

**Written Testimony in Support of FY09 Appropriations for the
National Endowment for the Arts**

Submitted by Robert Redford

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House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies

“Role of the Arts in Creativity and Innovation”

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Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to be here. My name is Robert Redford, and I am the Chairman of the Sundance Preserve in Utah and member of the Americans for the Arts Artists Committee. I am pleased to be a part of the Americans for the Arts delegation and come to our great capitol for Arts Advocacy Day. I am also here to testify in favor of a Fiscal Year 2009 appropriation of \$176 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

A character in a movie from an important book was told to “Follow the money” – so I’ve followed the money – and found that the source of federal arts funding in America starts with you.

I heard about the success of your hearing last year, and realized that this committee is providing a genuine opportunity to communicate to Congress the value of public investment in the arts, I wanted to join you. I spoke at the 2003 Nancy Hanks Lecture on the Arts so it has been five years since I last came to Washington to advocate for the arts.

But first let me mention my background, some of which you may know, some you may not. I grew up in Los Angeles. I was shaped by World War II and a time when we were all united in its purpose—unlike conflicts of today. Because times were tough, and my family financial resources slim, we didn’t have fancy toys or luxuries and had to be creative in inventing worlds of our own. My imagination was my most valuable commodity and thankfully it became a life force for me at a very young age. I saw the world around me not only as it was. I saw the world around me as it could be. Art and the imagination that gave it life became my closest companions.

Before anyone was much interested in what I had to say, they were interested in what I created. As a kid, I remember sketching everything in sight. My parents and their friends played cards and I began drawing them as a group, individual faces and the like. Then I moved under the table and began sketching their feet at which point I think everyone started to worry. Even though they thought I was weird, I got attention and encouragement for my “art” at a young age.

My third grade teacher recognized that art was an alternative means of expression for me as I struggled with more traditional approaches. My teacher’s encouragement of my artistic tendencies allowed me realize art was something legitimate to pursue and that it was integral to how I was finding my way in this world and making sense of things. If not for this, I may have taken a path that wasn’t as fulfilling and productive.

While I was a poor student academically, I shined in sports and I attended the University of Colorado to play baseball. At that time I had what is called a “troubled youth” and left college early to pursue painting.

I studied painting in Europe and at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and took classes at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. I came into the arts as a way of expressing myself. Looking back, the path I was on was a troublesome one and lacking any direction. I have said before, and I believe it to be true, that the arts saved my life. I began acting in small stage and television shows. I found that through work in places like summer stock theater that the ability to experiment, to shape and form a character and develop as an artist could freely take place. I then found some parts on Broadway, and eventually began a career in the movies. None of this was expected, or planned, and came to me only through small steps.

Clearly my life in the arts is a fortunate one. Not only was I able to enjoy a paycheck, but I found projects that had a voice to them – that communicated a message. It is this form of expression that led me to found the Sundance Institute and the Sundance Film Festival and other initiatives that allow for artists to develop their craft.

Americans for the Arts National Arts Policy Roundtable

In 2006, I began to co-convene with Americans for the Arts the inaugural National Arts Policy Roundtable. It was founded on the premise that arts are critical to our society and that every American should have an opportunity to participate in all forms of art—a goal that has particular resonance with me, and why I am pleased to be a partner in this endeavor. Our topic in 2006 was “The Future of Giving to the Arts in America” and it was examined by about 30 leaders in business, foundation, philanthropic and cultural sectors. The leaders from each of those sectors have to balance many social needs in addition to the arts on a daily basis.

The theme for our second convening this past October was “Thinking Creatively and Competing Globally – The Role of the Arts in Building the 21st Century American Workforce,” and we sought to confront the way we prepare students to succeed in the workplace and society of the future.

I can tell you that the energy and excitement around the table for this topic was real—and encouraging. We learned that the belief that the arts are an essential part of restoring the United States’ ability to compete successfully in the 21st century global, knowledge-based economy was not just an idea held by those of us living a life in the arts—it’s a passion that was shared by as diverse a set of leaders as a Lt. Governor, a chief economist, the CEO’s from Silicon Valley, music, film and the hospitality and sports industry, to the several Presidents of major corporate and private foundations. The report from the Conference Board that Mr. Spector presented, “Ready to Innovate” was a significant part of this discussion.

I’ll share with you the principles we came away with, and are committed to helping leaders in public, private, education, and culture sectors to understand:

1. Literacy in the arts is an essential educational goal for the 21st century—not just for a privileged few, but rather for all students, workers, and citizens;

2. As disciplines that both nurture and enhance creativity inquiry and innovation, the arts complement—and are not in competition with—other fields that depend on these applied skills such as math, science, and engineering, and;
3. In order to foster and develop creativity and innovation skills that can be applied in life and work, opportunities for arts learning must begin before kindergarten and continue throughout higher education, as well as in the community and the workplace itself.

These principles provided the foundation for three recommendations: to build a body of research to demonstrate how the arts foster creativity and innovation; to promote the arts, but emphasize that arts education not only prepares students for entry into the workforce, but also fosters excellence among workers; to continue outreach between individuals and organizations concerned with America's competitiveness in the 21st century global economy.

It's time for art to interface more substantially with other sectors.

Obviously this will require the vision and cooperation of many important sectors in our society working together to accomplish: you, as Members of Congress, our corporate, private sector and education leaders and the cultural communities. It is not beyond our reach, and it may in fact be our most important imperative, since there are many countries in our global community who are already forging ahead with a unified strategy to harness the creative energy of their citizens.

Looking forward, I would like to extend an invitation to each of you on this panel to attend the next National Arts Policy Roundtable – we would welcome your involvement on this topic.

The concept of integrating the arts into occupational endeavors is what I consider a key aspect of my message to you today. Let me try to illustrate my point in another way:

In 1981 I founded the Sundance Institute with a grant from the NEA when many others were skeptical of the idea's potential and ultimate worth. I will always be grateful to the NEA for believing in us at the time. It was instrumental in getting us started. It wasn't just the seed funding, but the seal of approval that gave the idea impetus.

The Institute began as an effort to foster independence, discovery, and new voices in American film. That spring, ten emerging filmmakers were invited to the first Sundance Institute Filmmakers/Directors Lab where they worked with leading writers and directors to develop their original independent film projects. In the remote natural setting and removed from the pressures of the marketplace, each emerging artist was encouraged to take creative risks and to craft a film true to their own, unique vision.

Since those first Labs, the Institute has grown into an internationally recognized resource for thousands of independent film, theatre, and music artists. The Institute's programs include the annual Sundance Film Festival, held in and around Park City, Utah. And at Sundance, Utah some 40 miles away, the Institute also conducts programs involving emerging independent screenwriters and directors, nonfiction documentary filmmakers from around the world and a program to connect filmmakers with musicians allowing accomplished musicians to explore composing for film. There's also an independent theater development program.

All these programs serve as an incubator for producing art and served as the inspiration for creating other Sundance enterprises, culminating in not only cultural significance, but positive economic impact in multiple sectors. The Sundance Film Festival alone, an 11 day event, has generated between \$59-64 million annually in economic activity for the State of Utah. When you add the global economic impact of filmmakers and playwrights nurtured in the Institute's year round programs and labs or launched at the Festival---who go on to very successful careers in the entertainment sector, the economics are quite significant.

And that's only part of the story. Collectively, Sundance entities employ nearly 900 full-time and another 350-400 seasonal employees each year. In addition, some 1500 volunteers come from all over the country and world to help run the Sundance Film Festival each year in exchange for the rich cultural experience it offers them.

Not every community can have a festival like Sundance, but many communities can benefit from the same kind of creative exploration, in film, but also in all other kinds of artistic expression. I am pleased to point out that there is an annual Tacoma Film Festival hosted by The Grand Cinema, a nonprofit movie theater and the Tallgrass Film Festival held annually in Wichita, Kansas which had record attendance this past year. I'm sure that many other communities represented on this committee have similar festivals. Perhaps the subcommittee could hold field hearings so that these communities could share information on their local efforts to build their creative economies?

Many of the artists that compete in these film festivals will continue on to careers in the arts. But those who don't pursue that career path may use the skills they gained through filmmaking as writers, graphic designers, as engineers and other audio/video endeavors – all occupations that pay above average wages and are in demand locally.

The Arts As An Economic Driver

The Arts & Economic Prosperity study shows that America's nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity every year -- \$63.1 billion in spending by organizations and an additional \$103.1 billion in event-related spending by audiences. The national impact of this activity is significant, supporting 5.7 million jobs and generating \$29.6 billion in government revenue.

The reason I bring this research to you is to provide a link between the recommendations that we've worked on at the Roundtable and actual businesses and jobs that exist in your congressional districts today. Supporting the arts with federal funds is supporting an investment into a vibrant and sustainable job sector.

We already know that the National Endowment for the Arts has made grants in every congressional district, what we need to do now is increase the size and frequency of those grants. Last year, Utah received 18 grants from the NEA providing just over \$1 million in federal support. That may sound like a lot of money if you're thinking that these funds are used only for costumes and stage lighting, but it's not a significant investment if you realize the tremendous need and potential that exists to make this a major source of economic development. An economic development tool like this should be on a track to reach \$500 million in NEA funding.

We need to change our thinking from a time when economic development was limited to building a road or a power plant. Indeed those are elements that are needed at the beginning of an economic development plan, but now that we're decades beyond those stages, we can focus on what's next. And what's next is investment in the creative economy. An economy that brings the best of American ingenuity to towns of all sizes and can add great value to the people and organizations that strive to develop their creativity.

As most of you know all too well, when the economy is in as bad a shape as it is now, art becomes the "throw-away." Art and art education becomes the funding cut they feel won't have a tangible effect. In other words, it's the cut from which they think nobody will suffer and they think nobody will notice its absence. Well that's not true. It may take a while to get it, but society at large will suffer and I believe, society at large will ultimately notice.

The opportunity before us now is to invest in an emerging economic sector, one that has the power to grow jobs and businesses while also producing cultural benefits for our country – that is the vision I ask you to consider.

What most of you know that maybe others don't is that out there right now is some kid with a great song in their head we've yet to hear or a novel in their heart that has yet to be written. There's someone out there that hasn't picked up a paintbrush yet but has a masterpiece on the horizon. There's a kid out there who hasn't picked up a camera yet but could end up making a memorable film of their time.

What most of you know that others might not as clearly see, is that the nurturing of creativity comes into play in the everything from world diplomacy to world economics, business endeavors to social endeavors and everything in between. It is creativity that gives all of it the nuance that often makes the difference. In all its forms, art plays a critical role in finding our way as people and as a culture.

So today I join hundreds of arts advocates in our quest to speak to our Members of Congress; to share with them our research and to ask for their support. Thank you for your time and I look forward to responding to any questions you may have.