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To The Editor -

Readers Urged To Write Senators
Today Regarding Support Of NEA

To The Editor,

I urge you to contact our senators today regarding their support. They have been supportive in the past – but now need to hear from you about the VALUE OF THE NEA in our local county!

The U.S. House Senate is now giving consideration to lowering the appropriation for the National Endowment for the Arts by five percent. This follows the recent U.S. House of Representatives approval of a two percent cut. This seemingly innocuous reduction by the Senate of some eight million dollars in a time when federal budgets, as well as all budgets, are tight seems reasonable on its face. As a person with interest in continuing and improving the arts for this rural area in Arkansas, I am alarmed by the implication that this holds for the future of arts programming in our country.

Here are the facts about the National Endowment:

1. The $178 million appropriations for NEA represents only three ten thousandths of the total federal budget. Federal investment in the arts costs each American citizen about 63 cents per year in taxes. Obviously this is not significant in terms of lowering our deficit.

2. What does NEA money go for? Here are some answers. When the original NEA authorization was made in 1965, there were 110 major symphony orchestras in the United States. Today there are 250. 28 local arts agencies had their beginning in 1968, with today’s figures reaching 3,600. The funds which were provided by NEA as “seed” money are matched about seven times by funds from other public and private sources. These funds allowed arts programs in rural areas, such as ours, not just in large urban areas. NEA funds also go to art museums, ballet troupes, opera companies. Increasingly as local school districts feel financial pinches, the arts are the first place where cuts are made. The National Endowment provides funding for professional artists in education in all 50 states. In the Mississippi County area, the Arts Council will receive a pilot grant from the NEA that will place 11 musicians, that have recently completed graduate school, in area schools for a 10-month school residency that will continue up to three years in duration. $20,000 plus in grants from the Arkansas Arts Council coming to Mississippi County comprise 33 percent of the funding from the National Endowment. The first important grant which Blytheville Arts Council received in 1986 was a three-year development grant which was matched by public contributions to the local arts council and by the City Advertising and Tourist Promotion Council. THIS MADE POSSIBLE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL ARTS COUNCIL!

3. The biggest source of misinformation spread by those who would do away with the National Endowment is that it promotes an immoral, anti-Christian philosophy in making grants to artists. To hear these critics, you would be led to believe that NEA promotes pornography. HAVE YOU OR YOUR CHILDREN EXPERIENCED SUCH IN MISSISSIPPI COUNTY? These are the facts. Of the thousands of grants made to artists and presenters by NEA there are less than a dozen which were controversial. MISSISSIPPI COUNTY IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE! These “controversial grants” were not direct grants made by NEA, but grants made to local organizations which regressed these funds. Those proposing that NEA be disbanded would gladly lend the public to believe that these were from the norm and not the rare exception. I challenge any reasonable person to find any federal agency with a better record of acting in the public interest than the NEA. There is simply not another agency which has accomplished so much, that is worthwhile in such a cost effective and efficient manner.

4. Finally during the last two years the National Endowment for the Arts funded Pamela Godfrey, a doctoral graduate student in music at the University of Indiana, to provide an Arts Corps residency in our county. Arts Corp is a program bringing talented graduates in various disciplines to rural areas which are underserved in the arts. The year before this grant provided the residency of Long Cheng of Temple University, who provided a video documentary for the county.

If you question the value of services of the NEA – I challenge you to speak to one of the area students who were brought to their first “arts experience” at the Ritz, or a promising young visual artist who gains insight and support of their talent by being selected as a winner in an area art competition. Attend a concert series, view the Ritz gallery, be a participant in community theater, visit an elementary school, or the rear of the Ritz to note outstanding murals done by art students. Economically, spiritually, and culturally, the NEA provides quality endeavors for Mississippi County.

Rae Glidowell