

House Republicans feed the arts to the market

OUR OPINION: Cutting the NEA just sacrifices culture for power

Last week, the Republican-led House of Representatives approved a bill that would cut federal funding for the National Endowment for the Arts by 40 percent, and phase out all funding for the organization by 1998.

Although the House defeated an amendment that would cut the NEA budget by an additional \$10 million and speed the demise of the organization, the original bill now lands in the lap of the politically polarized Senate.

The modern attack on government-funded art has been an annual occurrence since 1989, when Sens. Alfonse D'Amato and Jesse Helms staged their "moral outrage" on the Senate floor over NEA-funded photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano.

Because of the controversy over "anti-Christian" and "obscene" imagery, the NEA has become fused in the minds of many Americans with left-wing, elitist art. Conservatives hold up art they oppose as an example of the disintegration of morality and family values.

In the bipartisan battle for America's soul, the NEA has become an expedient scapegoat for Republicans.

However, controversial art accounts for only a minuscule percentage of the NEA budget. The Mapplethorpe exhibit cost each American the staggering sum of one-sixteenth of 1 percent of a single penny.

The largest percentage of the NEA's budget is allocated to media arts, museums, theaters and contributions to state arts programs.

Since its formation under the Johnson administration, the NEA has been responsible for free or suggested-donation admission to museums across the country.

While conservatives continue to paint publicly funded art as welfare for the rich, attendance records from national museums suggest otherwise. In 1952, before the founding of the NEA, fewer than seven of every 100 Americans visited a museum in a given year.

By 1988, thanks to art education in public schools, free admission and more than 1,800 new museums across the country, annual museum attendance had increased to almost 31 per 100 Americans.

Between 1965 and 1975, the NEA more than doubled the number of orchestras and literary magazines and quintupled the number of dance companies in the United States. The organization and the state art programs it supports are responsible for hundreds of thousands of public fountains, sculptures, murals and theater performances in city parks across the nation.

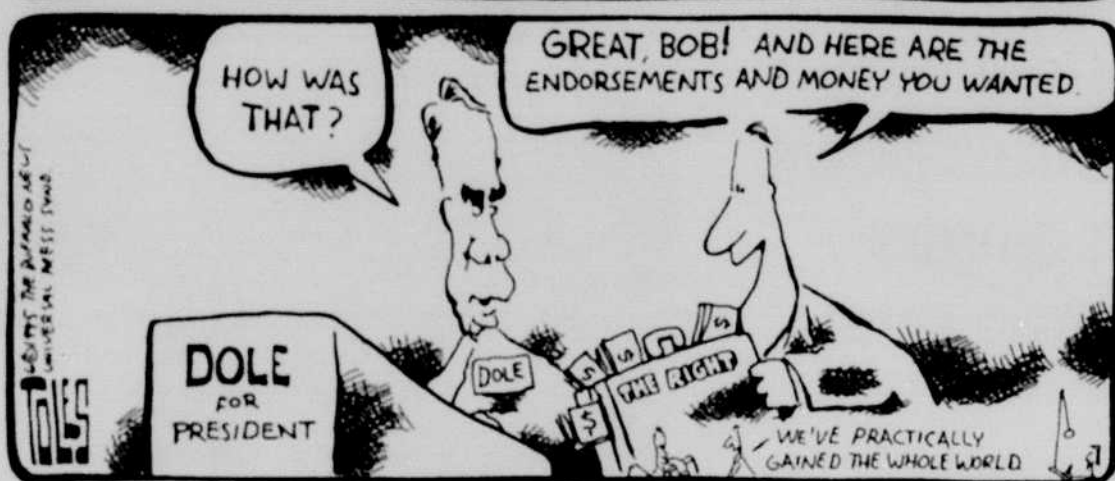
Most important, only 15 percent of the NEA's budget is derived from federal funds. In fact, the United States spends less money on public art than every other Western nation except Great Britain.

As such, the taxpayer will feel no economic tremor from the fall of the NEA, but the cultural chasm will be immeasurable.

If the bill becomes law, America will not be losing homoerotic photographs or avant-grade performance art. Instead, we will witness theater and museum closings, high admission prices to orchestra performances and a downward cultural spiral.

As the arts become only accessible to the wealthy, the middle and lower classes will wade through the muck of made-for-TV movies and lowest-common-denominator programming.

In effect, the defunding of the NEA will transform the arts into the elitist entity that Republicans already accuse them of being.



LETTERS

Butterfly hum

Life is a series of moments, a beautiful symphony like the monarch butterflies and dragonflies that dance past the Knight Library's windows, enjoying the California poppies, butterfly bushes and other wildflowers. Violin solos, piano recitals, jazz that hums out of the music department, the elegant architecture of Willamette Hall and the castle (Deady Hall), the endless characters of faces of people as they play their multi-roles — if one hurries, he or she just might miss it! Appreciating life's precious "gems" can add such a richness and priceless meaning to the daily routine. Is there mystery and magic — the other half of the "logical" — in your world? Do you make time in your hectic schedule for finding the treasured seashells in the sand? In peace,

K.C. Primbs
Journalism

Get over it

Somehow I cannot remember another war in history when people looked for their missing-in-action relatives for 20 years after the peace. It is bordering on the absurd. "We don't make peace or start up relations with the enemy, Vietnam, until they tell us all they know about our missing" That is quite a task!

Can you imagine this scenario for Anzio, Iwo Jima or the D-Day beaches? Soldiers died there by the thousands honorably, but we never could account for all of their bones to bury in the United States. This identification of bones and teeth has become a lucrative industry that is costing the taxpayers millions.

I admit I did not have a relative killed in a war, but I would never dream to demand a search for my grandmother's bones in Auschwitz. We need to be done with this sick chapter in American history. It appears as if Americans have

not learned over the years from that war, and they speak of it in the same terms as before. Just what made this a righteous war? It was such an awful waste of valuable human life on both sides, and it proved nothing.

McNamara's book (and others) opened up new angles that are hard to swallow after all these years but not unknown to many of us at the time. If leaders and the top brass did not know what the war was about, how could the foot soldiers or the U.S. public? It is high time to make peace and get over the paranoia that Vietnam is "hiding" our MIAs.

Hilde K. Cherry
Eugene

Women acted

As a woman, a student and a summer Saferide co-director, I am disturbed by some of the comments made by Michael Endicott in his commentary (ODE, July 20). I applaud him for opposing the "reduction of financial and ideological support for women and their issues" (ODE, May 24); however, I do not believe that Endicott realizes that the Women's Center and Saferide were formed by women to fill a void in our campus community.

First, let me address what seems to be a recurring theme in Endicott's commentaries. Saferide exists for women. It was formed by women who saw the need and came together to help other women. Four out of every five women will be raped in her lifetime. Saferide was formed as an attempt to curtail rape. We do not exist to end all violent crime; no one organization can do that. We are interested mainly in decreasing the number of rapes and other sexual assault.

No, men are not given rides, nor can they drive Saferide vehicles during operating hours. Our riders support this policy. If a woman is escaping

a situation of sexual assault, would she feel safe if her only alternative was to get into a car with a man? However, men can be involved in every other aspect of Saferide's services. In the past, we have had male dispatchers. Women's Studies' credit is given to women for driving; it is also given to men for putting gas in the vehicles or serving in some other way. If a vast majority of male students feel unsafe walking alone at night, they should take action and form their own transportation service. As summer co-director, I would welcome this because it would mean much less harassment of our drivers by male students.

Speaking simply as a student now, I would welcome the formation of a men's center if its purpose were to help the community as a whole. The Women's Center is open to men and women, and I would hope that the Men's Center would be as well. I would hope that Endicott would want to address such issues as domestic abuse and sexual assault in his center (these are men's issues as well as women's issues) in addition to forming a support group for men.

Endicott needs to realize that the women's organizations were formed by women (often against overwhelming odds) because they were needed. After years of oppression, women joined forces to empower themselves. If men would like to start a men's center, then they need to join together and take action.

It is my hope that this clears up any misunderstanding that Endicott might have with women's programs and with Saferide in particular. I look forward to meeting with him sometime in the near future. If anyone has any questions or would like more information, feel free to send an e-mail message to Saferide at saferide@gladstone, or call us at 346-0653.

Quimby Masters
Political Science

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Newsroom 346-5511

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