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Education: National Endowment for the Arts  
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## Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Article 02

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## ARTICLE FOR THE AMERICAN LEGION ON NEA

The National Endowment for the Arts has been remarkably successful in furthering the ideals for which it was created. Every single community in our country now has access to its indigenous and creative national culture. The limited funds appropriated for the Endowment help keep ticket prices reasonable, thus enabling lower income citizens, young people, the elderly and the disabled to gain access to the arts. They are often the only means by which to bring the arts to the geographically underserved. These are not grants to subsidize the wealthy, as some would like us to believe.

It is true that the National Endowment for the Arts has sponsored a few grants that I wish it had not, but why throw out the solid arts networks built over 30 years because of these? I fully understand that many Americans are troubled when they hear of works distasteful to them that are funded in part with their tax dollars. Nevertheless, while the Endowment has awarded well over 100,000 grants, fewer than 40 have resulted in any controversy whatsoever -- a success rate of 99.96%.

The Arts Endowment has already made changes that give the Chairman greater oversight over Endowment grants and go a long way towards addressing the concerns of many of our citizens. Recently, the agency implemented a major new organizational structure and grantmaking process. Fellowships to individuals have been eliminated except for creative writing, American Jazz Masters and National Heritage Awards. Funding is no longer available for general operating support or seasonal support. The agency no longer accepts applications from organizations, other than state arts agencies and regional arts organizations, which subgrant Endowment funds out to other projects.

Faced with a cut of 40 percent in the agency's budget for Fiscal Year 1996, the Endowment has eliminated a total of 89 positions, 47 percent of its staff. Anything more would severely damage the availability and accessibility of countless arts programs in communities nationwide. It must not happen.

It is wrong to assume that only wealthy Americans are interested in the development of the arts. Americans from every walk of life and economic level desire access to cultural events in their communities for themselves and for their children. Every parent knows that the arts teach young people creativity, increase self-discipline, and are a critical means of passing on an understanding of American culture and civilization to the next generation. Study of even a single artistic discipline is of immense value to a child, who may go on to become an avid amateur or patron. Last year, the Endowment's Arts in Education program distributed millions of dollars in partnership grants to the states to pay for artist residencies in schools and art teacher training.

From an economic point of view, the dollars spent by the National Endowment for the Arts represent extraordinarily successful community investments. Governors and mayors from around the country have demonstrated how NEA- supported projects have breathed new life into the downtown areas of their towns and cities, encouraged tourism,

attracted and retained businesses, created jobs, stimulated real estate development, increased production of exportable copyrighted materials, and contributed to the tax base. Moreover, each year, Endowment grants draw matching funds of approximately \$1.4 billion from private, state and local patrons.

Critics of federal funding argue that the arts will be able to generate the private support necessary to sustain themselves, but I am fearful the opposite will be true. Local dollars are already stretched to capacity. Major arts funders have announced that foundations will not and cannot replace federal funding. Corporate giving has declined in recent years despite economic growth. Further, removal of both the national recognition and the stimulation of partnerships offered through federal grants will produce a dramatic reduction in state and local support. Finally, it seems rather hypocritical for the people who cry for the "privatization" of the Arts Endowment to, at the same time, advocate for new tax laws that would end deductions for individual and corporate contributions to the arts.

Our tiny investment in the arts at the national level makes a statement to ourselves and to the world that we view the development of American culture and its availability to our citizens to be important. We must not become the only Western industrialized nation to declare that our government cares nothing for the development of our culture. National support for the arts fosters the creation of **community** – locally and on the national level.

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