

Speech: "Mr. President, I wish to commend my friend, the distinguished Senator from New York [Mr. Moynihan] who has keen insight on NEA funding (...)"

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

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Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I wish to commend my friend, the distinguished Senator from New York [Mr. MOYNIHAN] who has keen insight on NEA funding, and also the other Senator and my friend, the Senator from New York [Mr. D'AMATO], for his statements on this amendment.

We have before us, Mr. President, a highly politicized proposal which would—if you will excuse the pun—strip the National Endowment for the Arts of a significant portion of its funds.

On the surface, the pending amendment appears simple, straightforward, and democratic. It would redistribute funds away from the NEA and direct a greater percentage among each of the States' arts councils. The amendment seems democratic, fair, and harmless, but is it? It allocates funding based on the population of each State. It appears on the surface even patriotic, a salute to democracy.

But, Mr. President, I have a problem with that. Why must art funding follow an artificial formula? Why should we award a statistic—that is, the number of people who live in each State—and sacrifice artistic merit?

Our colleague, the senior Senator from North Carolina, wonders, alas, why certain States and cities receive

more grants from the NEA than do others. Does anyone here truly wonder why New York, San Francisco, and other native cities draw a majority of the NEA grants? These cities serve as vibrant cultural hubs and natural magnets for America's musicians, filmmakers, dancers, singers, composers, and painters. It was no less different in Mozart's Vienna or Michelangelo's Rome. A critical artistic mass is reached, and art flourishes.

I see no mystery or conspiracy here. There is no evidence of NEA funding being deliberately limited to certain cities and States. On the contrary, Mr. President, if we vote to radically alter the NEA funding formula, we will surely undermine its central stability. We will tear the heart out of the NEA. With this radical formula, we will undermine the good works of the NEA. The NEA has long played a proud role in promoting American art. The NEA continues to encourage excellence in art in all media and in all 50 States. Why are some intent on punishing the National Endowment for the Arts year after year?

Mr. President, I strongly urge my colleagues to stand fast against the pending amendment. The NEA deserves our strongest support in an America which has long prided itself on its homegrown artists.