

To Fund or Not to Fund? Republican Members of Congress and the National Endowment of the Arts

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Introduction.

The National Endowment for the Arts was established in 1965 as a federal agency designed to serve the public good by nurturing artistic expression and creativity, fostering appreciation for artistic achievements, and recognizing the importance of art in developing local communities. Overall, the Endowment was an investment in America's living cultural heritage. Since the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965, support for the program has been heavily debated and criticized by members of the United States Congress, especially Republicans. Yet, throughout the history of the National Endowment for the Arts there have been a consistent number of Republican members of Congress who have supported the program.

This phenomenon of Republicans in Congress supporting the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is intriguing considering the Republican Party's platform and conservative ideology. For the last ten years, the Republican leadership has targeted the NEA, threatening to eliminate the agency's funding. Yet, even though Republicans regained control of Congress in the mid-1990s, the NEA remains a federally subsidized program. Many Republicans support federal funding of the arts

every year. How can a program so high on the Republican platform hit-list still exist?

Many Republican members of Congress have adamantly opposed the Endowment on the House and Senate floors. The breadth of their arguments encompasses a variety of reasons not to support the NEA. Alternatively, there appear to be a significant number of Republican congresspersons, although not as verbose on the House and Senate floor, that support NEA funding. Therefore, this question rises: *Why do some Republicans in the United States Congress support funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and others do not?*

The best way to illustrate this phenomenon is to present excerpts from speeches made by Representatives and Senators concerning funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional texts concerning NEA funding are also provided to support the debate for or against the National Endowment for the Arts. Reasons why Republicans do not support the NEA are presented first; reasons why Republicans support the NEA are presented second.

Support for programs such as the National Endowment for the Arts is unconstitutional.

On August 9, 1999 Senator Bob Smith of New Hampshire, on behalf of Senator Ashcroft, moved to strike funding for the NEA in Amendment numbered 1569. In his speech on the Senate floor, Smith presented the question, "Where in the Constitution of the United States does it say that the Federal

Government is authorized to fund art?” (Smith 1999).

The Republican Party has built its ideology on the conservative ideals of limited constitutional government. Allegiance to this conception of government requires the abolishment of any program that is funded by the federal government that is not explicitly provided for in the Constitution. Senator Smith continues:

The framers made it clear—very clear—that unless the Constitution explicitly granted power to the Federal Government, that power would be reserved to the States, to the localities, to civil society, or to the people (Smith 1999).

Cynthia Koch, Associate Director, Penn National Commission, concurs with Senator Smith’s assessment that some members of Congress oppose the NEA because of the unconstitutionality of the program. Koch (1998) writes: “[f]ederal support for arts and education is unconstitutional. It is another misguided product of the 1960s Great Society that we can no longer afford.”

The argument that Republicans do not support the National Endowment of the Arts because of its unconstitutionality. The pivotal criterion used in the debate is dependent on each Republican legislator’s interpretation of the Constitution. However, constitutionality does not determine how every Republican determines funding for the NEA. Funding for the NEA is not considered a one-dimensional issue; it is possible that Republicans who do find

NEA funding constitutional would still not support the program, but for other reasons.

The Republican platform unequivocally seeks the abolishment of federal funding for programs like the National Endowment for the Arts.

The 1996 Republican platform ‘Changing Washington from the Ground Up,’ explicitly sought the elimination of funding for the NEA. The platform specifically states:

As a first step in reforming government, we support the elimination of the departments of Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Education, Energy, and the elimination, defunding, or privatization of agencies which are obsolete, redundant, or limited value, or too regional in focus. Examples of agencies that we seek to defund or to privatize are the National Endowment for the Arts...

Senator Bob Dole initiated the writing of the 1996 Republican platform on March 10, 1995. The 1996 Platform quotes Dole saying:

On November 8, 1994, the American people sent a message to Washington. Their message is my mandate to rein in government, reconnect it to the values of the American people, and that means making government a whole lot smaller, a lot less arrogant and getting it out of matters best left to the States, cities, and families across America.

This argument, like the one of Constitutionality, is very straightforward: “Will Republicans vote along party lines to defund the NEA?” Being a member of a major political party typically means adhering to the ideals and mandates set forth by those who supported the run for office. To not support the party platform

is quite contradictory, and poses a risk when seeking reelection.

Of course, voting against the party platform does not reject one from being a party member. Not every Republican agrees with each plank of the party platform, which is not unusual. This position does fail to address those Republicans who denounce funding for the NEA, not because of party loyalty, but for other reasons. The effectiveness of this argument could change if Republicans were not swayed by party loyalty, but by another prevalent issue in the debate over NEA funding.

The arts will have more than enough support without the NEA.

This position supports the idea that Republican congresspersons believe the Arts will receive enough funding without the support of a government agency. As Dr. Jarvik (1997) writes, “The growth of private-sector charitable giving in recent years has rendered NEA funding relatively insignificant to the arts community.” The belief is that federal funding of arts has outlived its usefulness. Furthermore, Republicans believe that any defunding by the government will be refunded by the private sector.

The 40 percent decrease of the NEA budget in 1991-1992 was followed by an increase in private funding by the same 40 percent. Jarvik (1997) notes, “Thus, as conservatives had predicted, cutting the federal NEA subsidy coincided with increased private support for the arts and culture.”

This argument is laced with holes. How much funding is “more than enough?” Also, the numbers and percentages used to support this position were gathered over one year, while the NEA has existed for over thirty-five. The material only includes one budget decrease, which makes generalizations impossible. Furthermore, there is no assurance that funding increased because of a lack of government subsidies. Still, is the hope that the private sector will support the burden of NEA funding cuts enough to convince Republicans to withdraw support of the NEA?

The National Endowment for the Arts sponsors the artistic elite for the social elite.

Harvard University Political Scientist Edward C. Banfield (1984) writes that the “art public is now, as it has always been, overwhelmingly middle and upper middle class and above average in income—relatively prosperous people who would probably enjoy art about as much in the absence of subsidies.”

Considering the NEA is supported by taxes from low, middle and high-income taxpayers it stands to reason that they should all receive benefits from this agency. Some Republicans maintain that this phenomenon is not occurring. Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich issued this assessment of the Endowment,

If the people who come to lobby us who are famous and rich would dedicate only one percent of their gross income to an American endowment for the arts, they would fund a bigger system than the NEA. This is not about money. This is

about an elite group that wants the government to define what art is good, and it's explicitly wrong (Errico 1997).

Representative Dick Arme of Texas, Republican Majority Leader, addressed the issue of the NEA with these words:

The National Endowment for the Arts has always been bigger than life. What makes it so big? It is made big by the concerted, well-funded, well-motivated efforts of the arts elite in America who want the focus to be not whether or not there will be funding for the arts but whether or not they will be in control (Gary 1998)

Cynthia Koch (1999) crystallizes this debate with the following:

Elitist! Large cultural institutions, artists, and intellectuals—most of them located on the East Coast—had no right to use the tax dollars of working people across the nation to subsidize arts and scholarship that benefit only them. It is far more democratic to let the market decide which art should prosper. Besides, great artists will produce their masterpieces in spite of—perhaps because of—poverty. Look at Vincent Van Gogh, Mozart. Artists with NEA grants get lazy, too comfortable. If big museums and symphonies were producing what people really want, they wouldn't need subsidies.

This position on the issue of NEA funding does have its shortcomings. If Republicans see the NEA as a positive program that is catering its needs to the wrong people, why not reform the NEA instead of dissolving its existence? Furthermore, the data collected that supports this position must also be scrutinized. Who exactly is the artistic elite?

How do they always receive funds that are appropriated, in part, by a committee of Representatives that includes Republicans?

The NEA supports art programs and endeavors that do not deserve public respect much less public funding.

This argument reverberates greatest among members of Congress and a majority of the NEA's opponents. The argument is simple. The subsidies given to artists by the National Endowment for the Arts produce art that is distasteful and immoral.

The most controversial NEA funded art projects include Andres Serrano's photograph *Piss Christ* and Robert Mapplethorpe's *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*. *Piss Christ* is a 60" by 40" photograph of wood and a plastic crucifix submerged in a container of Serrano's urine. Senator Jesse Helms denounced the work by professing, "I do not know Mr. Andres Serrano, and I hope I never meet him. Because he is not an artist, he is a jerk...Let him be a jerk on his own time and with his own resources" (Bolton 1992). Mapplethorpe's piece included over 150 photographs of sexually explicit positions including gay relationships, children and sadomasochism.

Republican Senator Dan Coates of Indiana agrees with Helms's assessment of some of the art promoted by the NEA. On July 26, 1989 he stated the following: "I come to this debate with only one question: Do we in Congress have the right to take money from citizens, on penalty of imprisonment, and then

use it to offend their most deeply held religious and moral beliefs?" (Bolton 1992).

Republican Senator Jesse Helms put forth this quandary, also during the debate on July 26, 1989. Helms asks,

Frankly, Mr. President, I have fundamental questions about why the Federal Government is involved in supporting artists the taxpayers have refused to support in the marketplace. My concern in this regard is heightened when I hear the arts community and the media saying that any restriction at all on Federal funding would amount to censorship. What they seem to be saying is that we in Congress must chose between: First, absolutely no Federal presence in the arts; or second, granting artists the absolute freedom to use tax dollars as they wish, regardless of how vulgar, blasphemous, or despicable their works may be. If we indeed must make this choice, the Federal Government should get out of the arts (Bolton 1992).

The theory some members of Congress will not support the National Endowment for the Arts because of the projects it sponsors is well documented. Over the past twenty years the press, the public and politicians have scrutinized a number of artistic projects that used NEA funding. Why would a Republican seeking reelection want to support an agency that uses taxpayer money to promote art that fails to meet the most basic considerations of human decency? This is not just a Republican reaction, but also a common reaction by most moderately moral individuals.

The only weakness this theory encounters is the number of actual cases that can

be held as morally reprehensible and immoral that the National Endowment for the Arts has funded. The NEA has existed for over 35 years. If only a handful of cases like these exist the NEA has a pretty decent overall record.

Furthermore, this theory may not cause Republicans to defund the NEA, but to revamp the selection process of its subsidy winners.

Funding from the Government to the NEA destroys artist's integrity.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Beauty will not come at the call of the legislature...It will come, as always, unannounced, and spring up between the feet of brave and earnest men" (Emerson [1883], Jarvik 1997).

This final argument supporting why Republicans want to dissolve the NEA rests

on the assumption that artists begin to create "compromised art" that they know the government will fund. Rather than risk moving forward in an artist's unique direction, endowment subsidy seekers look to appease the government and draw government funds through their art. Columnist Jan Breslauer, a theatre critic wrote, "private grantees are required to conform to the NEA's specifications" and the "art world's version of affirmative action" has had "a profoundly corrosive effect on the American arts—pigeonholing artists and pressuring them to produce work that satisfies a politically correct agenda rather than their best creative instincts" (Jarvik 1997).

Cynthia Koch (1999) looks at the formation of the National Endowment for the Arts as an establishment issue. Koch concludes that opponents to the NEA entertain the resolve:

Should the United States, which has no history of royal patronage or an established church, be engaged in directly sponsoring arts and learning? At risk, opponents of arts funding argue, is the independence of expression. Should America have an official art? Should it commission scholarship? A body of work that has been approved and funded by government agency smacks of communism or fascism.

The separation of art and legislation that is sought by Republicans who promote this position are candid about their own ability to choose between who should receive subsidies and who should not. Thus, those who help distribute the NEA's funds are doing so with very limited knowledge of what art is "good" or "appropriate" to fund. Toffler was aware of this problem at the inception of the National Endowment for the Arts in the 1960s. Toffler wrote:

Recognizing the reality of the danger of political or bureaucratic interference in the process of artistic decision making, the principle should be established that the United States government will make absolutely no grants to independent arts institutions—directly or through the states—to underwrite operating expenses or the costs of artistic production. Proposals for a national arts foundation that would distribute funds to foster experiment, innovation...are on the wrong track. They ask the government to make decisions in a field in which it has vested political interests (Jarvik 1997)

Representative Jim Kolbe of Arizona outlines the internal struggles he has had choosing which artists should be given subsidies. On July 14, 2000 Kolbe wrote his thoughts concerning the NEA on his website in order for his constituents to understand his interpretation of the NEA's viability. In part, Kolbe (2000) wrote:

Every year, a heated and emotional debate erupts on the floor of the United States House of Representatives regarding federal funding for the arts. Members of the House engage in a discussion over whether the National Endowment of the Arts is funding art projects or works of questionable artistic value. But who is the ultimate authority? A community in Kansas may have one view on the proper expression of art, and this view may not necessarily coincide with the views of those living in New York City. This struggle is understandable, and inevitable. What constitutes art is a subject that has been debated for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

This argument is difficult to ascertain. On one hand, there appears to be a valid reason to not support government control over art—integrity of the artist. On the other hand, this position would promote the 'starving artist' for cultural gain. The issue is a personal one, and difficult to transcribe.

The following are reasons why Republican members of Congress support funding for the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Federal Government has an obligation to support United States culture.

Republican supporters of the National Endowment of the Arts see the program as a vital element in sustaining American culture. Proponents of the NEA believe they are helping form a National identity and write the following:

The U.S. government, like all countries, has an interest in fostering the nation's culture. It is in the interest of American taxpayers to protect accessibility and freedom of expression by supporting culture with their tax dollars. Otherwise the arts and learning becomes the province of the few. The wealthy elite and corporations will inevitable silence points of view in opposition to their interests if they are paying the bills. Moreover, without government support the arts cannot survive the American free enterprise system where media conglomerates aggressively market entertainment as 'art' to an insatiable popular audience (Koch 1999)

Arts funding is seen as a public good to Republicans who hold this theory. Their fears stem from the belief that a lack of federal funding would have a negative affect on our society. Elizabeth Pleshett (1998) parallels art to other intangible public goods by writing:

Art is a public good, and like other public goods the market will not and does not reflect the full scope of its benefits to society. The U.S. government chooses to subsidize goods like education, health, housing, and transportation and other services in an effort to protect them from the inadequacies of the free market or to gain the maximum good for the greatest number. Just as one cannot put a price tag on the external benefits of education, one cannot place a fair market value on

the exposure to art and the role it plays in a national cultural identity.

This argument exposes many of the detriments that could occur if the arts were not publicly funded. However, the Republican Party has a long history of wanting Federal Programs, such as the NEA, left as a matter of the states or civil society. Why should Republicans support art on a federal level? What is the national interest of federal art support that could not be sustained by the states or civil society? In the past decade especially, the Republican Party has sought to disassemble programs that were not constitutionally justifiable on the federal level. Yet, even with Republican control of the House and Senate the NEA still exists.

Federal support for the arts has a firm place in American history.

Although not explicitly written in the Constitution or ratified by the Congress, the forefathers of this country understood the importance of art and professed this fact in their personal writings and government actions.

President John Adams wrote, in a letter to his wife, Abigail, "I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study...mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, ...in order to give their children the right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain" (Pleshett 1998). The arts were seen as a sign the nation had progressed. The adage "each generation better than the last" resounded in the hearts and minds of our forefathers. The arts are

seen as the next possible, logical conclusion to the wars being fought to secure United States independence and freedom. Republicans who support this position recognize that the arts are a way to distinguish America in history. The federal government has a role to play in this endeavor, and that role is, in part, the National Endowment for the Arts.

Federal support for the Arts did not begin in 1965 with the creation of the NEA or in 1935 when President Roosevelt created the Work Progress Administration. The WPA included a section of Fine Arts. Proponents of the NEA point out the following:

The federal government has been in the business of advancing arts and education since the founding of the Library of Congress in 1800 and the Smithsonian Institution in 1846. Since the establishment of the two national endowments in 1965, America's cultural life and educational leadership have grown to an unprecedented degree (Koch 1999).

This argument is supported by some very tenuous sources. Personal letters of past United States Presidents may not be enough to persuade Republicans that the federal government historically supported arts formally. Furthermore, assimilating the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institute to today's NEA may be too great a leap for most Republicans. Many members of Congress do not doubt that art is important to develop a dynamic American history. Republicans must

doubt whether that place in history requires federal support.

The question remains: *Why do some Republicans in the United States Congress support funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and others do not?* The context of this question is illustrated in the ongoing debate concerning NEA funding every year. So, why is this question important to research?

First, the National Endowment for the Arts would definitely find the product of this research useful. If there are significant characteristics that Republican congresspersons that support funding for the NEA share the NEA could use this information to target probable supporters in the House of Representatives and the Senate. In addition, those seeking government subsidies for programs similar to the National Endowment for the Arts would find this research useful for similar reasons.

Secondly, this question involves many exciting and compelling interests that exist in the United States federal government. For example, what interest does it serve for some Republicans to support funding for the NEA, while others do not support funding. Are Republicans influenced by their constituents when voting on these programs, or is their vote a product of personal experience? Financial support of the NEA by Republicans is unique because of the circumstance aforementioned, but the base question that is being asked is thus: How do politicians make decisions? In other words, what influences congressional decision-making?

Literature Review.

The literature focusing on this particular research question is sparse. However, there is a great deal of literature available concerning congressional voting behavior. Also, there is literature about support for art programs. This literature review will focus on the germane scholarly sources on congressional voting behavior and art-support programs.

Congressional Voting Behavior

Members of congress vote according to the preferences of their constituents.

In the literature supporting this viewpoint, the votes cast by members of Congress directly reflect the attitudes and wants of the people the congressperson represents. In other words, “one thus predicts that the votes cast by representatives will be a function of the preferences of their constituents, not the representatives themselves” (Stratman 1992).

The reasons why members of Congress cast votes in this manner is multidimensional. The foremost reason for this system of voting is future re-election. The paramount goal of Representatives and Senators is the maintenance of their seat at election time. In races that are tightly contested, it is of no small wonder that members of congress are sensitive to how their votes in congress will be reflected in the November elections. Members of Congress who are not sensitive to voter preferences may find that “alienating even a small segment of their electoral coalition may cost them their seats” (Rieselbach 1995).

Thus, a constituency that supports funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) may influence their representative to vote accordingly. So, it is possible that a member of Congress would vote for NEA funding because doing so would help solidify votes in their next congressional election. Of course, that assumes the constituents consider NEA funding a decisive factor when they cast their votes.

Members of congress vote according to personal preference—ideology.

What if there were no consequences, electoral or otherwise, to affect how a member of Congress would vote? According to many researchers, the personal ideology of a congressperson could be the determining force in legislative outcomes.

Conditions for the occurrence of ideology as a driving force behind congressional voting often belong to “those holding safe seats where electoral competition seldom poses a severe threat” (Rieselbach 1995). In these cases, a legislator does not believe self-ideological voting, which may oppose their constituent ideology, will result in the loss of their congressional seat. Although it may be difficult to measure, “we (Jackson and Kingdon) are convinced it (ideology) is central to decision making and to policy outcomes” (Jackson and Kingdon 1992). Members of congress may support such programs as the NEA, because they feel compelled ideologically to do so. The formation of this ideology is personal and may

be the result of their collegiate education, personal experience, or family upbringing.

If this literature holds true, members of Congress who do not believe supporting the NEA would jeopardize their congressional seat, and find that supporting the NEA is consistent with their personal ideology, will vote to fund the NEA. For the purposes of this research project, the idea of congressional votes via ideology is intriguing. How congresspersons view the role of the NEA could personally be the result of some common characteristic of personal experience Congress members share. For example, the education level or personal income level could form ideology that is congruent with NEA support.

Members of Congress vote along party lines.

There is no doubt that being a member of a major political party helps a candidate win political office. A result of party affiliation is the support of the party platform and partly-line voting. Members of Congress who stray too far from the party line make it difficult for themselves to win the party primary or nomination in future elections. However, the percentage of party line voting between Democrats and Republicans has fluctuated over the past century (Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin 2000).

For many members of Congress, the “political party provides a central point of reference for many members” (Rieselbach 1995). In many cases, members of Congress choose to support the party line out of loyalty.

The only other prevailing reasons to not support a partisan vote are the sentiments of their constituents or their own ideology.

The case of voting along party lines concerning the National Endowment for the Arts among Republicans is unique. As a party, the Republicans have been emphatic about disassembling the NEA. Yet, numerous Republicans have voted to support NEA funding. Here lies a great quandary.

Members of Congress may trade votes.

Vote trading (logrolling) is an important behavior to understand in determining how congresspersons vote. There are issues in the Congress that do not directly affect the constituents of some members of Congress. Votes on these issues are sometimes “traded” amongst Congress members. The reason is that “he (congress member) may have traded away his vote on this particular issue for votes on some other issue of more concern to his constituents” (Stratman 1992).

The use of logrolling in respect to support of the NEA can be substantial. For members of Congress, the issue of NEA support may be miniscule enough that they are willing to trade their votes away in return for support on another issue. The converse could also be true. Mainly, the issue of NEA support is so vitally important to a congressperson that they are seeking support from those who owe them votes.

Financial Art Support

Federal Government support for the arts.

In a number of countries, funding for the arts is sustained at the federal level. According to Rich (1993), in many countries “the arts form a part of national identity and key foundations for building a sense of the collective whole and claiming a place at the world table.” The government, in order to protect and promote the national culture, supports a large portion of the arts.

The promotion of the arts by countries is also seen as an investment in the country itself. For many countries, the development of the arts leads to increased tourism and increased foreign investment (Rich 1993). Therefore, art support can still create capital gains. However, the arts are foremost a provider of cultural heritage.

The significant difference between European and Latin American countries’ concept of art funding and that of the United States is the function of money. In the United States, the idea is that art support should be left to the private sector. The market will then decide what art should be funded. The idea of maintaining a cultural identity through art funding is superceded by capitalist ideals.

The United States federal government has made an effort in the last century to support art programs. The Works Program Administration in the 1930s was the first major endeavor taken by the government to subsidize art projects. Yet, the Federal Government “envisioned the program to be primarily one of economic relief with secondary emphasis on

artistic competence and achievement” (Mulcahy and Wyszomirski 1995).

In 1965, the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts was passed as an act of Congress and signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Federal Government supported this program in order to provide grants for those striving to achieve artistic excellence through not-for-profit organizations.

This literature focuses on the role the government has on art funding. Many countries have conflicting views on how large a subsidy should be directed toward the arts. Unlike the research topic proposed in this paper, this literature does not focus on political parties and how they vote within the federal government to fund art. However, observations why the federal government supports art programs, or does not support art programs, are important. The findings of this section of the literature help other researchers understand the pros and cons of government funding.

Private individual support for the arts.

There is little doubt that private donors are a major source of funding for the arts. Billions of dollars are donated to arts and cultural organizations in the United States every year. This individual support is the sustaining source of many art organizations across the United States.

The reason for such a large amount of donations is the belief “virtually all major donors have a substantial interest in the life and mission of the organization(s) they support”

(Hopkins and Friedman 1997). Furthermore, some support the arts because it appears fashionable. Others have friends and acquaintances involved with the arts, and show their support with monetary donations.

Private donors' support for the arts is crucial for the maintenance of not-for-profit art organizations. There is no data determining whether the majority of these donors are Republican or Democrat. However, there may be a link between private donations and government subsidies for art organizations. Some private donors see government support of art organizations as a "seal of approval" (Pleshette 1998). In other words, private donors trust their money is going to an art project if the government supports the project.

Art is funded by the service it provides to the public.

Every ticket purchased to see theatre, opera, or other art events are considered public consumption of the arts. Art is considered an economic activity where there is a supply and a demand for its production. To many, "performing arts can be seen as luxury items" (Throsby 1994) that are reserved for the upper echelon of social class and economic status. Guest lists for performances and high-ticket prices for productions are difficult for many members of society to overcome. Furthermore, the public's willingness to attend art events "is linked with education" (Throsby 1994). Higher educated consumers are more likely to attend art

events. However, it is no surprise that the higher educated also have larger incomes.

This literature suggests that art has been self-sufficient and remains independent of donations and subsidies in some areas. The literature in this section is vitally important when considering how members of Congress will vote on art funding. If art can support itself, why should the government interfere? Where this literature may lack is its consideration of what type of "art" is being produced, and what are the cultural benefits of its production. An answer to this inquiry could influence congressional voting behavior.

Hypothesis.

I hypothesize that Republican members of Congress vote for or against funding for the National Endowment for the Arts as a reflection of their constituency characteristics. More specifically, the outcome of a congressional vote is determined by three constituent characteristics: median household income; percent of constituency that is urban; and percent of constituency that is college educated.

I focus on these three independent variables because they are closely related to the elements involved in passing legislation to fund a federal agency like the National Endowment for the Arts. The first independent variable, median household income, focuses on the monetary issues of a constituency and is comparable across district and state lines. I believe the financial standing of each constituency will determine how their

Representative or Senator will vote on the NEA. The second independent variable, percent of constituency that is urban, is important because it focuses on where most of the National Endowment for the Arts subsidies are allocated. Most of the award recipients are from major cities and most of the art projects are performed in urban areas. Finally, the third independent variable, percent of the constituency college educated, also focuses on award recipients of the NEA—usually college graduates. The variable also illustrates the percent of the population that actually enjoys and participates in art.

My hypothesis is as follows:

Republican members of Congress are more likely to vote Yes to support funding of the National Endowment for the Arts the higher the median household income of their constituency; the higher the percentage of the constituency that lives in urban areas; and the higher the percentage of their constituency that is college educated.

First, Republicans who represent constituents with high median household incomes are more likely to support funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. The reason for this prediction is relatively simple to understand. The Representative or Senator believes that their constituents can afford to support a program such as the NEA. The cost in taxes on the constituency is outweighed by the benefits of the National Endowment for the Arts program. Similarly, it is easy to comprehend the justification for Republicans who represent

constituents with low median household incomes voting against funding for the NEA. The people they represent cannot afford to support a “luxury” item such as the NEA, and to burden them with taxes, no matter how minute, is unjustifiable. Therefore, it is expected that Republicans from constituencies with high median household incomes will vote to support the NEA. Conversely, Republicans representing constituencies with lower median household incomes will vote against funding the NEA.

Second, Republicans representing a constituency with a high percentage of the population living in urban areas are more likely to support the NEA. Considering most artistic events are held in cities, it is assumed that areas with greater urban population will support these events. Funding of the NEA will bring artistic projects and performances to urban centers, creating the payoff of enjoyment of art projects sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts. Likewise, areas that are mostly rural will not support the NEA because they do not enjoy the benefits of NEA funding. The Representative or Senator has no reason to support a program that the constituents will not be able to attend. Consequently, it is expected that Republicans representing a higher urban population will vote to support funding for the NEA, and Republicans from mostly rural areas will vote against funding the NEA.

Finally, Republicans representing a constituency with a high percentage of the population that are college educated are more

likely to support funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. The reason for this support could be college educated people have been exposed to the arts to a greater extent than less educated individuals. This exposure can likely lead to a greater appreciation for the arts and spark art funding. In addition, higher educated people tend to understand art to a greater degree either because of college art courses or associations with collegiate peers who were involved in art. Conversely, Republicans representing a constituency that has a low percentage of college graduates will not support funding for the NEA. It is expected that the value of artistic events is not appreciated, and money spent to support programs such as these are wasteful. Hence, Republicans representing college educated people will vote to fund the NEA, and Republicans representing people without a college education will not vote to fund the NEA.

Method and Analysis.

In order to test my hypothesis, I gathered data that sufficiently characterized the constituencies of Republican Representatives and Republican Senators in the United States Congress. The three independent variables include the median household income; the percent of the urban population; and the percent of the population that has graduated from college. The dependent variable is the vote, 'YES' or 'NO', to fund the National Endowment for the Arts.

The data for these three independent variables were gathered from the *Almanac of American Politics, 1998* by Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa. This national journal contained each Representative and Senator in the 1998 United States Congress and also included the following: a short biography of each congressperson; a biography of the district or state each congressperson represented; the political affiliation of each Congress member; and a break-down of the people represented in terms of population and ethnicity; percent of married couples; percent college educated; median household income; per capita income; median gross rent; and median house value. For the purposes of this research project only Republicans were included. Furthermore, only the median household income; percent of the population that is urban; and the percent of population that is college educated is used.

The dependent variable data, a 'YES' or 'NO' vote for NEA funding, for the House of Representatives, 105th Congress, was gathered from the Library of Congress information server. Roll Call vote #312 on July 21, 1998 posted the results of the House of Representatives vote¹. By a vote of 253 to 173, with 58 Republicans voting 'YES', the legislation passed the House of Representatives and appropriated \$98 million for fiscal year 1999 to the National Endowment for the Arts.

¹ The data is located at the website <http://143.231.93/cgi-bin/vote.exe?year=1998&rollnumber=312>.

The dependent variable, a 'YES' or 'NO' vote for NEA funding, for the Senate was gathered from the Conservative Caucus information server². Roll Call vote #241 on September 17, 1997 posed an amendment to cut NEA funding completely. A total of 32 Republican Senators of the 105th Congress voted against the Amendment No. 1188, and supported the House of Representatives to make plans to fund the National Endowment for the Arts for fiscal year 1999.

T-tests were incorporated as the best method of analysis for this particular project. The T-test provides information on whether the mean value of an independent ratio variable differs significantly from the value of the dependent nominal variable. For example, does the median household income mean differentiate significantly when compared to how a Representative or Senator voted on funding for the NEA?

Table 1 shows the results of the T-tests. Six separate T-tests were performed on the data set. The table separates the House of Representatives results and Senate results. The independent variables are presented in the first column. The means of each independent variable are beneath the YES VOTE and NO VOTE columns, and the significance levels for the House of Representatives and the Senate are provided in the T/<p columns (T-Value and

percent chance the relationship could exist if the null hypothesis were true).

According to the analysis of the data, four of the six tests conducted produced significant results. These significant results indicate that the difference in the median independent ratios and the dichotomous nominal dependent variable did not happen by chance. The dependent variable, voting 'YES' or 'No' to support NEA funding, can be explained by an actual difference between the independent variables values. The key indicator that the significance level is high enough to reject the null hypothesis is the T-value. A T-value greater than +/-1.96 indicates that the difference in the means occur less than 5% of the time.

All of the T-values for the House of Representatives are greater than +/-1.96. The House of Representatives has the two highest T-values: median household income has a T-value of 3.622, and the House's percent of urban constituency has a T-value of 2.791. The House also has the fourth highest T-value represented by the percent of the constituency college educated at 2.28. The only significant T-value for the Senate was median household income at 2.744.

With my hypothesis, I correctly predicted how members of the House of Representatives would vote given the independent variable. Representatives from a constituency with a higher median household income mean supported funding for the NEA. As the results show in Table 1, the

² The address for this data is located at <http://www.conservativeusa.org/vote-rec97.htm>.

constituencies of Representatives voting ‘YES’ to fund the NEA has a mean median household income of \$35,457 versus \$30,335 for those Representatives who voted against NEA funding.

Representatives from areas with higher urban populations percentage means were more likely to support funding for the NEA, as predicted in my hypothesis. The results show the mean urban population percentage for Representatives who voted ‘YES’ to support NEA funding at 76.118%. Republican Representatives voting against NEA funding were from a constituencies with a mean urban population percentage of 67.667%.

In my hypothesis, I also predicted the Representatives from a constituency with a higher percentage of the population college educated would vote ‘YES’ to support NEA funding, and the t-test results support this hypothesis. Representatives voting to support NEA funding represented a mean percent of 48.847% population that is college educated versus 45.346% mean represented by those voting against funding the National Endowment for the Arts.

The hypothesis I presented successfully predicts how Senators would vote, but the numbers are not all significant. According to the data results, only the independent variable, median household income, can reject the null hypothesis. The mean median household income for Senators voting ‘YES’ to support NEA funding is \$29,298; the mean median for

Senators voting ‘NO’ to support NEA funding is \$26,333. The difference of \$2,965 supported a T-value of 2.774 and a 99.2% probability this data was not by chance.

The independent variables—percent of urban constituency and percent of constituency college educated—produced results that were predicted in my hypothesis. The mean percentages of both were higher under the YES VOTE column than the NO VOTE column, as predicted in my hypothesis. However, the differences between the means were not great enough to support a significance level higher than 95%. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

After analyzing the data it is clear my hypothesis was successful in determining the characteristics of a constituency with a Representative or Senator who vote ‘YES’ to support funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. It has been established that four of the six T-tests produced significant differences between the means of the independent variables—keeping in mind the other two T-tests still coincided with the hypothesis.

Conclusion.

This project highlights some important aspects of congressional decision-making. The research results indicate that the characteristics of a constituency will influence the votes of Representatives and Senators in Congress. On average, in districts or states with low income levels the Representative or Senator did not vote to fund the National Endowment for the Arts.

This finding leads me to believe that legislators from poorer areas believed their constituents could not afford to support a program like the NEA—focusing on the tight budget constraints of the people they represent

Similarly, Representatives and Senators from areas with a smaller urban population did not support the NEA on average. The benefits of the program would not reach their constituents, and to spend their taxpayers' money on this program did not seem justified if the people they represented could not enjoy the benefits of the program.

Likewise, Representatives and Senators from areas with lower percentages of college educated constituents did not support the National Endowment for the Arts on average. The reason for this is most likely the fact the people they represented could not enjoy the programs intellectually or compete for National Endowment monies.

The findings presented here have established legislators as responsive caretakers of the people they represent. If their constituents can afford and enjoy the National Endowment for the Arts—support it. If the people they represent cannot afford or enjoy the National Endowment for the Arts—eliminate NEA funding. In part, this project has demonstrated that elected members of Congress are responsive to the needs and characteristics of the people they represent.

In the future, researchers should use this research as a starting point in order to determine

Representatives and Senators in the United States Congress voting behavior on federally funded agencies. As exemplified by this project, it is important to gather information about constituents that apply to the legislation in question. In this project the characteristics of income, urban population and education were important. Other projects may focus on district or state characteristics of ethnicity, marriages or geographical location. Whatever the case, it is vital that future studies focus on germane constituency characteristics in order to predict legislation. Overall, it is important to realize and understand that the characteristics of a constituency will influence congressional voting decisions.

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