

Nov 21 2005 - Slaughter, Arts Groups Host NEA Chairman Gioia in Rochester

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NEA Has Awarded 1.3 Million in Arts Funding to 28th District Since '03

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, today joined prominent local arts community organizations in hosting Dana Gioia, the Chairman for the National Endowment for the Arts in Rochester. Since assuming his position as NEA Chairman in February of 2003, the 28th district as received numerous NEA grants totaling 1.3 million dollars, and which have been used to support a wide array of artistic and cultural ventures.

Chairman Gioia received an extensive tour of the Rochester arts community and participated in several events throughout the day, including a press conference with Rep. Slaughter and local arts leaders. The meeting took place at Writers & Books, a Rochester establishment which has received \$45,000 in NEA support over the past three years alone.

"The groups represented here today, like the arts in general, play a central role in our culture, enriching our lives and our communities," Rep. Slaughter said. "By investing in Rochester's arts programs, the NEA has invested in our economy, in the success of our children, and in our future," she added.

"I'm delighted to be in Rochester, which has a vibrant and vital arts community which contributes immeasurably to the quality of life in Rochester," Mr. Gioia said. "I am especially pleased to be the guest of congresswoman Slaughter who has done so much on behalf of these arts organizations and for the National Endowment for the Arts."

The press conference was also attended by Thom Ward of BOA Editions, which has received \$125,000 from the NEA since 2003, as well as Sarah Lentini from the Arts and Cultural Commission. Joe Flaherty, Executive Director of Writers and Books, was a participant as well.

Representative Slaughter's comments at the press release with Mr. Gioia are included below, as prepared:

It is my pleasure today to host the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Dana Gioia. As the Chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus, I asked Chairman Gioia to come to Rochester and see first hand all of the world-class arts and cultural institutions that the NEA has helped support over the past many years.

We're joined by representatives from a few of these local institutions including Joe Flaherty from Writers & Books which received \$45,000 from the NEA in the past three years alone. Also we're joined by Chris Burdett from the Visual Studies Workshop which has been supported by the NEA over the past thirty years including \$50,000 in the past three years. Thom Ward is also here from BOA Editions which received \$125,000 in NEA funding over the past three years. Finally we're joined by Sarah Lentini, President and CEO of the Arts & Cultural Council of Greater Rochester.

The groups represented here today, like the arts in general, play a central role in our culture, enriching our lives and our communities immeasurably. They engage us, they broaden our horizons, and they transport us from the everyday to the fantastic.

Art is often seen as not a tangible contribution to our nation's prosperity but simply a cultural investment, easy to give up when budgets need to be cut. Yet, every time we slash funding for the arts, we slash opportunities for our children to succeed. Because the truth is, an investment in the arts is an investment in our nation's economy, the success of our children, and our nation's future.

Arts as an investment

Each year, the arts industry generates \$134 billion in economic activity, provides 4.9 million full-time jobs, creates \$89.4 billion in household income. The arts generate almost \$14 billion in state and local revenue and \$10.5 billion in federal income tax revenue, an incredible return on a \$250 million annual investment by Congress.

The ripple effect that originates with artistic attractions has grown enormously in the last 10 years, which is all the more reason to keep the arts flourishing. And, all the evidence proves that investments in the arts have lifelong impacts on our children.

We know that kids score higher on their SATs when they have had arts education. We know that children with Attention Deficit Disorder are more focused when they have music programs. We know that Parkinson's and Alzheimer's patients do better when music is a regular part of their therapy. Everybody does better when the arts are part of their life.

Your contribution to the arts and NEA funding increases

For more than a decade, I have been a leading advocate in Congress for increasing Arts and Humanities funding, and have served as co-chair of the Congressional Arts Caucus. This year, I am proud to say, the arts caucus has the highest support ever, with over 188 bipartisan Members of Congress who support the arts through federal initiatives.

The Arts Caucus' primary objective is to ensure adequate funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities. For many years, just trying to prevent cuts to the arts has been an uphill battle.

In 2004, with the resounding support of 241 Members, the House of Representatives voted an increase of \$10 million for the National Endowment for the Arts. This historic victory demonstrated that the mindset toward the arts within Congress was changing. Members were catching on to the fact that this small investment would pay us back many times over, both in hard dollars and in ways that are simply incalculable for the people we represent.

Unfortunately, after a handful of conferees met for the Omnibus Funding bill, NEA, incredibly, received just several hundred thousand dollars. Not only was the will of this great body thwarted, but also the creative activities of artistic constituents in every congressional district in this country were stifled.

But we were not to be deterred. This year, we came back with full force, and we fared better. On May 19th, the U.S. House of Representative approved my amendment for a \$10 million increase for the NEA and a \$5 million increase for NEH in the FY 2006 Interior Appropriations bill. The amendment was approved by voice vote.

While this was a modest victory in terms of funding levels, it was a huge victory in that many Members from the other side of the aisle realized the importance of art programs, or at least the political consequences of voting against the arts. Either way, it was an important victory.

In late July, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the conferenced FY 2006 Interior bill. The bill, which has been signed into law, provides a \$5 million increase for the NEA. The ultimate increase was still only half of what the House of Representatives approved, so we must keep up the fight.

I, in partnership with Chairman Gioia, will continue to work hard to ensure that NEA receives the funding it needs to continue valuable arts activities throughout this country.

Now, I'd like to introduce Chairman Gioia. He's an internationally acclaimed poet, critic, educator, writer and former business executive who's also trained in music, and he's managed to retain his creativity despite now being a bureaucrat! But truly, with his many talents and accomplishments, he is a fitting and tremendously capable leader of the National Endowment of the Arts. We wouldn't want anyone less imbued with a passion for the arts to be entrusted with this job.