

Cutting arts funding would be shortsighted

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(Photo: Picasa)

With crucial federal programs and agencies like the Affordable Care Act, Environmental Protection Agency, Planned Parenthood and Medicaid under attack by the Trump Administration, it may be easy to overlook some of the other domestic programs slated for elimination. But as part of the proposed 2018 budget Trump is rolling out to the various agencies is the elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the privatization of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). The CPB, which includes local NPR and PBS stations, offers the only free broadcast venues dedicated solely to the presentation of accurate news, arts and educational programming.

The elimination of federal funding for the arts and humanities is especially problematic for those of us who live in the Hudson Valley. According to a study conducted by SUNY New Paltz's Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach, Mid-Hudson arts and culture organizations attract 2.6 million day visitors and 1 million overnight visitors to the region for cultural events, injecting \$498 million directly into our local economy every year. The local arts scene also directly and indirectly employs nearly 5,000 residents. In Dutchess, Ulster and Orange counties, Arts Mid-Hudson helps provide grants to 393 organizations and individual artists. Guess where the majority of Arts Mid-Hudson's funding comes from? From the New York Council for the Arts, which is funded by New York state and yes, the NEA.

Funding for the NEA, NEH and CPB combined account for less than 0.01 percent of the federal budget, according to *The New York Times*. We spend 1/40th of what Germany does on government funded arts programs -- they average \$20 per citizen, we a measly 41 cents. Yet that small pittance matters immensely, providing much-needed money that supports community arts projects, new works and making the arts accessible to people in all 50 states and discount tickets for students and the less wealthy.

Given the influence of the Hudson River School painters, the Hudson Valley has long been viewed as the "birthplace of American Art," as well as home to great writers, such as Washington Irving, Herman Melville, Edith Wharton and James Fenimore Cooper, all of whom helped depict and define the culture and society of 19th-century America. Local residents can learn about these great artists and the impact these legendary authors had on both the U.S. and the world through programs like *American Masters* and *American Experience* on PBS, both of which receive funding from the NEH.

On the campaign trail, President Donald Trump promised that he would make America great again. Eliminating federal funding for the arts and humanities will ensure that he and any representative who votes to do so will inevitably fail in that mission. Only through the creation of literature, dance, theater, music and visual art (and sharing it through museums, public venues and broadcast institutions like NPR and PBS) will our nation's achievements and diverse culture be remembered and celebrated not just a decade from now, but for centuries to come.

Poughkeepsie resident Sandi Sonnenfeld is the author of the award-winning memoir, "This Is How I Speak" (Seattle: Impassio Press), and more than 30 published short stories and essays. For more, visit authorsandisonnenfeld.com. (<https://authorsandisonnenfeld.com/>)

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