we have talked so much for the last two days about your interest, sir, and how much you have helped us and how much Betty has helped us and, you know, I am very thrilled to introduce you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very, very much, Nancy. When I am surrounded by Betty on the one hand, who is an expert in her own right and her own background, and Nancy on the other, I am a completely helpless individual.

I have been delighted to have a part to some extent in promoting the Council of Arts and all of the things that are related thereto. I would be, I think, off on the wrong track if I took any credit for any significance. But it has been a very wonderful experience for me to go from one who had little or no appreciation or support for the arts to one who has learned that the arts can be very important, very vital in a community, and I think in the Nation.

So I am a converted individual. And I don't apologize for it. And converts often times are known as more ardent advocates than those who were brought up in an environment or in a religion.

It has been a great experience for me to see over the last four or five years the tremendous increase not only in money from the Federal Government, but the interest throughout the Nation.

I have traveled a good bit, as some of you may know, and I have seen from community to community, including my own community in Grand Rapids, Michigan, go from a rather placid interest to an interest of broad based public support.

And the National Council and all those associated with it can take a great deal of credit. I wish to compliment the Congress because the Congress in this span of time has really contributed very significantly. I doubt if there is a program in the Government in the last five or six years that has grown in dollars percentagewise as rapidly as this program, and I think that is a compliment to the program from its inception, to the program under Nancy. I think Roger and you have been the only two heads of the department, or organization, and I think when you can go from Roger to Nancy and have this kind of progress, it is a tribute to both of them.

My home of Grand Rapids, Michigan, is the honored place where one of Alexander Calder's wonderful mobiles --

MRS. FORD: No, that is not a mobile; it is a stabile.

THE PRESIDENT: -- stabile, all right -- is and will be a hallmark of the arts as far as we are concerned. I pointed out to all the visitors who come, including the Secret Service (laughter) -- I tell them it is nothing they should be worried about (laughter) -- it is stimulating, it is a great attraction as far as the community is concerned, and I am proud of it.

And I have yet to find out with any specificity or any great deal of definitiveness what he was trying to tell us, but nevertheless it is a great attraction and a wonderful addition to our community. And I think it is indicative of what can be done and will be done in the months and years ahead under the leadership of the Council of Arts and the leadership of Nancy, because you have to have a broad-based public, I think, range of activities, ranging from those that I know best to those that others know far better than I.

And the arts are an important and integral part of our better society. And I compliment you all, those on the Council at the present, those who have been there in the past, and those who will be assuming responsibilities in the future.

I think it is a great addition to our society here in the United States and we can be as proud as any of our old countries in what we have done in America and we are going to do infinitely better.

Thank you very much.

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