

PO BOX 2496  
SIOUX FALLS  
SD  
57101

O 605 252 5979

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February 23, 2021

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McCarthy,

I am writing in response to your recent tweet dated February 22 regarding the National Endowment for the Arts "handout" included in the most recent Covid relief proposal. Coming from a deep red state, such as South Dakota, I think NEA funds' characterization as a "liberal handout" is exceptionally off-base.

Let me give you a couple of statistics that are worth noting:

- The NEA portion of the Covid relief package is .007% of the total.
- The NEA will likely direct 40% of that relief aid to local state arts agencies to manage and distribute effectively on the local level. I know in South Dakota we have a better understanding of how to help fellow South Dakotans than the federal government, so directing creative sector relief directly to state agencies through the NEA is an effective and proven method.
- South Dakota will leverage its NEA direct state support to garner a \$20 to \$1 return on South Dakota's state allocation investment. In other words, the NEA funding goes a long way in South Dakota and is truly an economic spark to engage the state's creative economy.
- The NEA dollars invested in South Dakota reach 91% of our state's counties, most of which are very rural, very Republican, and where the arts are an essential small business.
- Let's not forget the creative sector is 4.5% of our nation's GDP and a worthy federal investment at any time, but especially now when the creative industry is dealing with extreme losses due to COVID.
- Creative Forces is NEA Military Healing Arts Network is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs and the state and local arts agencies that seeks to improve the health, wellness, and quality of life for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers. I would not consider this program a "liberal handout."
- We know most Americans, including South Dakotans, overwhelmingly agree that the arts in this country are important to our quality of life (90% agree) and that the arts are important to local businesses and the economy (86% agree).
- We also know that 81% of Americans agree that the arts "a positive experience in a troubled world."

The arts are not liberal, and they are not conservative; they are essential to American life. The arts make communities stronger, students better prepared for the future, provide a quality of life so many need right now, and bottom line, the arts are a powerful economic engine. Why would we not invest in that sector? Maybe there is difference in opinion on the dollar amount or how it is best invested, but I am troubled to hear a Republican leader call the arts a "liberal handout." That is far from the truth, especially so here in the great state of South Dakota. The Mount Rushmore state!



Thank you for your leadership and service to our country. I appreciate all that you must balance in your role as House Minority Leader, but please be more respectful to the hard-working, Republican creative workers. They count on help from the Federal Government during this time, just as so many other Americans. Supporting the arts does not equal a liberal handout any more than supporting other sectors that have been disproportionately devastated by Covid-19.

Best Regards,



Jim Speirs  
Executive Director

cc. Congressman Dusty Johnson (SD)