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**People For The
American Way**
ACTION FUND

APR 26 11:52

April 25, 1990

Dear Senator:

I would like to call your attention to a recent nationwide poll on the American public's perspective on federal support for the arts, and the controversy over funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. The independent random poll conducted by Research and Forecasts, Inc. and commissioned by the People For the American Way Action Fund reveals that Americans overwhelmingly reject efforts by anti-arts activists to restrict or censor controversial art, and strongly support the National Endowment for the Arts against its critics.

The poll sought to gauge the views of a representative cross-section of 1,200 Americans on art censorship, the NEA controversy, obscenity, nudity in the arts, public tolerance of "offensive" art, and respondents' own involvement with the arts.

Key findings of the poll were the following:

- o The public overwhelmingly opposes censorship of controversial art, even if they find it personally offensive. According to the survey:
 - 93 percent say that even when they find a particular piece of art offensive, "others have the right to view it;"
 - 96 percent agree that "people have different views on what is obscene in art and what is not";
 - 80 percent disagree that "nudity in art is usually pornographic";
 - 93 percent say "freedom of expression is essential to artists and the arts."
 - 81 percent agree that "Congress should not pass laws that interfere with our rights to free expression."
- o The public sides with the National Endowment for the Arts in the current controversy. According to the survey:
 - when asked to choose between the sides favoring and opposing NEA funding cuts and content restrictions on NEA-funded projects; 61 percent chose the pro-NEA side,

opposing cuts and restrictions. Only 13 percent favored cuts and restrictions, with the remainder undecided.

-- 80 percent support maintaining or increasing the NEA's budget;

-- 61 percent oppose "controls over the art content of projects funded by the Arts Endowment."

o Opponents of the NEA have sought to increase congressional control over the NEA's grant-making process, which currently relies on a system of citizen panels. According to the survey, the public thinks Congress should not interfere with NEA's artistic decisions:

-- only 4 percent support congressional involvement in NEA funding decisions;

-- 63 percent support leaving artistic decisions to the NEA's citizen panels or to the NEA itself;

o Solid majorities support federal funding for the arts, even for controversial artists. According to the survey:

-- 68 percent of the public support federal funding for arts;

-- 83 percent feel the NEA "serves a very useful purpose for American society";

-- 69 percent disagree that the NEA is "wasting the taxpayers' money."

-- 62 percent disagree with the statement "government funding to avant-garde or leading-edge artists should be stopped because a few people feel their work is controversial."

-- 66 percent disagree with the statement that "The Congress should prevent funding of any controversial arts projects or shows."

o NEA critics suggest that the Endowment serves a narrow constituency -- that the public places little value on the arts. According to the survey, the public actively supports the arts:

-- 76 percent say the "arts are an important part of my life" and 85 percent say they wish they "had more time to enjoy cultural activities";

-- 60 percent say "there are not enough cultural programs in

my community";

-- 89 percent say "America's world leadership and competitiveness depend on the continued creativity of our citizens."

We believe that the survey results demonstrate just how out of step with the public the NEA critics really are. Not only do Americans support the NEA and oppose government censorship of the arts, but the vast majority also want more arts programs in their communities. Moreover, according to the poll, the public refuses to allow a handful of vocal opponents to decide what art all of us can see.

The American people clearly agree with former President Reagan when he presented the National Medal of Arts and said:

Artists have to be brave: they live in a realm of ideas and expression and their ideas will often be provocative and unusual. Artists stretch the limits of understanding. They express ideas that are sometimes unpopular. In an atmosphere of liberty, artists and patrons are free to think the unthinkable and create the audacious. They are free to make both horrendous mistakes and glorious celebrations. Where there's liberty, art succeeds. In societies that are not free, art dies.

If you have questions, or you would like a copy of the Research and Forecasts poll, please call Melanne Verveer or Marsha Adler at 467-4999.

Sincerely yours,



John H. Buchanan, Jr.
Chairman