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PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY ACTION FUND

Your Voice Against Intolerance

July 25, 1994

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the over 300,000 members of People For the American Way Action Fund, we urge you to support the Jeffords Amendment to restore funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at the Administration's requested level of \$170 million when the Senate considers the Interior Appropriations bill. We also hope that you will oppose any attempts by Senator Helms to offer amendments which would weaken the NEA and undermine freedom of expression.

The Senate Appropriations Committee's recommendation of a 5% reduction would decrease the NEA's budget by \$8.5 million, rolling it back to a level below that for FY '84. The actions of the Appropriation's Committee were not based on fiscal concern, rather, the cut are a straightforward measure aimed at expressing displeasure with the content of specific grants. This 5% reduction will have a significant impact on many of this country's core cultural institutions and projects which benefit rural and underserved communities, at-risk youth programs, arts education, and neighborhood art centers.

Senator Helms, as in past years, is threatening to offer at least three weakening amendments which would further restrict the content of grants, revise the NEA grantmaking procedures, and provide additional cuts to the Endowment's budget. Since becoming NEA Chair, Jane Alexander has taken a number of steps to reform the grantmaking process and increase the accountability of the agency. Grantees are now required to submit an interim report before receiving the final third of the grant award. Revised reporting requirements demand written permission in advance if a grantee desires to change the grant activities from what has been previously approved. Additional review of the agency's program structure and operation are now underway.

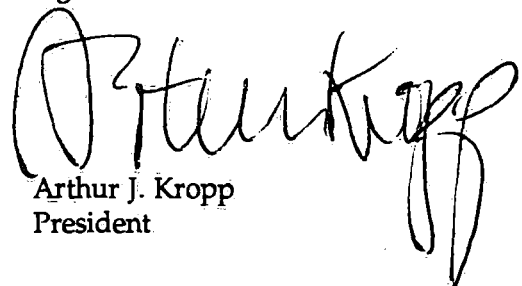
An amendment to restrict the content of works funded by the NEA is unnecessary and unconstitutional. The NEA is already prohibited from funding works which are obscene. The only constitutionally permissible standard for judging artistic works must be artistic merit and excellence. Any amendment which would require the agency to make determinations on the basis of a content-based subjective standard would violate the First Amendment. The courts have ruled in numerous instances that the government may not regulate the content of the speech when federal funds are involved.

The NEA is just beginning to regain its footing under Jane Alexander. Congress must not allow attacks on the NEA by political groups to paralyze the agency and cripple the arts in America. Over the last thirty years, the NEA has revolutionized the arts by making them more accessible to more of the American public. The arts are an important investment in this country's future by bridging our diversity and helping to identify shared values.

We urge you to support full funding and oppose all weakening amendments.

Sincerely,


Leslie Harris
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