



**Sept. 16, 2010**

## ***Funding for the Arts***

### ***Where do Connecticut's Congressional Candidates stand?***

***We are pleased to provide you with responses from the two congressional candidates for the upcoming November 2010 election. The questions submitted pertained to national arts issues and their views on regional arts.***

#### ***To find out more contact:***

Congressman Jim Himes

[www.himesforcongress.com](http://www.himesforcongress.com)

and

State Senator Dan Debicella,

[www.debicella.com](http://www.debicella.com)

**We asked Congressman Jim Himes and State Senator Dan Debicella to answer questions related to the arts. Here are their responses:**

#### **Congressman Himes:**

**1. What is your personal background and experience in the arts?**

I have always been a lover of music, painting, sculpture and theater. My parents believed that an educated individual understands not just mathematics, science, history and language, but the art that humans have used for millennia to express feelings and passions and to try to address the underlying questions of meaning that are inaccessible to science and logic. I was trained in piano for six years (until it became clear that I had little native talent as a musician). Some of my most intense memories include being transfixed by Rodin's *Fallen Caryatid* at the Musee Rodin, hearing Wagner at the Vienna Opera House, and watching *The Nutcracker* performed at Lincoln Center. My wife and I have been occasionally involved with Independent Curators International and have sought to emphasize the arts with our daughters, both of whom have learned to play musical instruments.

**2. What arts activities have you attended, participated in or supported in the last year?**

I am a member of the Congressional Arts Caucus. As a Congressman, I have had the opportunity to see opera at the Kennedy Center, to spend time in the National Gallery and the Corcoran, and to see musicians perform in venues like the Library of Congress, the

Capitol and the White House. I have participated for two years in a contest which encourages local students to submit works of art to their Congressional office. The winners' art hangs in the Capitol. My family supports Backcountry Jazz, a program that brings world class jazz musicians to Fairfield County's inner city children. Mary and I take our children to the theater in New York from time to time and we have supported Shakespeare on the Sound. Mary was a member of the Board of the Greenwich Arts Center, which worked to convert a historic Greenwich downtown building into a center for the arts.

**3. Do you support a significant funding increase for the National Endowment for the Arts, so that arts organizations in your district can present more high quality arts programs for all of its citizens?**

*(Background: The budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was cut in half during the 1990's. With its current funding of \$167.5 million, the NEA spends just 54 cents per American—about the cost of a pack of gum.)*

Given the cuts that have already been borne by the NEA, and the importance of art as palpable evidence of what we as a people value, I would support careful increases in funding for the NEA. I will defend and have defended the NEA from "cultural warfare" attacks designed to gut the notion of public funding for the arts. While we face extraordinarily difficult fiscal decisions, I believe that the relative expenditures we make on the arts compared to industrial and agricultural subsidies, wasteful defense programs, etc. do not speak well of us.

**4. Would you strengthen arts education and research through the ESEA reauthorization process?**

*(Background: The Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core academic subject, allowing school districts to use federal funding for arts education instruction. However, implementation of ESEA—also referred to as the "No Child Left Behind Act", has dramatically reduced the time spent teaching the arts around the country and increased the need for federal-level research measuring the status and condition of the arts.)*

Yes, as I said above, a person is not educated in any compelling sense unless he or she has been exposed to art of all kinds. In fact, I signed a letter to Congressman David Obey, chairman of the appropriations committee, on March 19, 2010 requesting strengthening the arts through the ESEA reauthorization process.

**5. Would you support expansion of the "Arts Education" grants program that allows for model programs to be replicated?**

*(Background: Since 2001, the Department of Education, (USDE) has administered a small—funded at \$40 million in FY10, "Arts Education" program that awards model grants to school districts to conduct arts integration and improve instruction. USDE has now made over 170 of these competitive grant awards around the country.)*

Yes.

**6. Do you support bipartisan legislation to correct the inequity of tax credits between collectors and artists to ensure that museums, libraries, and other cultural organizations receive donations?**

*(Background: Currently, art collectors can claim a fair market value tax deduction for works that they donate to cultural organizations, but artists can claim only the cost of the materials when they donate work that they have created.)*

I believe that any philanthropic contribution should be valued at fair market value for tax purposes.

**7. What are your views regarding the critical role of arts and culture in Fairfield County.**

I have always believed that an area with the levels of education and affluence of Fairfield County should have more artistic and cultural institutions than it does. While the county does have some treasures: the Bruce Museum, Westport Playhouse, Shakespeare on the Sound, the Aldrich and some world-class private art collections, we should do better.

Mary and I were very active supporters of the Greenwich Arts Center, which would have put a state-of-the-art center for theater, art and music into downtown Greenwich.

Unfortunately, this project has been temporarily (I hope!) set aside. Our many parks should have more sculpture, our many fine restaurants more live music and our libraries more programs to inspire children, delight seniors, and remind the rest of us that life is most richly lived and thought best provoked in the presence of art.

**State Senator Dan Debicella:**

**1. What is your personal background and experience in the arts?**

I was fortunate to have been deeply involved in the performing arts during my high school years and after. I appeared in productions of West Side Story, Meet me in St. Louis, and Guys and Dolls, among many others. It was a tremendous experience both artistically and socially as I made many lasting friendships with individuals who share my enthusiasm for the stage.

**2. What arts activities have you attended, participated in or supported in the last year?**

My wife, Alexandra, and I enjoy museums of art and in the last year have visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Guggenheim. Historically, we have made it a point to visit Europe and its wonderful history of art but the campaign trail has slowed us down a touch, so in the last year we have not been able to make the trip.

**3. Do you support a significant funding increase for the National Endowment for the Arts, so that arts organizations in your district can present more high quality arts programs for all of its citizens?**

*(Background: The budget of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was cut in half during the 1990's. With its current funding of \$167.5 million, the NEA spends just 54 cents per American—about the cost of a pack of gum.)*

The NEA is very important to the cultural growth of America, but I think we all need to face the reality that funding for the arts is in jeopardy in the midst of the severe deficit our nation faces.

**4. Would you strengthen arts education and research through the ESEA reauthorization process?**

*(Background: The Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) defines the arts as a core academic subject, allowing school districts to use federal funding for arts education instruction. However, implementation of ESEA—also referred to as the “No Child Left Behind Act”, has dramatically reduced the time spent teaching the arts around the country and increased the need for federal-level research measuring the status and condition of the arts.)*

I am opposed to mandates on our local school systems. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to education and decisions should be left to local Boards of Education, parents, and teachers as to how funds will be spent in educating our young people. If a school system wishes to direct funding to the visual, musical, and performing arts, they should be allowed to do so.

**5. Would you support expansion of the “Arts Education” grants program that allows for model programs to be replicated?**

*(Background: Since 2001, the Department of Education, (USDE) has administered a small—funded at \$40 million in FY10, “Arts Education” program that awards model grants to school districts to conduct arts integration and improve instruction. USDE has now made over 170 of these competitive grant awards around the country.)*

We should always encourage excellence in all areas of instruction. The promise of increased funding as a reward for strong performance is a fine example of how we should reward success. Developing model programs used to generate such grant awards is appropriate provided that funds are available in the midst of our nation’s financial crisis.

**6. Do you support bipartisan legislation to correct the inequity of tax credits between collectors and artists to ensure that museums, libraries, and other cultural organizations receive donations?**

*(Background: Currently, art collectors can claim a fair market value tax deduction for works that they donate to cultural organizations, but artists can claim only the cost of the materials when they donate work that they have created.)*

Yes. In the face of a challenged economy, our non-profits are always at risk of losing their charitable funding. Any effort to offer tax relief those donating their time and talent as well as to employers and employees should be encouraged. Impediments to the charitable spirit of the American people should be removed.

**7. What are your views regarding the critical role of arts and culture in Fairfield County.**

It is no secret that culture and art are essential to the character of Fairfield County. My wife and I are fortunate to live here and we are proud to support the advancement of the arts in the communities around us.