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ARTSSOUTHDAKOTA.ORG



Sen. John Thune
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Thune,

It was wonderful to see you and your wife over the Thanksgiving weekend. We played a couple of Don Henley tunes just for you. I hope you enjoyed and thanks for listening! Live music makes a night out so much better. (Of course I may be a little bias in my assessment)

I am writing to support conversations happening at the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Manufacturing, Trade, and Consumer Protection. I understand your committee met yesterday to discuss ongoing relief related to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a South Dakotan, a musician, and someone who works closely with the arts sector across the state, I want to share my concern for this vital sector's health and well-being. The national arts and cultural industry is an \$878 billion industry, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. In South Dakota, the same sector contributes \$1.2 billion to the state's economy and supports nearly 15,000 jobs.

At the heart of our arts sector are the many cultural and creative focused non-profit organizations. Think of the Washington Pavilion, Sculpture Walk, or South Dakota Symphony Orchestra in Sioux Falls. Or consider the Day County Arts Council in Webster, the National Music Museum in Vermillion, or Suzi Capp Arts Center in Rapid City. Non-profit arts organizations strengthen and support quality of life in so many South Dakota communities. And the non-profit sector drives much economic activity. The non-profit arts sector is a \$115 million/annual industry in the Black Hills and nearly the same amount in Sioux Falls. The arts strengthen South Dakota communities, provide a well-rounded education for our youth, and truly create jobs and impressive economic activity across our state.

Even in a state that has not totally closed down, our creative community has suffered on an outsized level due to the pandemic. Arts businesses were the first to close and will be the last to fully re-open. Nationally we're seeing a 50% job loss of the workforce associated with "fine and performing arts." In South Dakota, a survey of arts non-profits tells us 94% have had to cancel events. That equated to 879,259 lost program attendance with an over \$11 million negative financial impact to the sector. Over 500 South Dakotans have



been laid off or furloughed in the arts sector during the pandemic. And this information comes only from reporting organizations. We know the numbers are higher.

South Dakota artists are suffering. Recently Arts South Dakota provided emergency relief grants to S.D. artists that made a significant part of their living in the arts. One hundred sixty-five artists applied in less than 2-weeks. Artists asking for help during the pandemic reached across the entire state, with over 62 communities represented (60% coming from rural communities). Artists ranged in age from 19 to 75 and represented dancers, musicians, traditional arts, regalia, quillwork, photography, all sorts of visual arts, and more. As a musician myself, I can personally attest to the sudden and immediate shut down of performance opportunities when the pandemic started. Overnight I went from an average of 2-3 performances a week to literally nothing for months.

The creative sector has been decimated, and it will take continued Federal support to prevent widespread permanent and irreversible damage, even in our resilient state of South Dakota. We request your support and leadership to enact a second round of PPP support from the SBA, specifically designating funds for the cultural sector. Congress must also support new unemployment assistance to "gig" workers, many of which make up the 5.1 million American creative workers. In many situations, gig works or contract employees have no safety net often found in more traditional employee relationships.

We will need community arts experiences more than ever as we come out of isolation. 72% of Americans believe "the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity." Keeping the arts healthy is an investment in keeping our communities strong and vibrant for post-pandemic rebuilding.

Please know I am at your service if I can provide any help in this matter. I do not doubt that you support a creative South Dakota and want the arts to flourish in our state. Please remember that as you lead our country through the upcoming and hopefully final months of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Best Regards,

Jim Speirs
Executive Director

cc. Adam Wek

