

L.A. Hispanic arts organization awarded \$650,000 grant by NEA

Chairman denies political link to timing of endowment

By Hunter Drohojowska

At an L.A. press conference marked by overtones of art for politics sake, Frank Hodson, chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts, yesterday announced that Plaza de la Raza has been awarded a Challenge grant of \$650,000 by the federal agency. The grant is the largest ever received by a Hispanic arts organization. Also awarded was the Performing Arts Council of the Music Center, with \$1 million going to the Mark Taper Forum and \$500,000 to the Joffrey Ballet. When asked about the timing of the announcement, which comes during Hispanic Heritage Week, Hodson — a Reagan appointee and former White House aide — denied that it had any connection to the president's recent national efforts to woo Hispanic voters. The NEA, which is funded by Congress and is intended to be apolitical, annually awards money to artists and arts organizations.

"Politics did not play a part in this. I was amazed when the announcement of Hispanic week came out this week. Because we had... largely made the arrangements for doing this at Plaza quite in advance of that." After the press conference, Hodson

said the decision to announce the Plaza grant in L.A. was made in mid-August. The NEA has never before announced grant recipients here.

When asked about if he thought the coincidence risked tainting the apolitical reputation of the NEA, Hodson replied that he wasn't worried, "because our process had been completed a long time ago in terms of these grants, and I think it would be equally political to change one's plans because the president wanted to use this week to recognize Hispanics.

"But I would go further than that," he continued. "Not speaking so much from the arts endowment but as a member of the administration, I think it's very important that the administration does take this opportunity — granted it's only a symbol, but it's an important symbol — to recognize probably the fastest growing part of our population, and part of our population which is (not only) so extraordinarily important to the entire Southwest part of this country but also in Florida, Chicago and New York. It's an important part of what we do."

During the conference, two congratulatory letters from Reagan were read aloud. One was addressed to all NEA recipients, the other to Margot

Albert, the artistic director of the Plaza de la Raza and a member of Reagan's Task Force on the Arts and Humanities.

This year 35 Challenge grants were given to arts organizations around the country totaling \$21 million — an increase from the \$11 million awarded last year. Hodson said, "One of the things we've done since I've been at the Endowment is to increase our emphasis on these programs. As soon as I got into office I was particularly taken by the demonstration that most of our arts institutions are undercapitalized. And therefore we revived this program, oriented it more toward capital formation and increased it in relation to the rest of our budget."

The Challenge grants require that the institutions match every dollar of federal money with \$3 contributed by the private sector within three years. The intention is for arts organizations to reach out to the community and explore new funding sources.

For the first time since the Challenge Program began in 1977, the NEA is awarding second grants to 25 of the recipients, including the Performing Arts Council of the Music Center. Because that institution is in

the process of its own capital campaign, it will have to match the NEA money by four-to-one. Asked where the matching funds are likely to come from, Hodson said, "In general, private contributions to the arts come primarily from individuals — 85 percent; roughly 9 percent from corporations... and finally from foundations, 5 or 6 percent."

In addition to the Challenge Program, the NEA awarded \$1.6 million nationwide in Advancement grants. Begun in 1980, these could be described as mini-Challenge grants for emerging arts organizations such as alternative spaces, small theater groups or small presses. In Los Angeles, \$46,000 was granted to L.A. Contemporary Exhibitions (L.A.C.E.) and \$56,000 to Social and Public Arts Resources (S.P.A.R.C.).

Advancement grants also have to be matched three-to-one over three years, but the private sector contributions can take the form of technical assistance, goods and services.

During the first year, the NEA sends advisers to help these smaller institutions improve their marketing skills, subscription series and direct mail programs in order to ensure long term financial support.