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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989)

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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 24

Alfonse D'Amato

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 1989

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
Chairman
Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As you consider legislation to reauthorize the National Endowment for the Arts, I wish to call your attention to a matter that deserves the committee's fullest attention.

As you may know, certain of the Endowment's activities have come under fire recently and have raised questions about the procedures used by the Endowment to award funding. In particular, a work by Andres Serrano depicting the Crucifix submerged in the artist's urine created a national uproar.

Upon being made aware of this incident, I along with 25 of our colleagues wrote to the Acting Chairman of the Endowment Mr. Hugh Southern to protest the use of Federal funds to sponsor the Serrano work, and to call on him to review the Endowment's practices and procedures to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

In his response to my letter, Mr. Southern stated that he found Mr. Serrano's work to be personally offensive and pledged to work with the congressional oversight committee to review the Endowment's process to ensure that the highest artistic integrity and quality is maintained.

It is my hope that the committee will take a hard look at this matter and make whatever reforms prove necessary. As a strong supporter of a vibrant arts community and a fully funded National Endowment for the Arts, I would find it regrettable if lax procedures used resulted in the demise of this otherwise worthwhile agency.

The Honorable Nancy Landon Kassebaum
June 12, 1989
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Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alfonse D'Amato". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alfonse D'Amato
United States Senator

AMD/bt