

# Higgins warns cultural groups of impending fund cuts to NEA

*By Mark Sommer | News Staff Reporter*

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The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, UB Center for the Arts, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Burchfield Penney Art Center, Just Buffalo Literary Center and Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center are among the nonprofit Buffalo arts organizations that have received funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.

But Rep. Brian Higgins warned Monday that a House appropriations bill would slash the federal agency's budget by nearly half beginning in October.

Higgins, a Buffalo Democrat, said the \$75 million appropriation for fiscal 2014 would mark the smallest budget for the agency since the 1970s, putting it far below the \$138.4 million provided in 2013. It's also less than half of President Obama's request for \$154.4 million.

"The Buffalo area has a rich architectural tradition, and a rich arts and cultural tradition, which adds tremendously to the quality of life of Buffalo and Western New York, and is a big part of the city's resurgence," said Higgins, who is a member of the Congressional Arts Council. "These cuts are hurtful, and I think they are disproportionately hurtful to places like Buffalo."

The NEA's budget has been a target of Republicans on and off since the Reagan administration tried to eliminate the NEA three years in a row in the early 1980s. It has been a periodic lightning rod because of controversial artists or projects that have received the arts funding.

"The NEA is used for political fodder. It is seen by some as being symbolic, generally, of big-spending Washington, when in fact these are necessary investments that have helped the nation achieve prominence in arts and culture unlike any other in the world," Higgins said. "I think that the difference between this year and last is a more aggressive House that is being surgical in its efforts to cut spending."

Tod Kniazuk, executive director of Arts Services Initiative of Western New York, also expressed concern about the impact the loss of NEA funding could have in Western New York.

"These proposed cuts are especially ill-timed and ill-informed, considering the progress we have been making on cultural funding and policy at the local, county and state levels. That progress has been made by proving and showing the impact that arts and culture has on our area's economy, tourism, education, national reputation and quality of life," Kniazuk said.

Cuts to the NEA would also likely reduce the money that the New York State Council on the Arts has to supplement local cultural organizations.

Tom Burrows, director of UB Center for the Arts, said the \$30,000 grant the NEA provided in 2012 allowed both a dance company and a cellist to take temporary residence at the university.

“It allowed us to do things more experimental that we could not otherwise have afforded to do,” Burrows said, noting the artists worked with students and performed both at the school and in local hospitals.

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