

Arts Defunding: It's Won't Happen

By Donato (Danny) Pietrodangelo

The alphabet of American culture - the NEA, NEH and NPR - won't lose public funding.

No, the President and Congress didn't have a Eureka

moment and realize art and cultural and the capacity for creative expression differentiate us from the primordial slime from which we came.

And, it's not because lawmakers got all warm and fuzzy about projects that extending the paint-smeared hand of arts experiences to disenfranchised inner-city programs and not so disenfranchised charter schools.

And, it's not because experts concluded that, well, Bert and Ernie - it's just a bromance.

Real reasons?

First, it was never the plan. It was all part of the Deal. And, I won't debase the word "Art" by putting it in that sentence. No one expects to get asking price, especially a man who gloats about the size of his deals.

Second, political realities.

Will Marco Rubio put the big kibosh on funding for the International Hispanic Theatre Festival of Miami with its, "... all-day event for children and their families in Little

Havana featuring performing arts workshops and"?

And, it's not like the Senator will kill the miniscule \$820,520 the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs received from the NEA in 2015 -2016. It's seed money - for an industry, Secretary of State Ken Detzner says puts more than

\$1.2 billion in the Florida economy. *Arts & Economic Prosperity* by Americans for the Arts puts the figure at \$3.1 billion and 88,236 full time equivalent jobs.

Arts is the cultural equivalent of Eisenhower's Military Industrial (Congressional) Complex: lots of special interests, money and favors.

Nationally, the Bureau of Economic Analysis reports arts and cultural productions contribute more than \$704 billion to economy, more than 4.3 percent of GDP - more than construction, agriculture, mining, utilities, and travel and tourism sectors.

The Senator and Governor "Jobs" aren't going to step into that can of paint.



The NEA gets a miniscule \$146 million annually - .004 of the budget. (The government pays more to keep the first family in Trump Tower.) It gives 80 percent to large and small arts groups ranging from the Harlem Dance Theater to the Yoknapatawpha Arts Council, Inc. in Mississippi to the New York City Ballet (and Tallahassee Ballet).

Defunding these would unleash political wrath of biblical proportions.

Tax dollars help support (just seven percent of their budgets) the pastimes and passions of art lovers, many of whom are well-heeled. That makes support a win-win for politicians – a double-dipping bonanza. They get cultural creds with the home folk, and garner favor with the corporations and moneyed individuals who contribute about 40 percent to the cost of art.

It's a win-win- for donors as well: good guys supporting arts on the politician's turf and – in the circuitous nature of politics – expecting gratitude and an open door.

It's a swell arrangement. Sipping champagne together at a premier or opening delivers more kudos and dollars than tipping back Red Solo Cups with the rest of us at the Monster Truck Mash.

(Whatever the motive, as an artist, it's all good. The end justifies the means, so rare in Washington.)

No one knows the symbiosis of art and politics better than the President. He's been rubbing elbows with the glitterati his whole adult life. This brings us back to the Deal. With the arts, he's holding a royal flush, in a game that will play out sort of like this:

“I want 90 more of those awesome F-35s, at about \$90 million a pop,” he says.

“We'll give you 85, but you give us \$445 million for public television.”

“Okay, losers. Now cut the IRS by \$268 million.”

“Who cares?” If you use it for NEA and NEH, we'll throw in the \$168 million for those charter schools.”

“Tremendous.”

“Let's go guys, great food, open bar and deep pockets at that new gallery opening.”

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