

## Paper Mache for 5-19-25 by David Read

And the hits just keep on coming! Once again, the NEA or National Endowment for the Arts (and just about every other Federal art and culture related institution) is under attack. As you may have heard, in the current administration's 2026 budget proposal, the President has called for the complete elimination of the NEA, reviving efforts from his first term to defund the agency. The NEA has begun rescinding grants to arts organizations, citing alignment with new funding priorities that emphasize national heritage over diversity and inclusion initiatives. These cuts have disproportionately impacted small, rural (like Yuba-Sutter), and minority-led groups, leading to canceled projects and staff layoffs. The proposal has faced bipartisan opposition in Congress, which previously rejected similar defunding attempts. Advocates argue that dismantling the NEA undermines cultural access and economic support for underserved communities.

To put this in perspective, I want to share how NEA funding has directly benefited residents of Yuba and Sutter Counties. Our Murals of Live Oak Project, funded in large part by matching grants from the NEA, not only improved aesthetics for the City and our county but it also employed several local artists for the job. The grants have totaled more than \$40,000 over several years resulting in the wonderful murals now part of Live Oak. YSAC received a \$150,000 NEA regranting grant to support local artists and arts organizations under the American Rescue Plan program. Successful applicants included the Yuba Sutter Oratorio Society, the Yuba Sutter Master Chorale, the Sutter County Museum, Tri-County Diversity, Youth Mariachi program and several individual artists. YSAC was in line to receive a \$70,000 grant this year from the NEA for a new project called Neon Alley. It would have enabled us to complete murals on both sides of the corridor between Plumas Street and the offsite parking lot behind Creative Interiors. The project included restoration of original, iconic local neon signs from The Spur, the Town Pump and others incorporating them into the design creating another destination art installation. With the cancellation of all additional grants, we will have to seek funding for this project elsewhere.

The NEA was established in 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society initiative to support artistic excellence and accessibility across the United States. Over the decades, it has funded over 128,000 projects, contributing significantly to the nation's cultural landscape. For fiscal year 2025, the NEA's budget is \$210.1 million or about 63 cents per person annually. Despite its modest per capita cost, the NEA's funding supports a wide array of programs and institutions nationwide. These developments have sparked concern among arts leaders and organizations, who view the cuts as a threat to artistic freedom and cultural diversity. Many affected institutions are now seeking alternative funding sources to continue their work and maintain their scheduled performances and festivals. All of the proposed funding cuts to cultural institutions brings to mind a song that first debuted eight years ago during Trump 1.0. As stated in the immortal lyrics of my friend, Tom Galvin, songwriter, musician and brilliant social satirist it's time once again to say:

*BYE BYE BIG BIRD*

*Funding for public TV / just became history*

*Bye big bird*

*Downton Abbey's been torn down / so's the playhouse in your town*

*Bye big bird*

*Artists hate me but I don't begrudge it*

*Especially since I just cut their budget*

*NEA funds soon will be / spent on the military*

*Big bird bye...*

*When we bring on Trump's defeat / We'll bring back Sesame Street*

*Big Bird don't cry*

*Donald bye bye.*