

A False Economy: Arts Vetoed in Kansas

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Today more than ever, states that want to be competitive need a policy agenda that supports and nurtures the creativity and economic productivity of their citizens. With his veto of funding for the Kansas Arts Commission, Governor Sam Brownback has now declared his opinion that Kansas is too poor for that. The real poverty expressed in this action is not of the pocketbook; state arts agencies yield excellent return on investment in jobs and tax revenues.

Proponents of government efficiency should be deeply disturbed by Governor Brownback's decision. Elected officials are obligated to ask, "What are the citizens of my state getting in return for this investment of public dollars?" The answer in Kansas is "Plenty." The Kansas Arts Commission:

- fostered an arts and cultural sector supporting more than 4,000 jobs and generating more than \$15 million annually in state and local government revenues;
- brought home \$5.9 million in federal dollars to support arts activities for all Kansans over the past 10 years;
- engaged 300,000 students in arts education programs in and out of school last year;
- provided important social and creative outlets for seniors, persons with disabilities, children and underserved populations.

A \$689,000 appropriation to the Kansas Arts Commission would have comprised 0.005% of the total state budget, one half of 1/100 of one percent. Governor Brownback's veto won't make even a modest dent in the state's budget gap. It will, however, diminish the state's ability to leverage public and private investment, compete in the creative sector, improve education, and make Kansas a more rewarding place to live, work, visit and raise a family.

Rather than achieving any savings, this veto creates a net loss. Without the Kansas Arts Commission, the state's eligibility to secure its designated share of National Endowment for the Arts funds is in jeopardy. Those dollars can be allocated elsewhere, leaving Kansas taxpayers to pay for the arts *in other states*. Also lost through this veto is the state's power to leverage private and public investment. Last year the Kansas Arts Commission awarded \$1.4 million in grants, which was matched by \$60.7 million in local and private dollars.

Kansas taxpayers want the kinds of communities that the arts create. Thoughtful decision makers see the arts as creative skills, as jobs, as industries—not as a frill. This is why Kansas citizens spoke out against the governor's initial attempts to dismantle the Kansas Arts Commission, and why the legislature recommended funding for the agency. The veto of the entire Kansas Arts Commission budget was selective in its focus and extreme in its magnitude. Other states—wisely—are maintaining a public investment in the arts. The Kansas Arts Commission's 45-year legacy of service to families and communities—a legacy which received support from Republican and Democratic governors alike—may now be denied to future generations.

The citizens of Kansas deserve better.

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