President Trump's Political Roller Coaster

President Trump holds up a signed Executive Order in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan. 28, 2017. (Photo: Alex Brandon, AP)

The First 100 Days of the Trump Administration has begun and the agenda is full of policy endeavors that offer challenges and opportunities. There are several items that will impact the Arts Action Fund agenda, and we're watching their development closely.

For starters, among the White House executive orders was the original Immigration and Refugee Ban that denies entrance into the U.S. by immigrant and non-immigrant visitors from seven Muslim-majority nations. Americans for the Arts immediately released a statement that opposes policies that limit the free exchange of art, artists, and ideas based on nationality, faith, race, age or ability—and deplores the discriminatory nature of this travel ban. Read the full statement at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/Immigration.

On the budget front, an FY 2018 Trump budget proposal is not expected in full until April, but the Administration’s “skinny budget” recommends eliminating all public funding for the nation’s cultural agencies next year.

The President and Congress are currently trying to “repeal and replace” President Obama’s health care reforms. Americans for the Arts has also released a statement on the negative impact this would have on artists and arts organizations. Read the statement at www.AmericansForTheArts.org/ACA.

National Arts Petition to President Donald Trump

Soon after Election Day, the Arts Action Fund began circulating a petition to then-President-elect Donald Trump to support the arts with a number of specific pro-arts policy initiatives. But the petition became even more urgent after The Hill newspaper broke the story that sources close to the President-elect were planning to recommend eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and to privatize the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). In late January, President & CEO of the Arts Action Fund Robert L. Lynch wrote a letter to President Trump asking him to preserve federal funding for the arts and humanities. But that is only the beginning. We want the next letter we send to the White House to be accompanied by our national petition signed by 100,000 Arts Action Fund members. So far, the petition has garnered over 46,000 signatures, including over 6,500 arts organizations.
On March 2, 2017, Arts Action Fund President and CEO Bob Lynch organized a meeting for a delegation of The U.S. Conference of Mayors to meet with the Congressional Arts Caucus to discuss saving the NEA. Pictured with Bob is Pembroke Hills, Florida Mayor Frank Ortis (left).

This year is already proving to be a tumultuous year for our country, and for the arts. After news broke that President Trump has recommended eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Institute of Museum and Library Services, and privatizing the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), many of our members rushed forward, eager to do anything to help protect and promote the arts. I was inspired that our petition to President Trump (www.ArtsActionFund.org/TrumpPetition) garnered tens of thousands of signatures within days after the announcement that federal arts funding could be in jeopardy. I know that this tide of grassroots support for the arts will continue into 2017, and I am confident that the voices of arts advocates will prevail.

One of the best ways to support and defend the arts during this time is participating in our annual Arts Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. Arts Advocacy Day brings together a broad coalition of organizations to stand up for pro-arts policies on the federal level. Attendees also attend the Nancy Hanks Lecture on Arts & Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. I am pleased to share that our speaker this year is Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation. Darren will be introduced by Thelma Golden of the Studio Museum along with a special performance by Anna Deavere Smith.

The nation’s mayors gathered over inauguration week to at their 85th Winter meeting. From left to right: Tom Cochran, USCM Executive Director and CEO; USCM 2nd Vice President and Mayor of Columbia, SC Steve Benjamin, NEA Chairman Jane Chu, Boston Mayor Martin Walsh, USCM Vice President and Mayor of New Orleans Mitch Landrieu, Robert Lynch, Americans for the Arts President and CEO, Burnsville, MN Mayor Elizabeth Kautz, Oro Valley, AZ Mayor Satish Hiremath and artist Bobby Hill.

Over inauguration weekend, Americans for the Arts partnered with The United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) to present our 2017 Public Leadership in the Arts Awards for Local Arts Leadership. We were pleased to present Boston, MA Mayor Martin Walsh with our leadership award for a city with a population of 100,000 or more for his work in making the arts and culture a core component of Boston city government. Joining Mayor Walsh in being recognized was Oro Valley, AZ Mayor Satish Hiremath who received our leadership award for a city with a population of less than 100,000. Mayor Hiremath received his award for his personal philanthropy and his commitment to supporting arts and cultural non-profits. Additionally, NEA Chairman Jane Chu was presented with a Special Recognition Award for her Outstanding Public Service to the Arts.
PAC Update

The Arts Action Fund completed its annual year-end campaign for 2016. Utilizing both direct mail and e-mail for the appeals, the funds raised during the campaign directly support the Arts Action Fund. We set a goal at the beginning of the campaign to raise $30,000. We exceeded that goal by raising $40,086 from loyal Arts Action Fund members like you. Even though the campaign has officially wrapped, we continue to receive contributions well into the new year from our members. We extend our most sincere thanks to everyone who supported the 2016 year-end campaign.

Federal Update

In January, the 115th Congress gavelled into action and has a very full agenda this year. The Senate has begun with the immediate task of approving the President’s cabinet nominees before assembling legislation on the budget, an infrastructure proposal and a Supreme Court nominee. The House, which is able to move faster than the Senate, will be working on two fiscal years as they try to complete work on FY 2017 (under a “Continuing Resolution” until April 28th) and begin the process for FY 2018 amid legislative action on the Affordable Care Act, producing a fresh proposal on tax reform and seeking enactment of their “Better Way” agenda. As always, the Arts Action Fund will be working with Members of Congress, and their staff, to protect the NEA and other cultural agencies and build pro-arts support on broad legislative initiatives.

State and Local Update

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf announced $1.7 million in philanthropic funds to create affordable, safe spaces for the city’s artists and arts organizations.

On December 6, 2016, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf announced $1.7 million in philanthropic funds to create affordable, safe spaces for the city’s artists and arts organizations. The funds will help establish a technical assistance and financial program to provide aid for artists and arts organizations facing displacement. The money will seed a two-year pilot program by CAST and the Northern California Community Loan Fund “to help artists keep their existing venues, or move into permanent, affordable space.” Funding will also be used to buy real estate and lease it at below market rates to local artists. In addition, Mayor Schaaf pledged additional city staffing to support arts and culture in Oakland.

Though in development for the past few months, the funding news was especially meaningful in light of the deadly fire at the Ghost Ship warehouse—and artists’ work and living collective—in which 36 people were killed. Mayor Schaaf stated, “The arts are at the center of vibrant and diverse communities, and are critical to neighborhood health and well-being, yet artists and cultural organizations are increasingly vulnerable to instability and displacement. This public-private collaboration and investments are aimed at preventing displacement, growing the capacity of the city’s artists and cultural organizations, and enhancing municipal resources for the cultural sector over the long haul.”

On January 11, 2017 Mayor Libby Schaaf issued Executive Order 2017-1 to address the critical need to improve the safety of former warehouse and industrial buildings that have been converted to non-permitted use while avoiding displacement of vulnerable communities, particularly in face of the regional affordability crisis.
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