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Agnes Gund, David Lang and Nell Breyer

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## Put Art Works Back in Stimulus Plan

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This week the Senate approved an amendment to the economic stimulus package that strips funds for jobs in arts and culture from the House bill. The Coburn amendment is a grave mistake. Our country's history illustrates why.

In 1935, the Works Projects Administration established the Federal Art Project, The Federal Music Project, The Federal Theater Project and The Federal Writers Project and many other New Deal cultural programs. These programs employed over 40,000 artists, hundreds of teachers, and served over 22 million adults and children through community art centers in 48 states. They included weekly classes in rural areas and urban neighborhoods, theater and musical performances, concerts, opera, film screenings, national broadcasts, local guidebooks and stories.

Under the Art Project, an estimated 2,500 murals for hospitals, schools and municipal buildings, 17,744 sculptures, 108,099 easel paintings and 240,000 prints were produced, many in turn, loaned to schools, libraries, galleries, and other institutions. Under the Music Project, orchestras, chamber, choral and opera groups, military, concert and dance bands offered over 5,000 performances before some three million people each week. Under the Theater Project over 1,200 plays were produced, introducing 100 new playwrights. Under the Writer's Project writers provided research, writing and editorial services to government agencies, produced 3.5 million copies of 800 titles, the historic American Guide Series -- comprehensive guidebooks for every state, Alaska, Guam, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C and some of the most important oral history archives and American folklore collections we have to date.

Does it make sense to do the same thing today? Yes it does. Our national economic stimulus package must include the arts for three reasons.

First, the economy benefits. Arts and culture-based jobs are labor intensive, often with little overhead required for production. Arts-funding would go directly and primarily towards job creation and labor, not infrastructure, bureaucracy or costly equipment. The same does not hold true for many of the capital intensive projects contained in the present stimulus bills. Furthermore, artists and artisans often have little savings. They are therefore more likely to spend what they earn directly on goods and services, funneling the government's investment back into the economy. The same does not hold true for bankers and businessmen who may have considerable other income and thus may save large portions of what the government gives them, through tax relief. Spend on the country's artists, designers, architects and craftsmen, and they will, in turn, spend immediately and directly on our country.

Second, the community benefits. Arts and culture programming not only impacts a broad cross section of our country, it sustains and builds that cross section, enabling individuals to listen, reflect and speak to others in society through poetic and personal languages. There are exemplary cultural programs and artworks that provide financial opportunity and visibility for diverse communities, and others that provide inspiration and solace often when hardship is most acute. Just consider the:

-Jazz artists and musicians across the nation who worked relentlessly in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to raise funds and awareness for its survivors

-American quilt-making traditions such as the quilts made by the Women of Gee's Bend ("some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced." *The New York Times*) or the 40,000 individuals across the country contributing to the AIDS memorial quilt

**-Innovative national and local arts education programs, such as SMARTArt's integrated media literacy, arts, and technology curriculum; Jacques D'Amboise's National Dance Institute serving public school children in low-income communities; or the Lincoln Center Initiative, among others. These efforts promote immersive learning, discipline, imagination and creative problem-solving**

-0.5% for arts in federal buildings and public arts programming for our subways, train stations and airports, continuing the tradition of the New Deal public murals

-Philadelphia Museum of Art's "Cezanne" Exhibit (1996), generating \$86.5 Million in city revenues in just 14 weeks with nearly 60% of its visitors from out of state, or Boston's Museum of Fine Arts responsible for \$369 Million of additional spending by visitors to the region

Successful arts-based initiatives and artworks engage people in critical exchanges every day. Sometimes these efforts mean learning, sometimes community pride, sometimes urban renewal. Often they produce empathy, insight and new resources that connect individuals from different backgrounds and communities with each other. This kind of awareness, imagination, and personal conviction are what lay the groundwork for increased civic engagement.

Third, the future benefits. Alongside the Golden Gate Bridge, the Shasta Dam, and other construction begun in the 1930s, remains an equally important American cultural legacy created by thousands of artists: artists who include Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, James Agee, Walker Evans, Zora Neale Hurston, Orson Welles, Philip Guston, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko (all participants in the federal arts programs). Unlike roads, bridges and dams, these pieces cost little to maintain. An artwork once produced requires little further injection of government funds. Instead, the New Deal-era artworks continue to give back to future generations. Our children and our children's children are still able to enjoy the fruits of this one-time investment.

Investing in our nation's culture makes strong financial sense and will leave a lasting legacy far beyond the current crisis.