

TESTIMONY OF ROBIN BRONK,
CEO OF THE CREATIVE COALITION

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

April 17, 2013

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify this morning regarding the fiscal year 2014 funding levels for the National Endowment for the Arts.

My name is Robin Bronk. I am the CEO of The Creative Coalition, the non-profit, non-partisan public advocacy organization of the arts and entertainment community. The Creative Coalition was established in 1989 by actors Ron Silver, Christopher Reeve, Alec Baldwin and others. From the beginning, support for the arts and arts education has always been central to our mission. Our membership is comprised of actors, directors, producers, writers, and others who make their livings in theater, film, arts, letters and television. On their behalf, it is an honor to speak with you today.

First, let me thank the members of the Committee for your strong bipartisan support for arts funding in recent years. Study after study has shown the important role that the arts and arts-related industries play in our economy, creating jobs, revitalizing communities and generating tax revenue. Your support has been essential to maintaining struggling arts organizations, allowing them to generate much needed economic activity and jobs in communities across the country.

The Creative Coalition supports funding for the NEA at a level of \$154 million for the coming fiscal year. We appreciate the very tight fiscal constraints under which the Committee is operating, but we also know that – when looked at in real, inflation-adjusted dollars – the NEA’s funding has already been cut by more than \$100 million over the past two decades.

I. The Entertainment Industry

Members of The Creative Coalition know the impact that the arts can have. According to statistics compiled by the Motion Picture Association of America for 2010, the motion picture and television industry support 2.1 million jobs and \$143 billion in wages annually. In 2010, we had \$13.5 billion in film and television exports, with a trade surplus of \$11.9 billion.

The economic impact of the entertainment industry extends far beyond those who appear on camera. A television series or movie is a big enterprise. A single series can employ hundreds of people. In addition, filming provides huge support to local businesses like caterers, dry cleaners and clothing stores. And this economic activity is taking place all across the country, not just in Hollywood or New York. When I call my members, I’m

almost as likely to find them at work in Louisiana or North Carolina or Utah as I am in California.

Our entertainment industry is an American success story, but we can't take that success for granted. We don't have any guarantee that we'll remain the source of what the world wants to watch and hear, and we can't afford to rest on our laurels.

This is a delicate ecosystem, and the non-profit arts organizations and events supported by the National Endowment for the Arts are a vital part of that ecosystem, training and nurturing the next generation of talent. The community theaters, the children's theaters, symphonies, arts centers, dance troupes are the R&D of America's vibrant arts economy. The Sundance Film Festival, which has become a premiere venue for emerging film talent, was started with the help of an NEA grant. The modest investment in these programs is paid back many times over.

Speak with virtually any of my members, and you will find individuals who were drawn into the arts as young people. They were acting in community theater productions and school plays, playing in bands, spending their afternoons and weekends at local dance companies. The non-profit arts ecosystem was nurturing them into the artists that they would become. And, perhaps unwittingly but absolutely critically, they were playing a key role in building artists who would help us maintain and expand our global leadership in the entertainment economy.

II. The Non-Profit Arts Sector

While they may be among the most visible parts of America's arts economy, professional actors, actresses, writers and directors are only a tiny fraction of those who rely on our arts economy for their livelihoods. Trying to gauge the impact that the arts have on our economy by looking only at professional actors would be like trying to assess the health and community impact of sports in America solely by looking to NBA or NFL players. When one looks at our non-profit arts sector and at our creative industries more broadly, the real impact of the arts on our economy comes into clearer focus.

Arts advocates have done great work in recent years to sift through all the data and measure the impact of the arts on our economy. In their most recent analysis, Americans for the Arts found that non-profit arts and culture organizations spur \$135 billion in economic activity annually, supporting more than 4 million full-time jobs and generating more than \$22 billion in revenue to local, state and the federal government.

In a move that may prove to be one of the most impactful for the arts over the longer term, the Department of Commerce announced this past October that its Bureau of Economic Analysis would work with the NEA to – for the first time ever – quantify our arts and culture sector's contribution to our Gross Domestic Product. When we are able to see more clearly the economic impact the arts and of our federal investment in the arts, I'm hopeful that we can build even greater support here in Congress.

III. America's Creative Economy

Even looking at the jobs and economic activity generated by the entertainment and arts industries, however, we're still missing a key reason to support for the arts. The arts play an increasingly important role as a gateway to creative thinking in all fields. Art, because of its link to creativity, is a vital part of virtually all disciplines. Even science, technology, engineering and math are inextricably tied to art, turning the acronym STEM into STEAM.

I think there are two dynamics at play here that are worth noting. One, the global economy continues to shift, and the U.S. competitive advantage is increasingly in higher-skill, more creative economic activity. Second, we're beginning to get a better sense of how the brain works and how to foster creativity.

In May of last year, the National Governors' Association issued a report entitled, "New Engines of Growth: Five Roles for Arts, Culture and Design." The study looks at the key roles that arts, culture and design play in fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, employment and revitalization. It highlights the ability of creative clusters, which include vibrant arts communities, can play in driving a region's economic growth.

The report includes a photo of MusikFest in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, which, by the way, is an NEA grantee. The image is of a crowd watching a live music performance at the arts center called SteelStacks, which was built in the shadow of hulking decommissioned blast furnaces at a former Bethlehem Steel plant. The image is a great metaphor for our shifting economy: the industrial is transforming into the creative. Certainly we still want a vibrant manufacturing economy, but even that will take creative thinking to remain competitive. Our advantage is increasingly in our creativity.

And the arts are central to creative development. This is a point that we know instinctively and that parents have always understood. We don't give our kids crayons and paint and music lessons because we necessarily think they're going to become "artists." We do it because we know that it's beneficial for their development. And our gut feelings are increasingly being confirmed by research and science. Involvement in the arts carries a number of benefits, not the least of which is training the mind to think differently and creatively.

A recent study commissioned by the software company Adobe Systems found that an overwhelming percentage of professionals believe that creativity is critically important to a successful career. When asked what courses best teach creative thinking, the number one and two top responses were "art" and "music." If we believe creativity is essential to our prosperity, we can't afford to neglect the arts.

Conclusion

Given these economic imperatives, The Creative Coalition strongly supports an allocation of at least \$154 million in the National Endowment for the Arts for the next

fiscal year. The resulting grants, leveraged with an average of eight private dollars for each dollar of NEA support, will provide a critical lifeline to and serve as an important validator for arts programs around the country. To maintain our vital arts economy and ensure continued American competitiveness in a global market that increasingly values creativity, this is an investment that makes sense for America.

Thank you for your consideration.