



For Immediate Release

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September 23, 2009

Enzi Leads GOP HELP Committee Inquiry Into Alleged NEA Political Activity

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), Ranking Member of the Senate’s Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today led his fellow Republican HELP Committee members in requesting an explanation regarding possible violations of federal law at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Enzi and his colleagues sent the request to NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman.

In the letter delivered today the Senators questioned the possibility of “taxpayer dollars to engage in lobbying activities to promote the President’s health care legislative agenda and other legislative priorities” during several August conference calls with NEA grant recipients and community stakeholders.

The letter also raises serious questions regarding how the NEA’s participation in these calls may have violated federal criminal restrictions on lobbying Congress, the Hatch Act, appropriations restrictions on spending funds for such purposes and possible contradictions with the entity’s mission under its authorizing statute.

“...The promotion to NEA grant recipients of topics that are at the top of the President’s legislative agenda and urging a call to action creates a serious conflict of interest,” wrote the Senators.

The full text of the letter to Landesman is below:

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

J. MICHAEL MYERS, STAFF DIRECTOR AND CHIEF COUNSEL
FRANK J. MACCHARDOLA, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

<http://help.senate.gov>

September 23, 2009

The Honorable Rocco Landesman
Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Chairman Landesman:

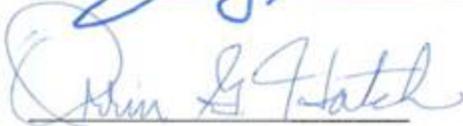
We are writing to express our concern about recent news reports that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) used taxpayer dollars to engage in lobbying activities to promote the President's health care legislative agenda and other legislative priorities. Last night, you issued a statement to clarify the issues concerning the August conference calls. However, there remain significant concerns that NEA's participation in these calls may have stepped over the line. If true, the activities may have violated criminal restrictions on lobbying Congress, the Hatch Act, appropriations restrictions on spending funds for such purposes, and/or are in direct contradiction with the NEA's mission under its authorizing statute. Further, the promotion to NEA grant recipients of topics that are at the top of the President's legislative agenda and urging a call to action creates a serious conflict of interest.

We are specifically concerned about conference calls made on August 10 and 27, 2009, initiated and/or hosted by the NEA, the White House Office of Public Engagement, and/or United We Serve (an initiative funded by the government's Corporation for National and Community Service). We also are concerned that until today NEA's website front page under "Resources, Health Insurance," directly linked to a page that contained the following: "Artists Unite! Advocate for real health care reform that will benefit all artists at Artists United for Health Care." Until recently that page also featured the following statement: "At this moment we have a unique opportunity to improve our quality of life by demanding affordable guaranteed-issue insurance. AHIRC recently launched a new website helping artists get involved in the health care reform debate. Visit Artists United to learn more about the reform bills and advocacy organizations, and to contact your Congress representatives directly."

When you met with the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee during your recent confirmation proceedings, you specifically stated that the NEA should not become a politicized agency. This situation, unfortunately, significantly undermined that statement and goal. We understand that this occurred after you were confirmed but before you joined the Agency and appreciate your statement of last night that the individual responsible, the former NEA Communications Director, acted without senior management authority and has been removed. Your statement, however, is unclear as to how the NEA will prevent this type of activity from happening in the future. In addition, your statement suggests that the NEA may continue to work with the White House and United We Serve to promote volunteer art initiatives to NEA stakeholders and grantees. This and the web link noted above remain problematic.

To address our concerns, we respectfully ask that you provide the Committee with information about the Agency's involvement in this matter, the current status of the former NEA Communications Director, whether any taxpayer dollars were used for this or any other similar activity, and how you will prevent this from happening in the future. Please provide the NEA's response no later than close of business on October 1, 2009. If you have any questions, please have your staff contact Amy Shank, Oversight and Investigations Director for Senator Enzi, at 202-224-6770. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



cc: The Honorable Thomas Harkin, Chairman
The Honorable Daniel Inyoue, Chairman
The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
Tonie Jones, Acting Inspector General

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