

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HONORING THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

HON. RAY LAHOOD

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Mr. LAHOOD. Madam Speaker, during the last several years, I have had the honor and pleasure to work with the National Endowment for the Arts. I have been impressed with their energy, passion, and integrity in connection with their pursuit to bring arts excellence to America. I would like to discuss a few of the programs which have been so important to our communities and which were brought to us by the National Endowment for the Arts.

I'll start with Shakespeare in American Communities. Since its inception in 2003, the program has brought live, high quality Shakespeare performances to more than 2,000 communities in all 50 states. Sixty-five professional theater companies have participated in the largest tour of Shakespearean theater in American history. They have reached audiences of 1 million—focusing on high school students—and have distributed 55,000 sets of exemplary educational materials—free to any teacher.

Poetry Out Loud is a national poetry recitation contest for high school students that was conducted in partnership with all 50 State arts agencies; 150,000 students were engaged in learning and reciting poetry and \$50,000 was awarded annually in scholarship funds to winning students.

The NEA Jazz Masters program has expanded exponentially under the leadership of Chairman Dana Gioia. Designed to honor the best and most innovative jazz musicians and advocates, the Jazz Masters award has become the nation's highest honor in jazz. An NEA Jazz Masters on Tour commenced, and a curriculum was developed for high school teachers—NEA Jazz in the Schools—celebrating the story of jazz in a classroom-friendly format for music, civics, social studies, and U.S. history classes. The agency has produced a special commemorative recording of the music of 27 Jazz Masters, developed with National Public Radio a series of documentaries profiling honorees, and launched on public television the "Legends of Jazz" program—a series of conversations with Jazz Masters.

Through the American Masterpieces initiative, the Endowment has given grants to organizations to bring the best of our cultural and artistic legacy to Americans. Through this program they have supported the disciplines of visual arts, dance, musical theater, presenting choral music, and chamber music. State arts councils have shared in this program by supporting their indigenous master artists and art forms.

One program which we should be very proud of is the Big Read. Through this program—the largest project ever undertaken by the National Endowment for the Arts—the En-

dowment has given grants and educational materials to 533 communities to conduct community-wide reading programs centered around a great work of fiction chosen by the community. By reaching 96 percent of the country with Big Read events and activities, 2 million attendees have been introduced to great American literature.

Through its tireless effort, the National Endowment for the Arts has solidified its relationship with Congress and the American public. I would like to recognize all of the employees at the agency for their excellent work and commitment to the arts. In particular, I would like to commend the outstanding and tireless work performed by Chairman Dana Gioia and Senior Deputy Chairman Eileen Mason. Their leadership and enthusiasm and substantive work resulted in a renaissance era at the National Endowment for the Arts. I congratulate them for a job well done.

HONORING FRESNO BUSINESS COUNCIL

HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Mr. RADANOVICH. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Fresno Business Council upon the celebration of their 15th anniversary. A celebration dinner will be held on Wednesday November 12, 2008 to honor this milestone.

In the early 1990s, the Greater Fresno area experienced a dramatic increase in crime rates and a severe economic downturn. As a result of the regional crisis, the morale of the entire community suffered tremendously. In response, a small group of business leaders formed an organization to address the critical issues that afflicted the region. In its beginning stages, the Fresno Business Council developed subject matter committees to address various issues such as job growth, crime and education. These specific committees were designed to obtain the research necessary to develop comprehensive action plans. A civic infrastructure was built and a network of partnerships, that crossed boundaries, was developed in support of transformational change. One of the first projects of the Fresno Business Council was the establishment of the Central Valley Business Incubator. This project, a partnership between California State University, Fresno and the Fresno Business Council, has created over one thousand jobs to date.

In 2000 "The Economic Future of the San Joaquin Valley" was issued. This report offered the Central Valley two choices; maintain the status quo by continuing the low cost path or shift to an added value economy and increase the prosperity and quality of life for everyone in the community. Following the recommendations of the report, a group of people came together to develop a plan, this estab-

lished the Collaborative Regional Initiative, CRI. CRI was a joint venture between California State University, Fresno and the Fresno Business Council. There were 5 initiatives that came out of this; insuring a state of the art technology infrastructure, increasing the number of knowledgeable workers, improving the quality of life through land use and transportation decisions, achieving high quality performance in the human services and education systems and the creation of an innovative culture. An essential element of the CRI was a commitment to a new contract for civic behavior; this contract became the "Community Values of the Fresno Region". In the end, CRI launched 26 projects that are completed, still in an implementation stage or have been absorbed by other organizations.

Fresno City Mayor Alan Autry asked his economic advisors to evaluate the city budget. They found that if more jobs were not created law enforcement would eventually consume the entire general fund. From this evaluation, the Regional Job Initiative, RJI, was launched in 2004. The RJI set a goal of 30,000 net new jobs in just 5 years. Those involved with RJI quickly realized that they would have to have strong education institutions and effective workforce preparation organizations to achieve sustainable success. Together with the networks created by CRI, the Fresno Business Council and representatives from other organizations they developed the "Choosing our Future Report", a plan to address critical issues inside Fresno Unified School District and the surrounding neighborhoods. The implementation of this plan began in 2005 and those involved have pledged at least a 3 year commitment.

The Fresno Business Council has been an essential organization of constant adaptation and with its members picking up many of the operation functions. It has proven to be a catalyst for transformational change, a merger of formerly disconnected organizations and a steward leader willing to take responsibility for helping to solve critical and systematic problems.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to commend and congratulate the Fresno Business Council on 15 years as an outstanding organization. I invite my colleagues to join me in wishing the Fresno Business Council many years of continued success.

HONORING MG RON DARDIS

HON. BRUCE L. BRALEY

OF IOWA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Adjutant General of the Iowa National Guard, MG Ron Dardis, and to express gratitude for his many years of extraordinary service and leadership. General Dardis is retiring after almost 43 years of service with the Iowa National Guard. He enlisted

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