

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) spoke at the Dance/USA Annual Conference, telling arts leaders and dance advocates that we must continue spreading the power and promise of the arts.

“Dance, music and art transcend barriers of language, time, and generation, translating cultural differences, breathing life into history, and bridging experiences across cultures,” said Slaughter. “They accomplish the seemingly impossible task of both revealing our differences across the globe, while managing to illuminate all that connects us enriching our lives in ways nothing else can.”

Slaughter was introduced to the advocacy conference by Ruby Lockhart, Executive Director of Rochester’s Garth Fagan Dance.

“I have to mention how lucky I am to live in Western New York. The arts community in my district is one of the strongest, longest lasting, most impactful communities in the nation,” said Slaughter. “Garth Fagan Dance is now in its 39th season and is at the top of its game. Not only do they offer unique, multifaceted performances to the people of Western New York and beyond, they also work tirelessly to teach dance as well as the appreciation and understanding of dance.”

Dance/USA is the national service organization for professional dance which represents more than 500 ballet modern, ethnic, jazz, culturally specific, and tap companies, artist managers and dance service organizations. The 2010 Annual Conference, Dance Beyond Borders, will examine and eliminate the borders, real or imagined, that define us.

Nationally, the arts support 5.7 million jobs. In the 28th Congressional District alone, more than 1200 arts-related businesses employ nearly 16,000 people.

“Dancers, musicians, authors, educators, architects, designers and every other creative worker are like every other employee in our economy,” said Slaughter. “They deserve just as much support in surviving this economic downturn as anyone else. The arts create a hub of economic activity, attracting investments, generating tax revenues, and stimulating local economies through tourism and urban renewal.”

Slaughter is a longtime champion for the arts community and is Co-Chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus. For more on her leadership in the arts, [click here](#).

A copy of her remarks as prepared is included below.

Good morning everyone! Thank you Andrea and Ruby for your kind introduction and to Dance/USA for inviting me to be here and giving me the opportunity to speak with you today about how dear the arts are to both me personally and our nation’s history and future.

Just think of what emotions come to mind when I mention Gene Kelley declaring “Come on with the rain, I've a smile on my face, I walk down the lane with a happy refrain just singin', singin' in the rain,” as he unabashedly bounds from puddle to puddle in the pouring rain.

No doubt a smile has crept up on your face as you recall this iconic moment in tap history.

If the fleeting mention of a dance routine from almost 60 years ago can warm the hearts of both young and old, imagine the impact that all the arts, and especially dance, have had on us throughout the years.

The arts define our culture and instill unique character in the communities across our nation. Art transcends barriers of language, time, and generation, translating cultural differences, breathing life into history, and bridging experiences across cultures.

They accomplish the seemingly impossible task of both revealing our differences across the globe, while managing to illuminate all that connects us.

This is why organizations, such as Dance USA, which speaks for over 500 ballet modern, ethnic, jazz, culturally specific, and tap companies, artist managers, dance service organizations, presenters, are crucial because they ensure that the needs of artists are voiced.

I have to mention how lucky I am to live in Western New York. The arts community in my district is one of the strongest, longest lasting, most impactful communities in the nation. My friend Ruby Lockhart, who so kindly introduced me, is the Executive Director of Garth Fagan Dance in Rochester, NY. Garth Fagan Dance is now in its 39th season and is at the top of its game. Not only to they offer unique, multifaceted performances to the people of Western New York and beyond, they also work tirelessly to teach dance as well as the appreciation and understanding of dance. Ruby, thank you for all that you do for Rochester.

You understand firsthand the sentiments that bring generations of families together year after year to watch performances such as the Nutcracker. Originally choreographed and composed in Russia at the end of the 19th century. The ballet, which has been performed over the decades, has literally entrenched itself in American culture as each winter parents, grandparents, entire families and friends gather to bring wide-eyed girls and boys to experience it for the first time.

What is perhaps most amazing about America’s attachment to the piece is not it’s endurance, which is impressive in its own right, but its timing. First performed in the United States in 1940, its place in our culture only became solidified during the succeeding decades. That is, it emerged at a time when tensions between the Soviet Union and America were at their height. The Nutcracker, like so many other works of art and dance, was able to transcend national and social sentiment and move those who experienced it by touching our shared human sentiments.

Dance and the arts also give us a unique window to the rest of the world. Our perceptions of who the Koreans or the Argentineans are don’t have to be limited to the lifeless pages of a history or travel book.

Dance troupes from all across the globe come to the United States each year to bring their culture alive to school children and adults alike. Their fan dances, tangos, salsas and waltzes engage our imagination and inspire us to continue learning.

Dance has not only captured our imagination and entertained us, it has also given us a medium of expression and release. During the 1920’s as Harlem’s residents dealt with the harsh realities of high rents and scarce job opportunities due to racism the dance room hall known as the Savoy Ballroom became a refuge to residents. The ballroom, which was open to everyone both African Americans and whites, provided a venue where dancers could combine elements from

African dance with more formal European dance into their own unique style. The dance style that they helped to create, Lindy Hop, is still enjoyed today.

Another example of dance affecting our culture can be seen starting in the 1950s. Teens celebrating their own new style on the show American Bandstand helped usher in the acceptance of Rock and Roll. The music genre would go to become almost synonymous with the American culture.

At the same time that art has bestowed intrinsic emotional, cultural and intellectual benefits to individuals and communities across the country, it has also given back to our society in other ways.

As we all know, the arts also bring jobs.

The arts support 5.7 million jobs nationwide, and in my congressional district alone, there are over 1200 arts-related businesses employing nearly 16,000 people.

Musicians, authors, educators, architects, designers and every other creative worker are like every other employee in our economy. They deserve just as much support in surviving this economic downturn as anyone else.

Yet we must continue to craft our message and spread the word.

The arts and culture are important economic assets. They create a hub of economic activity, attracting investments, generating tax revenues, and stimulating local economies through tourism and urban renewal.

That is why both the National Governor’s Association and the U.S. Conference of Mayors agree that investing in arts and culture-related industries provide important economic benefits to local and regional economies.

It is also no surprise that America’s overall nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion economic activity every year and returns \$12.6 billion to the federal government in income taxes. Measured against direct federal cultural spending of about \$1.4 billion, that’s a return of nearly nine to one.

Much of this activity would not be possible without grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. In Fiscal Year 2009, NEA awarded more than \$110 million of appropriated funds through more than almost 2,240 grants reaching all 435 congressional districts. In addition, \$50 million in 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds used to distribute 693 grants, reaching all 50 states.

Unfortunately, artistic activity in the US is also hampered by our current visa system which makes obtaining a O and J visa, the visa types used by visiting artists, more an unnecessarily long and expensive process.

While the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ Premium Processing Service allows for visa processing to be completed within 15 days it comes at the steep price of \$1,000 per petition. For those unable to afford the expedited processing fee the wait time to receive a visa can range from 45 days to six months.

Easing this burden will not only allow important and educational performances to go on, it will also provide more job certainty to the support services of these types of performers, such as venues and security, here in the United States.

Because of the cultural and economic benefits of art and cultural programs, we have been willing to fight an uphill battle to increase NEA funding for the past several years. It is difficult for art and culture industries to live up to their fullest potential when they cannot predict the level of federal support to factor into their business plans.

But we’re a tenacious crowd, and we’ve faced these challenges and enjoyed some significant victories along the way.

Fiscal Year 2008 was a breakthrough for the arts when the NEA was funded at 144.7 million dollars – an increase of over 19 million dollars over Fiscal Year 2007, and the largest increase for the arts in 28 years.

And for Fiscal Year 2009, we secured another 10 million dollar increase and better yet, for Fiscal Year 2010, we secured another 12.5 million dollars.

In addition to helping our workforce, artistic organizations and cities survive this economic downturn, we should use this time as an opportunity to push for greater investment in arts education to prepare our children for the future.

Employers today in America and abroad are looking for imaginative and vibrant young men and women to fill their rosters. Educating children early and continuously in the arts will prepare them for the work in today’s innovative and creative postindustrial society.

In Fiscal Year 2010, Congress funded the Arts in Education program with 40 million dollars. Since it began in 2001, this program has resulted in approximately 160 awards to school districts in 180 Congressional Districts throughout the country. This year, at a time when model programs supported by the Department are showing impressive results and the need for arts in education could not be greater, it is imperative that we fully fund these programs.

Making that transformation will greatly benefit the lives of the students at schools across the country, expanding their minds and imaginations in new and exciting ways. And what’s more, it will give them a better chance of attaining their future goals.

Clearly, now more than ever we need to continue robust support for our nation’s creative industries and workforce. Supporting the millions of people employed in the creative industries as well as the organizations, businesses and artistic institutions which contribute to local and regional economies is simply an imperative this Congress cannot cast aside.

This morning, I would like to ask that you remind everyone you meet with today that the arts are for everyone. They benefit every aspect of our society and culture, and enrich our lives in ways nothing else can.

You must also drive home the point that as we all know, the arts equal jobs. The creative industries are vital to our local, regional, and national economies. Supporting the arts will help our economic recovery and funding arts education will prepare our children for success in our innovative, creative world economy.

I've felt the power of art personally all my life. I was a trained microbiologist who was the vocalist in a blues band back in Lexington, at the University of Kentucky and I've loved music ever since. Today, I stand before you as a legislator who wants to continue spreading the joy art gave me to children throughout America. I want to continue spreading its power, and its promise, from coast to coast.

Our children deserve it, and their future – and ours – needs it. Thank you very much.