

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

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President's Report October 13, 2017 Portland, Oregon

Gary Gibbs: Welcome to our closing session. When we built the agenda for this year's Leadership Institute, our goal was to step away from our daily demands and have candid conversations about the arts, politics and the future of our field. I believe we've achieved that. The conversations have been substantive, and the camaraderie has been inspiring—part policy summit and part family reunion! I'm heading back to my own state with some new ideas in my pocket and a sense of optimism about our field. I hope you are, too. Portland has been a great place for us to convene. We're deeply grateful to the Oregon Arts Commission for their hospitality.

Our final docket of business begins with the annual President's Report. I'm proud of what NASAA achieved this year, especially given all of the trials that we faced. Your business packets included a [full report of our accomplishments](#), so I'm not going to recount them. Instead, I'd like to use this time—which will be my last address to you as your board president—to call forth some things that make NASAA special to me, and to all state arts agencies.

NASAA's approach to advocacy certainly rises to the top. Federal funding for the arts was in serious peril this year, and NASAA came through in a clutch. Securing a \$2 million increase in NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] funding for 2017 was a big achievement. Work on the 2018 budget continues, but we've made good headway so far, getting a \$145 million recommendation out of the House. That's notable in a climate where other federal agencies are receiving exponential cuts or are slated for outright elimination.

What's distinctive about NASAA's advocacy—and why I think we've had so much success—is our **pan-partisan ethic**. Whether you serve in a red state, a blue state, or a place of some other political hue, you can always trust NASAA to represent you well in D.C. and to rise above the political fray and use good judgement in protecting your interests. Being bipartisan is smart politics, of course. But more than that, it reflects NASAA's higher vision that the arts are a place where people *come together* and make life better for all American communities.

In addition to trusting NASAA's political acumen, we also can trust NASAA's **knowledge base**. In this era of info overload and fake news, NASAA distinguishes itself by being a balanced, accurate and credible source. Whether you're looking for economic data, budget forecasts, model legislation or best practices, NASAA has you covered. NASAA also is a source for **deeper insights that reach beyond mere numbers**. Several of our agencies, my own included, were hit by catastrophic events this year. NASAA was right by our side, providing wise counsel, moral support and technical assistance and serving as our lighthouse. NASAA helps state arts agencies tackle other tough issues, too—like funding equity, controversial artworks and coping with legislative crises. No other organization has our back like NASAA does.

None of this would be possible without **outstanding leadership**. Signing Pam Breaux's letter of hire as our CEO in 2015 was one of my happiest moments as NASAA's president! She's got the perfect blend of finesse and ferocity to get the job done. She's also widening our circle of allies: From the NEA, the White House and the National Governors Association to The Mellon Foundation and Ovation TV, we're building stronger policy partnerships to benefit state arts agencies.

NASAA also is blessed with an exceptionally dedicated and talented **staff team**. They're on call year-round, answering our questions, promoting our work, and serving as the glue that holds our community together. Pam, and the entire NASAA staff, thank you.

State arts agencies appreciate NASAA so much because our work back home is so hard. Budget battles and the day-to-day grind of state bureaucracy can wear a body down. But being part of NASAA gives us strength, galvanizes our resolve and calls forth our higher purpose. NASAA reminds us that **state arts agencies are so much more than the sum of our appropriations**. We're government's better angels. We make sure that nobody is left behind, and that every community can realize its fullest civic and creative potential. As Abraham Lincoln said, we "swell the chorus of our Union."

I'm very proud to be part of this field and what we stand for. I'm deeply grateful to have the work of my own agency empowered and elevated by NASAA. And it has been my true privilege to serve as your president.

Before I pass the gavel, I want to praise the entire NASAA board for its hard work, its courage and its foresight. Next year is NASAA's 50th anniversary, but we're feeling decidedly young at heart, with our [new plan](#), new resources, new partners and a fresh sense of momentum. Thanks to the board for leading the charge—and stay tuned for more good things to come!

With that, I'll now pass the torch to Benjamin Brown, your new board chair.