A Tribute to The Honorable Louise M. Slaughter (1929-2018)

Since her sudden passing on March 16, 2018, many people, organizations, leaders, and friends have shared wonderful memories of Louise. Words like “trailblazer,” “indefatigable,” “champion,” “unrelenting,” and “tireless advocate for her constituents and the causes she believed in” are among the descriptions of an amazing leader. House Speaker Paul Ryan called her a “giant.” And she was. She was truly an inspiration. And is forever in our hearts.

For Americans for the Arts, Louise was also the most formidable voice and authority on the arts on Capitol Hill. Today, during memorial services in her honor at the U.S. Capitol, Americans for the Arts is humbly honored to take a moment to reflect on her career and service in the U.S. House of Representatives, where for over three decades, she stood as a steadfast advocate and champion for the arts, culture, and arts education. Her work on behalf of the arts in America was exemplary.

It was 21 years ago on Arts Advocacy Day 1997, when Louise single-handedly revived the Congressional Arts Caucus to successfully save the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities from being terminated the following year. It was a time of considerable debate over the role of federal funding for the arts. As the stalwart co-chair of the Arts Caucus since its inception, Louise and her Republican co-chairs (Reps. Steve Horn- 1997-2002, Christopher Shays- 2003-2008, Todd Platts- 2009-2012, Leonard Lance- 2013-present) worked together to lead and unify a 161-member caucus to secure federal support for the arts and culture.
every year. Today, the Congressional Arts Caucus is one of the largest and longest-serving bipartisan caucuses on Capitol Hill.

Under her leadership, the Congressional Arts Caucus became one of most important congressional organizing resources for advancing pro-arts policies in Congress. The Arts Caucus has been an invaluable bipartisan partner for the nonprofit arts sector, and an important ally for federal support for arts and culture in America. Through bill introduction to Capitol Hill events, congressional letter-writing campaigns, press conferences, testimony before key congressional committees, floor speeches, help to constituent artists and much more, Louise made sure the Arts Caucus played an active role in engaging her colleagues to take action.

Louise leaves behind an impressive legacy that will inspire others who follow in her footsteps.

- She sponsored or cosponsored nearly 400 bills in the U.S. House affecting the arts.
  - 139 of those bills saw action on the U.S. House floor, and 68 became law, including the *Monuments Men Recognition Act*, honoring the men and women who served in the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section under the Allied Armies during World War II and their heroic role in the preservation, protection, and restitution of monuments, works of art, and artifacts of cultural importance.
  - Other bills that became law included resolutions to allow new statues in the Capitol, including work with the Joint Committee on the Library to obtain a statue of Rosa Parks to place in Statuary Hall, where memorial services for Louise occurred.
  - She also cosponsored resolutions that successfully designated the month of October 1990 as "Country Music Month," and a joint resolution that designated June 19, 1987, as "American Gospel Arts Day", bringing recognition and celebration to impact of the arts in our lives.
  - Every October, she participated in “National Arts and Humanities Month” to encourage all Americans to participate in the arts.
- Never one to shy away, she regularly testified before the House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee in support of increased funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- Louise was always an integral part of Arts Advocacy Day from 1987 – 2018, both onsite and offsite, Rep. Slaughter helped ensure each year’s success. Her rousing speeches to arts advocates were always a highlight and a moment of inspiration.
Passionate about her personal love for the arts, Louise once told an Arts Advocacy Day crowd about a conversation with her husband the night she was first elected to Congress: “My husband swears I told him this...after we’d gotten the results that I’d just won a seat in the House of Representatives, I said to him, ‘Well, all I really wanted to do was be a blues singer.’” Congresswoman Slaughter sang with a big band in college, and her husband would often proudly show off a photo of Louise fronting the Tinker Baggarly Orchestra.

- Louise annually co-led congressional sign-on letters to the U.S. House Appropriations Committee in support of federal funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, and year after year, she made the case about why the federal government should invest more in the arts.
- She composed op-eds to further champion the cause—most recently in 2017 and in 2015 with Congressional Arts Caucus co-chair Leonard Lance (R-NJ).
- In 1998, Louise was recognized by Americans for the Arts and The United States Conference of Mayors for her leadership in creating the Congressional Arts Caucus and the course she set, rallying thousands of arts advocates to speak to their members of Congress about the value and importance of the arts.
- Each year, Louise encouraged high school students from across the country to participate in the Congressional Art Competition, and from 1993-1994, she served as co-chair of the competition. Nearly every congressional office participated.
- She inspired everyone, from art students in high school, to parents seeking arts programs for their children, to heads of major cultural institutions, to nationally recognized artists including Lin-Manuel Miranda, Robert Redford, Tony Bennett, John Legend, and Kerry Washington.
- Louise never forgot why she was in Congress, and her constituent service was beyond reproach, assisting musicians, arts students, art teachers, and more to secure funding and national recognition.
- Over the past 30 years, her district in the Rochester-area received more than 100 direct grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. These grants expanded access to the arts through everything from a cultural planning process grant for the 10-county greater Rochester region, to a neighborhood urban art trail, to financial support to the Urban Youth Arts Education photography program, the Garth Fagan Dance Company and the Dance 2B program which provides a positive, safe environment to Rochester City School District students.
- All told, Louise secured millions of dollars in funding for arts initiatives for her district and the state.
• Alongside her colleagues, Louise successfully worked to get the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue a final rule to help musicians travel safely with their instruments on planes. The rule established regulations allowing passengers to stow a musical instrument in accordance with carry-on baggage requirements, for which Yo-Yo Ma personally thanked her.

• At every turn on the House floor, Louise would take a moment to tell you about the arts. She loved to remind members of statistics like high school students who take four years of arts classes score an average of 100 points higher on their SATs.

• And she couldn’t wait for the latest data on the economic impact of the arts to come our every four years. She’d rattle off those statistics in a way that grabbed your attention. She’d tell people, “wait until you hear this!” And she’d tell you that “the arts represent a larger share of our nation’s economy than transportation or agriculture.”

• Louise was also quick to remind members of Congress about the return on investment that the arts bring into federal coffers, reminding members that “the tax revenue the nonprofit arts generated for local economies and the federal government far exceeded its paltry investment.” In fact, she’d say, the arts generate a trade surplus for the country.

• Even in the early morning hours when the House Rules Committee often met, where she served as Chair and later as Ranking Member, she would never miss an opportunity to tell her colleagues about the impact of the arts. On the U.S. economy. On jobs. On tax revenue. On education. On graduation rates. On classroom attendance. On servicemembers. On healthcare.

• In 2015, when Louise’s official portrait as Rules Committee Chairman was unveiled, one could see how she collaborated with the artist to ensure special items were included in the portrait, the most important of which was a framed photo of her recently departed husband, Robert, painted into the portrait itself.

• One of the more recent initiatives that Louise cared deeply about was the impact of the arts and creative arts therapies on our U.S. service members returning from war zones. She had recently organized an Arts Caucus site visit to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and met with veterans and their families. She went to the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICOE) and saw the impact of the National Endowment for the Arts’ programs in art therapy, music, and writing on healing and recovery from the more “invisible”
psychological wounds of war. She would tell everyone she met. “You need to go see what’s happening at the NICoE. We need to expand access to the arts.”

- One of her final acts in Congress was our work together spearheading a bipartisan letter to the U.S. House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee encouraging funding the National Endowment for the Arts at least at $155 million in FY 2019. The letter garnered a record 166 signatures from members.

Louise knew how to be an advocate. Everyone was important to Louise. She never missed a chance to stop and listen, and then take the opportunity to point something out to you. Louise passed away on March 16, 2018, but not before changing the course of many American lives—children, veterans, families, teachers, artists, students, and the colleagues she served with. May we be reminded of these reflections, and continue to carry on her good work, so that all Americans may benefit from access to the arts.

As Louise often stated and lived herself, "the power of the arts transcends our differences, transports our imaginations, and teaches our children." Her longtime passion and energy for the arts and arts education are also reflected in her dedication to the people she served, and when it came to congressional debate, Louise was an eloquent advocate who never, ever let up. All of us at Americans for the Arts will miss our friend, but we will continue to be inspired by her legacy.

There has never been an arts advocate with more tenacity, fight, humor, and spirit of generosity than Louise Slaughter. May she rest in peace knowing that she made the world a better place through the arts. We keep her family in our heartfelt thoughts.

Respectfully submitted on April 18, 2018 on behalf of our 400,000 members across the country,

Robert L. Lynch
President and CEO
Americans for the Arts and the Americans for the Arts Action Fund