Arts Advocates Make the Case for Federal Support of the Arts on Capitol Hill

More than 550 advocates from 48 states came to Washington, DC on March 23–24 for this year’s Arts Advocacy Day, part of the National Arts Action Summit. Now marking its 28th year, the events are presented by Americans for the Arts and co-sponsored by 87 national organizations representing thousands of arts, culture, business, civic, and education institutions and individuals nationwide. The two-day event kicked off on Monday with a day of legislative training sessions to learn about the current arts issues circulating on Capitol Hill and how to become effective advocates for increased support for the arts. On Monday night, Norman Lear delivered the Americans for the Arts 28th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy with introductions by COMMON and featured performance by the 106-member Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra. The following morning at the Congressional Arts Kick Off, numerous members of Congress addressed the packed room, including civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), Arts Caucus Co-Chairs Reps. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) and Leonard Lance (R-NJ), STEAM Caucus Co-Chair Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), and member of the National Council on the Arts and Ranking on House Interior Appropriations Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN). The crowd also heard remarks by both the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities Chairs, Jane Chu and Bro Adams respectively. Artists also joined the stage, including actress and playwright Holland Taylor, Turnaround artist and Disney actor Doc Shaw, singer-songwriter Grace Weber, and actress and Americans for the Arts Artists Committee Member Victoria Rowell. O.A.R. American Rock band members Marc Roberge and Richard On joined Hill meetings that afternoon. Check out event highlights and learn about ways to keep the advocacy momentum going throughout the year at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/AAD.

Norman Lear Delivers the 2015 Nancy Hanks Lecture

“We all take it as a given that art is beneficial to society, but do we put sufficient value on that art for art’s sake—and for all people?” asked groundbreaking television producer, author, and social activist Norman Lear to a full house at the 28th Annual Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts and Public Policy presented by Americans for the Arts at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. After an introduction by Grammy, Oscar, and Golden Globe Award-winning artist COMMON, Lear delved into how he has used his art as a tool to make invaluable social impact on society. He further addressed the intrinsic value of the arts to American society, ending his remarks by stating “We will save our world. But when it is saved, I’m confident that the door will have been kicked open by the things that bring us together—the arts, the music, the film, the literature, theater, painting, photography, sculpture, and dance—which cause us to see and hear as one. We are then free to delight in or disparage according to our individual tastes, but in the embrace of art and beauty, still one.”

To view the lecture, including introductions by COMMON, please visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org/Hanks.
Message from President & CEO
Robert Lynch

While it was a slow start to spring this year in Washington, DC, with temperatures barely reaching high enough to coax the famous cherry blossoms into bloom, National Arts Advocacy Day came in like a lion. On March 24, the energy of hundreds of grassroots arts advocates brought some excitement to the halls of Congress.

On March 24, an army of pro-arts advocates swarmed Capitol Hill to make the case for increased federal arts funding, arts education, and charitable tax provisions. Just a few weeks earlier, details of these pro-arts positions were overwhelmingly approved by Arts Action Fund members during our annual Policy Vote.

I was honored to kick off Arts Advocacy Day this year by introducing longtime Congressman and civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) to speak to arts advocates about the power and importance of the arts. He said the civil rights movement would not have been as effective without music. It was also my honor to co-present the Congressional Arts Leadership Award with The United States Conference of Mayors to Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), a tireless champion of the arts in the Senate and his wife Jill serves on the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

During Arts Advocacy Day, we were able to lay the groundwork about our concerns for arts education in any upcoming bill to re-authorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), commonly known as No Child Left Behind. We mobilized Arts Action Fund members to sign our petition to tell their elected representatives that the arts are indispensable part of every child’s education. We were able to collect and deliver over 6,100 signatures to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. On April 16, we scored a major victory when the Senate committee in charge of the bill unanimously approved a version that includes arts education as one of the “core academic subjects.” However, the current version awaiting a vote in the House of Representatives excludes the arts as a “core subject,” opening the door for decreasing arts education across the country.

I think it’s very important to always be willing to speak up to policy-makers that these are wise investments in our future.”

–Sherron Long, Florida Cultural Alliance and Florida State Captain

Heard on the Hill during Arts Advocacy Day

@EdAdvocacy “Artistic freedom challenges us to face the things we don’t want to face” #AAD15

@DocShaw Enjoying my day with americans4arts #aad15 Supporting arts and arts education

@MarcRoberge Spent the morning on the Hill with #AAD15 Arts Advocacy Day and can’t believe I got to stand with Congressman John Lewis

“"I think it’s very important to always be willing to speak up to policy-makers that these are wise investments in our future.”

–Sherron Long, Florida Cultural Alliance and Florida State Captain
The Arts Action Fund monitors arts policy at the federal level and helps bring citizens’ voices to the table when important arts issues are debated. For detailed legislative updates, please visit www.AmericansForTheArts.org/news-room/legislative-news.

Budget and Education Work Off to a Quick Start

On February 2, the Obama administration released its FY 2016 budget request to Congress, which includes a proposed $2 million funding increase for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The request also proposes dedicated funding for the Arts in Education (AIE) program in the amount of $25 million to continue existing AIE grants. The Appropriations Committees are now developing funding proposals. To inform this work, on March 18, the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee held its Public Witness hearing to receive testimony on programs funded by the subcommittee, including the NEA. Karen Hanan, executive director of Washington State Arts Commission (ArtsWA) in Olympia, WA and member of Americans for the Arts Action Fund, testified in support of federal funding at no less than $155 million for the NEA, a minimum increase of $9 million over current funding. She was joined by the Utah Symphony | Utah Opera and Portland Stage in Portland, ME to make the case. On education reform, the House considered reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, holding debate on the House floor in February. The Senate, under the leadership of Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Patty Murray (D-WA), is working on a bipartisan bill.

State Arts Appropriation and Legislative Update

The election of 2014 saw 36 governors stand for election, resulting in 10 new men and one woman being elected. Given that 11 states now have brand new chief executives, state arts advocates are working hard to educate and inform their governors how the arts and culture contribute to the state’s economy, create jobs, and enrich communities. While the state appropriations process is still playing out, there are a few bright spots for arts supporters. Newly elected Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf has proposed a $2 million increase for the state arts agency. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has proposed a $5 million increase, and South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley has proposed a $1 million increase for arts education grants.

In other states, arts advocates are diligently working to maintain level funding for the arts and culture. In Maryland, the Senate unanimously passed H.B. 70 and 72, which are the House versions of the FY 2016 budget and the 2015 Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act. With the passage of these bills, the state budget fully restores arts funding for FY 2016 to the mandated level of nearly $66.8 million and redirects about $600,000 of the Special Fund for the Preservation of Cultural Arts to the Maryland State Arts Council to restore the previously enacted 5 percent mid-year cut to FY 2015.

In addition to appropriations, there are several other bills that state advocates are working on. In Iowa, arts advocates are focusing on adding fine arts to the Iowa Core Curriculum as well as adding a full-time fine arts consultant at the Iowa Department of Education. There are currently two companion fine arts bills moving through both the Iowa House and Senate; the Senate bill is sponsored by the Senate Education Committee Chair with the House version having bipartisan cosponsors. A hearing with the House Education Committee is scheduled in the upcoming weeks. In Utah, S.B. 194, more commonly known as the Arts & Business Alliance, proposes the creation of the Arts and Culture Business Alliance, which would administer up to $1 million a year to promote and encourage development of the arts throughout the state. Sponsored by State Senator Jim Dabakis (D-Salt Lake City), S.B. 194 passed committee with unanimous vote and passed both the Senate and House with overwhelmingly positive votes of 25-2-2 and 24-o-5 respectively. Governor Gary Herbert signed it into law on March 30.
Actor and Youth Activist Joins Forces with Arts Action Fund Members

Thanks to the generosity of Arts Action Fund members like you, we were able to raise $10,000 for pro-arts candidates at the PAC Fundraiser in conjunction with Arts Advocacy Day on March 23. President and CEO of Action Fund Robert L. Lynch and actor and youth activist Doc Shaw each spoke about the importance of arts advocacy.

Arts advocacy is particularly important moving into the 2016 presidential election. The Arts Action Fund will be in key early primary states Iowa and New Hampshire, as well as both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. The Arts Action Fund PAC is a critical tool for us to educate and mobilize presidential candidates in both parties.

In order for us to put the arts front and center in 2016, we need the support of our grassroots membership. Please visit www.ArtsActionFund.org/PAC to play your part in advancing the arts in America or use the enclosed envelope to mail in a check.

(From Left to Right) Disney Actor and Youth Activist Doc Shaw, Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra clarinetist Barrett Ham, and Arts Action Fund Executive Director Nina Ozlu Tunceli at the Arts Action Fund PAC Fundraising Reception.