

## Elections 2008: Presidential Elections and Congressional Changes

Assembly 2008  
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### Presidential Candidates' Records and Platforms

An examination of the policy platforms of the presidential candidates of the two major political parties can offer some indication of the extent of their support for and interest in federal arts policy.

Among the issues presented on the campaign website of Republican candidate **John McCain**, there has been no mention of the arts, or federal arts organizations like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), or arts education (even in the education section). \*

The campaign website for Democratic candidate **Barack Obama** includes a six-point "Platform in Support of the Arts," addressing the following:

1. Arts education:
  - Increase resources for the U.S. Department of Education's Arts Education Model Development and Dissemination Grants to develop and expand partnerships between schools and arts organizations, including engaging support from the foundation and corporate community. Grants from this program have gone to the Mississippi Arts Commission and the Tennessee Arts Commission.
  - Artist Corps: Create a corps of young artists to work in low-income schools and communities, recognizing the value of linking the arts across the curriculum for students in schools lacking these programs.
  - Champion arts education: Use the bully pulpit of the White House to promote the importance of the arts and arts education.
2. NEA: Increase funding for the NEA, "support of which enriches schools and neighborhoods . . . and helps to promote the economic development of countless communities."
3. Cultural diplomacy: With resources for cultural diplomacy at their lowest level in a decade, reverse this trend and expand cultural and arts exchanges throughout the world.
4. Attract foreign talent: Streamline the visa process to return America to its place as "the world's top destination for artists and arts students."
5. Health care for artists: Health plan includes creation of a new public program to allow individuals and small businesses to buy affordable health care; create

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\* Since the NASAA meeting in Chattanooga, the McCain campaign issued the following statement on October 3 addressing arts education:

"John McCain believes that arts education can play a vital role fostering creativity and expression. He is a strong believer in empowering local school districts to establish priorities based on the needs of local schools and school districts. Schools receiving federal funds for education must be held accountable for providing a quality education in basic subjects critical to ensuring students are prepared to compete and succeed in the global economy. Where these local priorities allow, he believes investing in arts education can play a role in nurturing the creativity of expression so vital to the health of our cultural life and providing a means of creative expression for young people."

- a National Health Insurance Exchange allowing enrollment in participating private plans with comprehensive benefits, charging "fair and stable premiums"; for those unable to afford coverage, government subsidy would be available.
6. Tax fairness for artists: Support for the Artist-Museum Partnership Act allowing artists a deduction for the full fair market value for the charitable donation of their works.

Since 2000, there have been no Senate floor votes on arts-related issues. Therefore, there is no voting record for Sen. Obama.

Sen. McCain has served longer in the Senate; his voting record going back to the late 1980s and through the 1990s has consistently supported failed proposals to cut or eliminate NEA funding.

### **Congressional Changes**

Currently the Democrats hold 236 seats in the House of Representatives; Republicans hold 199. Looking at the number of House members retiring, the Republicans, with 29 retirees, leave far more seats open to be contested. Only 8 Democrats have announced plans to retire from the House at the end of the 2008 term. **Significant among the group of Republicans retiring from Congress, almost half are moderates who consistently vote in support of increasing funding to the NEA.** Five of those supportive Republican legislators are members of the Appropriations Committee. The absence of those moderate Republican voices in key positions in Congress would be a loss. Among the retiring Democrats, three are running for the U.S. Senate: Tom Udall for an open seat in New Mexico, Mark Udall (his cousin) for an open seat in Colorado, and Tom Allen challenging Sen. Susan Collins in Maine.

In the Senate, the parties are split evenly with 49 seats each; 2 independents caucus with the Democrats. Five Republicans, and no Democrats, are retiring. **Of those who will be leaving the Senate, three have been dependable, vocal supporters of the NEA:** Sens. John Warner (VA), Pete Domenici (NM) and Larry Craig (ID). The other two retirees have posted negative voting records on arts funding: Sens. Wayne Allard (CO) and Chuck Hagel (NE).