

# Remarks by the First Lady at the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities Youth Event

East Room

November 2, 2011

2:33 P.M. EDT

MRS. OBAMA: Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you all, so much.

Hello and welcome to the White House. (Laughter.) I am, as always, so thrilled to have all of you join us here today -- one of our favorite events, just all around. We are so excited.

I want to start by thanking the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities for sponsoring these awards. And I'd like to ask all of the committee members here today to stand up so that we can honor them for their service. Please stand. (Applause.) Thank you, so much.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge Representative Jim McDermott. I'm not sure if he's here today because there are votes happening, but if he is I want to thank him for his service and for all the work that he's done.

And, finally, I want to recognize all of the artists, the educators, and administrators who are on the ground everyday running the programs that we're honoring today. Every day you all are providing unparalleled opportunities for our young people to explore every facet of the arts -- from dance and theater, to writing and music, to history and the visual arts.

In so doing, you're not just teaching these young people about painting or acting or singing, you're teaching them about hard work and discipline and teamwork. You're teaching them how to manage their time -- something that we all need to learn -- (laughter) -- how to set goals, and, more importantly, how to achieve those goals.

And you all have seen firsthand how these skills translate to every part of their lives. You've seen them realize that if they can compose a song or a poem, then maybe they can write that term paper -- (laughter) -- or finish that math homework, too. We were just having this conversation at home last night at dinner. (Laughter.) If they can deliver a monologue up on stage with all the grandeur that goes along with what you do, then maybe they can make a presentation in front of the classroom on something not so dramatic.

If they can conduct a quartet or direct a play, then maybe they can lead a student group. Maybe they can, one day, run a business or a city or a state or maybe even the United States of America, right? That's right. (Applause.)

And all of you working so hard with these young people are not just helping them use the arts to lift themselves; you're showing them how they can lift their communities, as well, and that's so important.

Because of your programs, because of the work that you're doing, there are students all over this country who are doing great things -- students in Denver, Colorado, who wrote a play about teenage homelessness. There are students in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who designed a mural to brighten a struggling neighborhood.

And through this year's international honoree program, Youth Community Media Project, students in Indonesia created their own videos to raise awareness around issues like poverty, women's rights, and the effects of natural disasters.

Every day, with every lesson you teach, you remind our young people that their story is part of the broader American story, and you show them how they, as artists, can challenge our assumptions and help us view our world in new and very unexpected ways. That is precisely what we are trying to do here at the White House, as well.

Over the past few years we've worked to make this place a showcase for our country's rich cultural life, and to throw open our doors to as many young people as possible. We've hosted students at concerts and workshops on everything from jazz to spoken-word poetry to modern dance. We've done it because we want them to know that they can be part of our arts community; that this community is for them. We say that every year. You own the space; it is yours. And we want to support your efforts to show them that if they work hard, and if they believed in themselves, then anything is possible. Anything.

Now, I know that what many of you do in these programs and projects -- it's not easy, particularly in these difficult economic times. I know that in this era of belt-tightening and budget cuts, all of you are working harder than ever before just to hold things together. But month after month, and year after year, in spite of all the challenges, you all keep going, because you know that, for so many of our young people, the arts are not an extra. You know that the arts are not a luxury; rather, it's a lifeline. It is a lifeline for so many of these kids.

And you know that for every young life you transform, there is a tremendous ripple effect. It happens when that child goes on to mentor and inspire other young people, which many of them do. It happens when a community is lifted by their service. It happens when our economy benefits from their skills and hard work. It happens when our nation and our world are graced by the works of art they go on to create.

So make no mistake about it. All of you working on these programs, you are impact multipliers. You are inspiration multipliers. And that is the power that you have, that you hold. And it is a truly precious power. And, today, I want to honor you all. I want to congratulate you. I want to thank you for everything you do for our kids and for our country. You all are amazing. And you should give yourselves a round of applause. (Applause.) Thank you.

And with that, it is my pleasure to introduce Margo Lion, Co-Chair of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, who will now say a few words.

Thank you all, and God bless. Congratulations. (Applause.)