



## NEWS AND INFORMATION

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

09/14/2009

### **Statement from Americans for the Arts in regards to inaccuracies published by The Washington Times**

WASHINGTON, D.C.— On September 10 and 11, 2009, *The Washington Times* posted a series of unfounded blog posts and an inaccurate editorial on its website. Americans for the Arts urges the editors of *The Washington Times* to reconsider their mistake and ask them to also print this clarification in its entirety when the editorial is published.

*The Washington Times* blogs in question include:

- 9/10/09 – [Audio: Arts coalition chief on NEA artists' grants and health care reform](#)
- 9/10/09 – [Path to political propoganda at the National Endowment for the Arts](#)
- 9/10/09 – [\\$2 million behind National Endowment for the Arts politics push](#)
- 9/11/09 – [Arts lobby pulls an online houdini](#)
- 9/11/09 – [Editorial: NEA's artful dodgers](#)

On September 14, 2009, *The Washington Times* published an editorial titled "Inartful Politics" that was originally posted on its The Water Cooler blog and written by Kerry Picket. It contains many inaccuracies and fabrications.

### **According to The Washington Times/Picket:**

"Last month, a top NEA official gathered artists and arts organizations in a conference call that also included a White House official and clearly asked the arts community to get behind the administration's agenda, including the current top priority health care. A mere 48 hours after the request, 21 art organizations led by an arts lobbying organization, Americans for the Arts, released the first of two public statements endorsing health care reform and urging Congress to act."

### **The truth:**

- There was never an endorsement of President Obama's health reform plan. On August 13, 2009, Americans for the Arts issued a press release calling attention to a statement issued by a coalition of national arts service organizations including Americans for the Arts on August 12, 2009. The statement urged Congress to include many arts-specific principles in the passage of a health care reform bill. In fact, President Obama and the Administration were not even mentioned in the statement.
- The issuing of the press release was strategically tied to the timely citizen debates happening in the media and in town hall meetings across America during the August Congressional recess. The issuance and timing of the health care and the arts statement had nothing to do with a conference call on August 10, 2009, involving the National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Americans for the Arts was not part of the August 10, 2009, conference call as suggested by Ms. Picket and was not even aware of the call until early September after reading news reports.
- Americans for the Arts has been a longtime vocal advocate for health care reform to benefit uninsured artists and arts administrators, and to include more art therapy research and programs in health care reform. In fact, Americans for the Arts and dozens of other national arts service organizations joined to issue a Health care and the Arts Issue Brief to Congress on National Arts Advocacy Day on March 31, 2009.
- Incidentally the August 10 call, from what we have read, was for artists. What Ms. Picket obviously does not know is that individual artists, except for some writers, are ineligible to receive NEA direct grants. Ms. Picket uses the words "pressure to comply" to imply that someone was trying to coerce artists to take some kind of specific directed action.
- There was no involvement of the National Endowment for the Arts in the development of the arts coalition's health care reform statement or the timing of the press release on August 13, 2009. The statement reiterates arts policy positions on health care consistent with at least two years of similar advocacy by Americans for the Arts and others on behalf of decent health care for artists and arts workers.
- Apparently Ms. Picket was unaware that as early as December 2007 Americans for the Arts released a policy document, "A Bold New Vision for the Arts," that outlined 10 policy objectives for the arts and asked each then Presidential candidate to respond with their own policy positions for the arts. Health care and the arts was one of our ten points, along with roles for the arts in economic development, jobs, education, public diplomacy, more appropriations for the federal arts and humanities agencies, and many other areas.
- Seven candidates responded with an arts policy position statement including Mike Huckabee (who was the first), John McCain, and Barack Obama. This initiative was widely covered in the press. Our own policy statement, as well as those of the candidates has remained on our ArtsVote2008 website ever since. I for one am pleased that many politicians, Republican and Democrat alike, have begun to catch up with the recommendations of the arts community two years later.

**According to The Washington Times/Picket:**

“However, when you add in the nearly \$2 million that the NEA handed out to those very arts organizations in the four months prior to the conference call—including more than a million in stimulus funds—it is time to start wondering whether a line has been crossed from merely unethical into the land of special prosecutors. Such an investigation may be the only way to get straight answers.”

**The truth:**

- The National Endowment for the Arts was authorized by the United States Congress in 1965 to make grants to arts organizations among other charges. All of the 100,000 nonprofit arts organizations in America are eligible to apply for grants, and peer panels of volunteers make the independent decisions based on very specific criteria. There is no connection between the policy positions of Americans for the Arts or any other arts organization. There is also no connection between any monies received by Americans for the Arts such as the \$50,000 NEA economic stimulus grant that we received on July 7, 2009, which was to specifically help preserve two staff positions providing professional development and technical services to the local arts agency field.
- The NEA’s grant-making process is nonpartisan and has been found to be so by Republican and Democrat administrations for more than four decades. The direct economic stimulus grants to arts organizations underwent a comprehensive and rigorous review process that involved congressionally mandated panels of experts in the respective discipline fields. The panelists assessed the ability of the organizations to preserve jobs in the arts with federal stimulus funds; decisions were not based on any specific programming of the applicant organizations. The real story is how efficiently the NEA distributed job creation funds while other federal agencies struggled.
- More disturbing is *The Washington Times*, by innuendo, questions the hard won rights of American nonprofit organizations to advocate to the federal government for causes they believe in. All nonprofit organizations have the right to advocate and most do far less advocacy and lobbying than legally permitted.

**According to The Washington Times/Picket:**

“On Aug. 27 or 28, Robert L. Lynch, head of NEA grant recipient Americans for the Arts, met with Mr. Landesman. On Aug. 28, Mr. Lynch posted a preening podcast monologue about the event. The podcast was short on specifics, but there were tantalizing suggestions that Mr. Lynch's discussion with the new NEA chairman had touched on health care and activism. How tantalizing? Enough to cause Americans for the Arts to remove audio of the podcast from the Web page where it had been promoted. The disappearing act ended when *The Washington Times* called about the missing audio. Suddenly the audio reappeared.”

## **The truth:**

- On August 27 and 28, Americans for the Arts President and CEO Robert Lynch was on vacation in New England and not meeting with NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman. Robert Lynch had a meeting with Mr. Landesman on August 12, 2009, during his first week on the job after Senate confirmation. This meeting incidentally happened after the coalition of national arts organizations had crafted and released a health care reform statement not before as suggested by Ms. Picket. The Washington Times implies that there is something wrong with the CEO of a national service organization meeting with the Chair of our nation's federal arts agency.
- In his 25 years at Americans for the Arts, Mr. Lynch has met multiple times with all NEA Chairs whether Republican or Democrat appointed. What do they talk about? How the United States government can and should do more for the 100,000 non profit arts businesses, the 5.7 million arts centric jobs, the 2 million plus artists, the 4 percent of all American businesses that are arts centric. In Mr. Lynch's conversation with Mr. Landesman the subject of health care never arose.
- On August 28, 2009, Americans for the Arts posted one of Mr. Lynch's weekly podcasts on the Americans for the Arts blog site at <http://blog.artsusa.org>. The link to this podcast entitled "ArtCast: Meeting NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman" was never removed from the blog. The Washington Times never called about or asked about the blog as stated by Ms. Picket; she did call our communications staff to ask the amount of NEA grants received by American for the Arts.
- Just this past week, the WordPress blog software that Americans for the Arts uses for its ArtsBlog had a podcast plug-in failure of the "Blubrry PowerPress," which provides the embedded MP3 audio player. On September 9, 2009 at 9:30 am the server logs show that WordPress sent out a series of upgrades to WordPress related plug-ins. The "Blubrry PowerPress" plug-in upgrade failed and at that time the ability to use the player to play podcast went off all our podcasts posted on the blog. This software was updated and reactivated on September 11, 2009, at 10:10 am EST.
- It is important to note that all podcasts on the Americans for the Arts blog were impacted by this software failure during this time and that none of the links and descriptions of the podcasts were ever taken down.
- Additionally, Americans for the Arts takes exception with the selective excerpts and misleading transcription patched together by Ms. Picket on a blog post she wrote on September 10, 2009 ("Audio: Arts coalition chief on NEA artists' grants and health care reform").

## **According to The Washington Times/Picket:**

"Mr. Lynch's organization is also an arts powerhouse; the affiliated political action committee gave \$48,000 to Democrats in Congress during the last election cycle. So far this year, Americans for the Arts reports lobbying expenses of more than a quarter of a million dollars."

## The Truth:

- *The Washington Times* purposefully omits that the PAC of the Americans for the Arts Action Fund, a 501(c)4 organization set up for arts advocacy purposes, also gave donations to 26 Republicans running for Congress in the same time period. Or that Americans for the Arts honored Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger for his arts education support. Or that Americans for the Arts hosted a thank you ceremony and luncheon for First Lady Laura Bush and her key cultural support all in that same time period all chronicled on the Americans for the Arts website. Perhaps Ms. Picket was just unable to find these items.
- At the Republican National Convention last year in St. Paul, the Americans for the Arts Action Fund hosted an arts forum with key Republican elected leaders moderated by Governor Mike Huckabee and the discussion focused on the same 10-point plan that Americans for the Arts brought to all candidates throughout the election.
- Ms. Picket by implying that the arts and the needs of artists are somehow a Democrat issues dishonors the hundreds of thousands of Republican elected officials, arts patrons, board members, and arts leaders across America who should be recognized for their ongoing strong arts support. Perhaps key Republican leaders are also part of the conspiracy for better health care for arts workers that Ms. Picket envisions. We certainly hope so.

Besides all the petty inaccuracies that Ms. Picket seems to be forging into some kind of conspiracy theory she makes one very big critical mistake. It is not Congress or the White House or the NEA urging the arts community to embrace health care reform, rather it is the arts community urging Congress and the White House and America to embrace health care reform that will benefit artists and art workers and America as a whole and we have been calling for it long before the current administration came to town.

**Americans for the Arts** is the leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education in America. With offices in Washington, D.C. and New York City, it has a record of more than 50 years of service. Americans for the Arts is dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts. Additional information is available at [www.AmericansForTheArts.org](http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org).

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