

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH ALEC BALDWIN

SUBJECT: ACTOR AND POLITICAL ACTIVIST ALEC BALDWIN WILL SPEAK ABOUT ART AND POLITICS.

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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THERESA WERNER: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105th president of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists, committed to our profession's future through our programming while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. To donate to our programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit www.press.org/institute.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists who are Club members. And, if you do hear applause from our audience, please note that members of the general public are attending. So it's not necessarily a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN audience and our Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club, available on iTunes. You can follow the action on Twitter using the hashtag #NPCLunch. After our guest speech concludes, we'll have a question and answer segment. And I will ask as many questions as time permits.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. And I would ask each of you to stand up briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Kate Michael, K Street Kate, Nyia Hawkins, Associated Press, Todd Purdum, Vanity Fair, Mary Milliken, Reuters, Monica Hopkins, Eldorado Pictures, Nora Halpern, Americans for the Arts, Alison Fitzgerald, freelance journal and Speaker Committee Chair.

I'm going to skip our speaker for just a moment. Robert Hardin, Hardin Communications and Speakers Committee member who organized this luncheon. Nina Ozlu Tunceli, Americans for the Arts, Marc Weiner, Kiplinger's, Nikki Schwab, Washington Examiner, Yeas and Nays columnist, Bob Madigan, WTOP, Pam Stevens, MSNBC.

[applause]

Our guest today is an award-winning actor, producer, director and author. He has starred on the big screen, on television, and on Broadway. Alec Baldwin has won two Emmy Awards and a number of Screen Actors Guild Awards for playing the self-absorbed Jack Donaghy on the hit television show, *30 Rock*. He has hosted *Saturday Night Live* a record 16 times, and is a well-known frequent flier and American Airlines fan.

[laughter]

A native of Long Island, Mr. Baldwin began his career in soap operas in the early 1980s, before moving on to Broadway and film. His most notable films include *The Hunt for Red October*, *The Aviator*, *Pearl Harbor*, and *It's Complicated*. Mr. Baldwin is a member of the Americans for the Arts Artist Committee, and serves as the 25th annual Nancy Hanks Lecturer on Art and Public Policy. He is in Washington this week working with the committee.

He is also a board member of the People for the American Way and a strong supporter of the animal rights group PETA. Mr. Baldwin lives in New York City, has one daughter, and is recently engaged. Mr. Baldwin can now add National Press Club Luncheon Speaker to that weighty list of accomplishments. [applause]

Mr. Baldwin is also a well-known political activist. Perhaps that comes from spending some of his college years right here at George Washington University. [applause] Mr. Baldwin has been mentioned as a candidate for public office. This might be the right place to make that announcement. Mr. Baldwin.

[applause]

ALEC BALDWIN: Thank you very much to Theresa Werner and to everyone from the National Press Club, and to all of you for having me here as your guest. And also to thank Bob Lynch and Nina Ozlu Tunceli and everyone on the Staff of Americans for the Arts, because I am here, once again, as their guest for the Arts Advocacy Day

work that's being done on Capitol Hill. And tonight is the lecture the Nancy Hanks Lecture, and the dinner to follow.

I started coming there-- But before we get to that, actually, let's talk about American Airlines and Words With Friends. [laughter]. Because I know that's precisely what you want to talk about. Because it's not lost on me that, while I was being admonished for using my phone while we were parked at the gate, I think someone-- I think some dear friend of mine, some colleague of yours from Fox News, while deeply, deeply, boundlessly admiring us, mentioned that I was using my phone while we actually on the runway about to take off and had to taxi back, which is not true.

But, while I was in the plane, and we were parked at the gate, I was using my phone. And then I was asked to leave the plane. I want to just tell you this. It was this amazing moment, because it seemed like a scene from a really smart movie, like a Michael Mann movie, where you'd expect really smart writing, and great acting. [laughter] But not like some crazy, you know, hyped up TV show. It was a really wonderful moment where I had said-- I registered a very loud complaint about this woman who I thought had singled me out.

And then, a very young Asian-American woman, who was actually this breathtakingly beautiful woman, and very serene. I'm sitting on the plane. And she walked up to me, and she said, "Mr. Baldwin, would you gather your things and come with me please?" [laughter] And it just had this kind of narcotic effect on me. [laughter] She just spoke very quietly and very calmly. And then threw me off the plane. [laughter] "Mr. Baldwin, would you kindly collect your things, please, and come with me?"

But, as all this is happening, there were probably about seven or eight people who had their cell phones on. And they were Tweeting about it at the time it was happening. [laughter] And I want to thank all the people out there on Twitter who happened to make note of the fact that there were a lot of people in the first class cabin of the plane who were on Twitter at that very moment I was being kicked off for using my phone. They were Tweeting about it. So not my day. Bad luck for me that day. But that's okay.

I'm here as a guest of Americans for the Arts. And I've been coming down here since 1990. The origin of this work for me was with the Creative Coalition that was formed by Michael Fuchs(?) the former head of HBO. Fuchs, who wanted to bring together a bunch of entertainment industry professionals, producers, writers, directors and actors to kind of focus their work and their advocacy on public policy, comped for them, their office space, the HBO building across from Bryant Park back then. I think HBO is still there, but I don't think GCC is anymore.

And Fuchs gave them office space and gave them a budget, a modest budget of staff persons with HBO. He got them started and they went out and raised money. And the name of the game back then was for us to learn more about how to effectively advocate for our issue, whether it be in Albany or here in Washington. And Ron Silver-- I'm sad when I look at the photograph-- and Nina can confirm this. There's a photograph

of us together in one of our early trips. Steve Collins and I, Susan Sarandon, Chris, Michael Benehan(?) and Ron Silver. Half of the people in the photograph are gone, have passed away very tragically.

But Silver was someone who was a great mentor for me in the advocacy world. He, I remember, sitting me down on a train coming down here and talked very, very succinctly and very effectively about cover, and “You're going to say this, and they're going to say this,” and anticipating their answer, and, “Here is your battery of answers you're going to have, and facts and statements to help substantiate what we want to do, the issues we're-- gun control, reproductive rights, the environment, federal funding for the arts, and so forth.”

And we would come down here, and I have come down here intermittently since then, to speak to members of Congress, (a) to thank our supporters, both Republican and Democrat, in both the House and the Senate, who have worked to gain federal funding for the arts. And to-- not admonish, I mean that's something I might have done five or ten years ago, now, but to-- or shame, if you will. It's more to encourage, to try to cajole some of our opponents who still don't believe that there is a role for the federal government in funding the arts.

And I don't mean that in terms of individual grants. As many of you know, the NEA is out of the individual grant business as a result of some of the-- I would imagine as a result of some of the controversies in the past. When I first started doing this kind of work, it was the days of Karen Finlay and Serrano and “Piss Christ” and Mapplethorpe and a lot of people jumping up and down and screaming during the early Clinton years. And we wound up getting an appropriation in '94, I guess, when Gingrich and that crowd took over.

And my dear friend Liz Robbins helped us to term, what they called “The corn for porn swap.” [laughter] Some deal was made with conservative republicans in the House to get some kind of an agricultural subsidy which now allowed them to back off and support federal funding of the arts at a certain price. And that back room deal between the NEA and the agriculture subsidy became known as the “corn for porn swap” in the days of Mapplethorpe.

Since then, a tremendous amount has changed on a variety of levels. The government is out of the individual grant business. The amount of money dropped precipitously for a while and has come back up. However, I think the numbers are still problematic, as far as I'm concerned. You have an appropriation for the NEA now at about \$147 million dollars. The appropriation, when I first started coming down here, the statistics I had available online were for 1992, which was \$175 million dollars. The internet, which never ceases to amaze me, took me quickly to a site where you could do the index to adjust for inflation. So I programmed it at \$175 million dollars, which today would be, I think it's \$248 or \$238 million dollars.

So if \$175 million in '92 would actually be \$248 million today, and we're at \$147 million, we're just around between \$90 and \$100 million dollars less. Make no mistake. We are, right now, about \$90 to \$100 million dollars less in actual federal subsidies for the arts, in a country that has grown to 320 million people roughly, let's say, or at least ones we can count these days, at least the ones we bother counting in this country these days.

And I'm someone who has said on the record that I think that the arts are beyond essential. I mean everywhere I go-- I just got back from Rome-- and everywhere I go, I see that dichotomy. I see that strange dissonance between some European economies-- you go to Greece, of course, and the Italians are very uncomfortable about their economy right now. And you go there, and you see that we have what they don't have. The American economy is still a strong economy when we balance our debts and pay our bills. The American economy is still a great economy. Still a strong economy. When we falter is because we don't get it right, in terms of balancing our budgets and our priorities. And that's a different conversation.

But, when you go to Italy-- and they have a weak economy. But they have an artistic heritage that puts us to shame. You go to Paris, you go to London, even when you're in New York and this city as well. And tonight, when I give these remarks, I'll talk about the artistic heritage of this country being embodied in this city like no other city in this country. I included in the remarks I make today, I say that nothing, nothing makes you love this country more-- it kind of chokes me up, actually-- Nothing makes you love this country more than when you come to Washington. And it's nothing to do with the rhetoric of any one of these people who exist on the Hill today, not a Republican or a Democrat.

The rhetoric of political leadership in this country is irrelevant, in terms of creating real love for this country. It only creates disgust and disdain and disappointment and heartbreak. And, if you walk around Washington, D.C., the great, great architectural, great, great artistic heritage of our country, of our country, is embodied in this town, in this town, in this great, great, great city where I went to college for three years.

And my comments to that, I say that, I say, "God, it's so funny that I live in New York, you know. And years ago I used to live in Washington. And I'd go to New York, and here I was in Washington. Took the course about DC politics and cultural-- learned Kennedy's great line about DC, the city of southern efficiency and northern hospitality. [laughter] JFK's great quote about Washington.

And I remember, I lived in the old DC. 1976 I came down here, back when they were burning the Shah of Iran in effigy in Lafayette Park. They were burning the Shah of Iran. Now, if you put a match in Lafayette Park, you'd get shot by probably six or seven different snipers in different aspects all over that area in front of the White House. [laughter] They shut down Pennsylvania Avenue since I was here.

But I remember, it was odd to me to be in Union Station. I remember, when I went to school here, you would-- I didn't have the money to fly. And it wasn't convenient. And they used to have a train you could take. The last train out of Union Station to Penn Station was at 9:30, and it was a local. It stopped in Delaware. It stopped in New Jersey. You'd swear to God it was stopping in St. Louis, too, it took so long. [laughter] This damned train was the slowest damned train you've ever been on in your entire lifetime.

And we'd go to New York, it was like \$18 bucks. It was \$36 bucks round-trip to go on this train. And you'd leave Union Station. And sometimes I'd get a ride there, whenever I wanted to get there early. If I missed that train, I was dead. And I'd get there early. And you'd sit in Union Station, the great, great, great Union Station of Washington, DC. Then go on from there to New York, sophisticated, glamorous, wealthy, cosmopolitan New York, and go to that God-forsaken sink hole, Penn Station. [laughter] You'd go from one of the great train stations in this country to probably the worst train station in this country. The worst, the worst.

That is, when it was erected on the grounds, had once been a great train station as many people here know. The old Meade-- Why am I blanking on this? McKinn, Meade and White. That's a tongue-twister for you. Thank you. The old McKinn, Meade and White structure of the old Penn Station, torn down, controversy around the world, from all corners of the world, which gives birth to the historical preservation law in New York.

But you're in New York, there's a lot of great architecture in New York. Not like Washington. There's a lot of great architecture and arts in New York, much of the art, of course, that's done in public spaces and architecture behind a door. You've got to pay a fee to access, you know. Great art in London, Spain, all over Europe. Rome is singular to me. I just got back from Rome. It's hard to leave Rome, because the city itself is a work of art. You are inside the work of art that is the extent of an entire city, you know.

And I think that, in this country, when you're over there, you see they've got the-- I only have glib words for you today about this. But they have the art thing down. They're spending a lot of money over there. And they're getting a lot of tourists over there. They're getting a lot of our money over there over the last many years, because they preserve that heritage. And they've made art count. They've raised their children to believe that art counts. It's part of their culture, part of their heritage.

And you come on over here, and we have what they don't have. We have the potential-- and typically, we have a great humming, hissing, steaming, 12-cylinder economy here. And we don't get the art thing right all the time. Because I think we send the wrong signal here. We say that art isn't important enough for the government to spend money on. You don't need to spend what I would spend on it. I'd spend a billion dollars each on the NEA and the NEH. I'd spend a lot of money on art. I'd spend a lot more money than most people would, possibly imagine on our government money on the art, arts education and so forth.

But I think my host here this year, Bob Lynch said he would settle for one dollar per U.S. citizen, he'd be happy with. Just ask them to wrap their braids around one dollar. You know, \$320 million dollars would be-- which would still be more than double what the appropriation is now.

I want to finish by just-- because I could go on and on and on. I do want to finish by just saying that we have heroes, friends, comrades, whatever you want to call them here in the House and the Senate, both Republican and Democrat, in terms of our seemingly never-ending journey in keeping America focused on the arts and arts education. I would like to take a moment to thank Louise Slaughter, the Democrat from New York in the Rochester-Buffalo area. You all know Louise Slaughter. And Congressman Norm Dicks, who is the Democrat from Washington, the Tacoma area, both stalwarts in the Democratic side of the House for the arts.

On the Republican side, equally a stalwart-- I was here last year when Kevin Spacey was the Nancy Hanks speaker. And I came to testify with Kevin before the Congress. And the testimony was canceled. And we didn't wind up doing that. But Representative Richard Hanna, who's been a good friend to the arts and our movement, the Republican from the Utica area of New York. And Representative Chris Gibson, also from New York, from central New York, in the Saratoga Springs area. Those are two what we would call freshman moderates. Oh no, I'm sorry. Did I have-- Yes, Hanna from Utica and Gibson from Saratoga Springs, those are two moderate freshmen who are with us.

The two stalwarts we have who are Republicans in the House are, of course Mike Simpson, who I meet with-- Mike Simpson is who I met with last year from the Boise area of Idaho, and Representative Aaron Schock, from the Peoria, Illinois district of his in Illinois. Both Simpson and Schock have been long-time friends of ours.

People who are not, as we say in New York, the *mishpachen* in our movement here-- [laughter]-- are the Republican Study Group, which the Republican Study Group, which I think you had mentioned to me, Nina, who was the founder, Phil Crane, the former member, Phil Crane, was the founder of the Republican Study Group, who they want all federal funding zeroed out. And Congressman Tim Walberg, the Republican from Michigan, we're hoping somehow that I'll be able to get, well a game of Words with Friends going with Tim Walberg. [laughter] I'd like to try to maybe pitch that. We're going to find some beachhead there with him and try to get him over on our side.

On the Senate side, we have Senator Tom Udall from New Mexico, who has always been-- is good with us on this issue. He's a first term Senator, but he has been spearheading efforts to recruit other Senators to support funding increases for the NEA. And Tom Harkin, who was Chairman of the Help Committee on Health Education Labor and Pensions, has been placing a spotlight on the decline in arts education programs in grades K through 12.

The Republicans we have that are our heroes and our friends are Tom Cochran, the Republican from Mississippi. I met with him last year. He's been great for us on the arts. And Susan Collins from Maine, a longtime moderate Republican and supporter of the public funding for the arts. And Tom Colburn is the one we were going to mention today as being not as wonderful as we would like him to be on the issue of the arts. And I wanted to mention that we have a couple of-- is this the one for Colburn's right here? Is that the-- We have a list here of-- Oklahoma, yeah.

In the State of Oklahoma, we have got, you know, in March of 2001, the Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition received a grant of \$15,000 dollars. That was in March of 2001. In May of 2001, the Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City-- all five of these grantees are in Oklahoma City, by the way-- received-- in 2011, rather, yeah, Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition was March of 2011. In May of 2011 was Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma. They got \$45,000 dollars. The Oklahoma Council of the Arts, which I guess is more of an umbrella organization in that community, in June of 2011, got \$773,000 dollars from the National Endowment for the Arts in Oklahoma. In July of 2011, the Oklahoma Visual Arts again got \$25,000 dollars. And then the Oklahoma Historical Society in July got \$20,000 dollars.

So I just want to mention that we always find it-- not enjoyable, but ultimately necessary to point out to some of these folks that there are constituents of theirs, in their own congressional districts or statewide in the Senate, who the NEA is bringing some wonderful, wonderful arts-related programming and events, shows, what have you, and educational opportunities for young people there, under the umbrella of the National Endowment for the Arts.

I want to finish by saying that, in my own life, my path with art-- I mean sometimes people think that when you do what I do for a living, you kind of live in the "Art Lounge." You know, you're in the "Art Tent." And you're behind the velvet rope with the art people. And that's not necessarily true.

I work in a business where the longer I'm in the business, the purely artistic aspects of my business intrigue me much more than the glitz and the glamour and what is often the purview of the stars and the actors. Design, directing, cinematography, editing, musical composition, everything that comes into play in great filmmaking are far more interesting to me now, and draw my attention now, than they do-- But the artistic experience in my life comes to me the same way it comes to you. I go out my door, and I try to identify some experience artistically that is attractive to me.

Then I got to go get a ticket for it, I've got to buy a ticket for it. And I can afford to buy a ticket for it. I can go see whatever I want, whenever I want. I mean, I've been very blessed that way. But a lot of people can't. And I've been working my foundation that I set up a few years ago, to funnel some tributaries of my own income to the arts and funding.

Right now I made this agreement with Capital One Bank. I have this relationship with Capital One Bank. Becoming a spokesperson for a bank, at the time of the banking collapse-- [laughter]-- And at the genesis moment of the Occupy Wall Street Movement was not a goal of mine in my career. I can assure you of that. [laughter] However, Capital One came to me, along with a couple of other bankers, and were talking about on-camera commercial opportunities, which I decided to avail myself of for two reasons. One, I was on a television show every week. So I thought, "Now is the time. You know, when I'm off TV, I'm going to be off TV for a while."

But, while I'm on TV every week, and then once we went into syndication, it became clearer that audiences are probably plenty sick of me now, so they can't get any sicker of me. Maybe I'm wrong about that, by the way. [laughter] But they can't get any sicker of me than they are now. So I thought, "Well, I'll do this campaign for them." And I funneled all of the proceeds I got from them toward arts funding, my foundation. We earned a specific amount of money from a two-tier contract with them last year for 18 months, and gave all that money to arts-related organizations. And I'm doing another round with them now.

And no, no-- [applause]-- I only mention that because it might not have been the smartest move in my life to go do a commercial for a bank. But they have been great partners with me. They have helped me to shape the content of the commercials, and they've been very-- they've just been wonderful, wonderful partners for me. And they've really helped me to publicize or promote the fact that we're giving the money to arts-related organizations.

And I say this because, what I have discovered as I've gotten older-- because I am older now-- I just turned 54. And, as I've gotten older, there is a thing that I did that satisfied me. And there is a thing I did with my life, and what's coming more into focus, are not a lot of them, but the three or four other things in my life that I might have done that I could have been very happy doing, that were not at all what I'm doing now.

I got a great opportunity to be the on-air announcer for the New York Philharmonic in New York. And I've been doing that for the last three seasons with them. And my relationship with them has led me to this place that, when you're with them, you are in the art lounge, you know. When you're hanging out with these people who are like, you know, Alan Gilbert, and Zarin Mehta, and when you're in a room with a bunch of people who have Maestro Shel Dutoit there from the Philadelphia Symphony, and they're calling him "Charlie," [laughter] You know, you're in with a pretty heady crowd.

And when I'm around these people in the art room and the performing art world, the classically trained music group of opera and so forth, it's been so thrilling for me. I mean God, you just don't know how amazing it is to me. And this is the thing I'll close with. What it's also opened a vista for me is in arts administration. Mehta, who is resigning now, or retiring as the executive director, he and his wife Carmen have become very dear friends of mine. And Mehta is leaving after 12 years after running the New

York Philharmonic. And Daniel Bembiza(?) is taking over for him. He came up from Australia. Lovely guy.

And I've been with Mehta, and I realized that to raise the money, the staff of the Philharmonic, you know, when that group of men and women go out on that stage and they perform that music, and that building lifts off the ground for that hour and a half, for that two hours, you feel like you just-- that life is really worth living when those people are playing this beautiful music.

And the tens and thousands, hundreds of thousands of hours those people put into mastering those instruments, and studying the classical repertoire, and they give you this beautiful, beautiful art form, well there's a lot of people in the other part of that building that got to make that happen. They have to raise that money. They have to promote that, sell those tickets and coordinate these schedules. Arts administration is something I'd like to see more programs in arts administration that are funded by the federal government, in terms of arts education. Because not everybody-- what is it, like one percent of everybody that picks up a violin gets a seat in a really, really esteemed orchestra. The other 99 percent teach or play something that is not, you know, for the Boston or the Cleveland or the big five, if you will, or for the San Francisco, and Utah, or Dallas. These are the great symphonies that they don't get there.

So for many people, just as I have realized that there are ancillary jobs, there are other parts of my own field that I might have worked in and am just as happy. I see that now at my age. I realize that's true in the classical music world as well, as one example, that there are other things I could have done. I mean there's times I sit there at the Philharmonic, and I think, "God, I'd trade places with Zarin Mehta for a year any day. Give me a year, knowing what he knows, and doing what he does, and being able to exist the way he exists, with these great, great, great artists. It's just really, really, thrilling."

I think that pretty much encapsulates what my mission today is, is my mission is to try to remind people that art is many, many things. We all have our own opinions of what art is and what we define as art. But the one that I hope we can all agree on, or maybe one day I can convince us all to agree on, is that art is essential. Art is essential for us to be-- to continue to be a great country. We have to make art essential in our own lives, and in the lives of our children. Thank you.

[applause]

THERESA WERNER: Is there one area of the arts that is most threatened by lack of funding?

ALEC BALDWIN: I would like to say half hour comedy on NBC on Thursday night is an answer to your question. [laughter] That's a very threatened-- [laughter] So they tell me. But I would say that-- I mean that's a tough question for me to answer, because I have never done or even read about a survey of what the x-ray of the art world is, and what the CT scans of the art world will tell us right now. But I do know that I

think they're all suffering equally. I have got friends of mine who-- you know, Monica, who works with my company-- I mean people who work with me in my life, what I do, all say the same thing. Whenever they leave this job, and I do this ersatz exit interview, I say, "What was the job like for you?" And they say, "Working for you is more like working for a Congressman than it is an actor, you know. There's so little glamour in film festivals or film openings. It's more like going and raising money for people."

The bequest for me to raise money for people in the arts, for their organizations, is equal across the board. If it's not Jacques d'Amboise and the National Dance Institute, it's this museum, it's this gallery, it's this poetry reading, it's this-- I mean it's across the board. And I think that, of all of them, and the theatre, the not-for-profit theatre, whether it's the public or the Roundabout or Lynn Meadow and MTC in New York, all of these great institutions are struggling very hard to beef up.

You know, when times are strong, what do they want to do? What does an organization, a great arts institution want to do when everything starts to get on the uptick? Well they want the money for their reserve. They want to pump up that reserve. They want to get, you know, another \$50 million in that reserve. Because they're going to dip into that reserve on a rainy day.

And I guess that people in my life, I will cross a line here to include literature in terms of art, my friends who I think are complaining the loudest, who have seemed the most despondent, the most genuinely despondent, are people in the world of publishing. Because books are just all going online, and books are going to-- the whole book world seems to be kind of melting down.

THERESA WERNER: Do you think that lawmakers would be more generous in funding the arts if money was designated for education and not arts projects or organizations?

ALEC BALDWIN: I don't know. I think that, you know, they got rid of the individual grants. And I think that that was a mistake. I mean to me, that spoke to freedom of expression. As I've said before, they wanted people-- They set up a mechanism for a while where, if you were given a grant and it was proven to be obscene, if you were taken to court in your local jurisdiction, in your municipality, and obscenity laws were violated with NEA money, you had to pay the grant money back. And I thought, that struck me as odd. Because, I mean, I wouldn't want the government to fund obscene art. But number one, the number of things that were proven to be obscene, that were funded by the NEA, I can't really think of any, actually. It was zero that were proven in court, that a judge ruled that they had broken an obscenity law. And where that was implied, it was such a miniscule amount.

And I thought this idea that the government wants to fund, or certain aspects of the government want to fund a type of work, but preemptively hamstringing that in some way, where they want to say to the artist, "We're going to give you some money to do a project. But make sure, when you do this project, now, you've given us a general idea

what it is. If it's obscene, now, if you do anything obscene, you're going to have to give us the money back. You have to pay us back the money."

And I thought, "Well, are we going to do that in all aspects of the government? Are opponents of the NEA going to go to the Justice Department and say, "Now you're going to do this prosecution. And, if you don't get a conviction, you're going to give us your salaries back for those hours"-- I mean we can get insane here with this whole kind of preemptive safeguarding they want to do. These are freedom of expression issues.

And what's happened-- and I don't like this word "culture war" because it's such a hot button word-- but, in these last many years, what we've done is, we have allowed people to really, really cave on the issue of freedom of expression in the arts. We've really allowed people to get so intimidated about freedom of expression and what it means and what it can lead to, that a lot of people have backed off in defending that concept.

THERESA WERNER: How do you defend the need for funding the arts alongside the need for funding jobs and education, as well as local aid?

ALEC BALDWIN: Well, Theresa, I'm so glad you brought that up. [laughter] Because, as most people who are advocates of this know, and have known for many, many years, is that art spending is a stimulus for economic development in the areas where that money flows. Whether you're in a place that's as well heeled as Manhattan, where you've got a lot of corporations there, and rich people who are giving millions upon millions of dollars to the Lincoln Centers of the world, and the Metropolitan Museums of Art, and MOMA and so forth, and all kinds of arts, performing arts, and visual arts institutions, that private giving is enormous. That private giving is incalculable.

But those institutions get federal money as well. They qualify for federal money, because tourists are coming to those cities and spending a lot of money on parking, and restaurants, and hotels. Art spending stimulates economic activity. I went down, at the request of the AT&T Performing Arts Center in Dallas, the Dallas Performing Arts Center. They asked me to come down there and do one of these conversations with the programs. I went down there about a month or two ago.

And I was down there. And they were telling me how, if I understood the woman correctly, some board member backstage, she said to me that they had feared-- I don't mean to be cute about this-- but American Airlines, back to them for a moment, they're headquartered in Chicago, they're hubbed in Chicago, I think. Yeah, they're in Chicago. And the people in Dallas believed that one of the reasons they lost out in the consideration of having a major corporate hub like that come to Dallas, even though they have plenty of other ones down there, was because they didn't have a concentrated arts center, a distinctive monolithic arts center like you have in New York's Lincoln Center.

And they're doing something about that now. They showed me these plans they have, where right in that corridor there, where the Wind Spear is, and the opera house is, and the performing arts school that Edie Brickell graduated from, and they named all their famous graduates, they told me that they're going to close down some enormous section of some eight-lane freeway they have there, and rip it up, and build a garden, and unify this entire structure into their own Lincoln Center type of facility, billions of dollars they intend to spend over the next couple of decades. And certainly, they have the money down there, I would imagine.

But it was interesting to me how the arts is business. The arts is business. I mean where federal funding for the arts goes, it is a proven, incontrovertible trigger for a lot of other economic activity in the area where those funds are sent.

THERESA WERNER: How has Twitter changed your life as a celebrity? And does personal interaction with the fans have real value?

ALEC BALDWIN: I'd like to answer that question on Twitter, if I may. [laughter] I had an interview-- What was the woman's name? Do we know? Is she here today? There was a woman who was with-- who I did an interview with. Is she here today, from *Newsweek*? I had a reporter-- there she is. What is your name again?

__: [00:38:45]

ALEC BALDWIN: Sandra Macelwain(?) from *Newsweek*, I spoke to her. And I think I was a little rough with Sandra today. [laughter] Because she was asking me the same question about Twitter. And I said, "Well Sandra, the great thing about Twitter is that it enables me to bypass people like you." [laughter] What could be better than that? I mean I can speak to my fans directly and instantaneously. Granted, it's in 140 characters. Granted, the primary issue is that I'm not a good writer, actually.

But Twitter, for me, is a work in progress. But I do like that it enables you to communicate, on a limited number of fields, with your fans. You may use Twitter for promotion, use Twitter to hug your colleagues and fellows in a certain area. You use Twitter to kick and elbow your opponents politically or what have you. It's pretty childish sometimes. I mean I'm guilty of that, too. But it's something I'm evolving. But I do enjoy it, because you get to speak to people directly and bypass all of you in this room.

[laughter]

THERESA WERNER: Well, since I have you for a few more minutes, I'm going to ask you a few more questions. You said, if every entertainment show went off the air tomorrow, what difference would it make? Every talk show, political show, sitcoms for that matter, media in the U.S. is dull. What would you like to see on TV?

ALEC BALDWIN: Well, I think it's less about what would I like to see on TV, because that doesn't really matter. I think what we're going to start seeing on TV is much more of the pure pay-for-view packaging of television. You're going to start to see all of it. I mean a lot of people in the world are saying, "I'm paying for a cable package that I don't want. You're making me pay \$69 dollars, \$89 dollars, \$125 dollars a month to have a triple package bundle of my internet streaming and my phone and my cable."

And, I mean, I suppose, if you have more economic resources, you don't read that bill as carefully as you might. And, for other people who do, they read that bill a little bit carefully. And more and more of those people are saying, "What am I paying for? I'm paying for"-- It's that old line from that song, "500 Channels and there's nothing on." And it's not that there's nothing on, it's what you want. So I think we're getting much closer, now, to the age of the a la carte television viewing, where you're going to go to a site, and you're going to-- whether it's an Apple TV style, and you're going to select your menu of what channels you want. And you're going to be charged a la carte for each of those things. And that, I think, is going to really profoundly change the television business.

THERESA WERNER: You were upset with the *Today Show* for camping outside your door. Would you really have given them an interview if they had called?

ALEC BALDWIN: Well, I mean, I think that that's something that obviously has changed in my lifetime. I remember I would watch some morning programming before I became purely a radio person in the morning and listening to NPR and so forth. And I would watch morning programming, a la *Good Morning America* and *Today Show*. And CBS, I was a good Harry Smith fan. I loved Harry. And I would watch these shows.

And then one time, I remember toward the end of her tenure, it was I think a special Halloween episode of the *Today Show*, Katie Couric came down. And she was dressed in a kind of Marilyn Monroe getup, a kind of a revealing dress, a blonde wig. And she and the staff of the show, her hosts, did a musical rendition of *Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend*. I mean literally, Katie Couric came down a staircase with jewels on. And Matt Lauer was holding her hand. And she was lip-synching, *Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend*. That was the day I turned off the *Today Show* and I never watched it again. [laughter] Never watched it again. It was over. [applause]

And I just didn't need to see people doing lip-synchs of *Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend* at 7:30 in the morning. [laughter] But I think that those shows, they struggle in that infotainment way of having to, you know, battle with each other for audience. And from my standpoint-- and I don't want to belabor this-- I just-- that obsession, that interest in the personal lives of people in my business is, to a degree, I think is strange. I mean when you are on the inside of that, it is just kind of odd why people-- I mean some of it I could see if someone is ill, or someone gets married, or someone has some more kind of benchmarks in their life.

But, what I realized was-- and I'll finish with this-- is that what's happened in this business was, many years ago-- and Todd forgive me if I've already said this in front of you when we met recently-- is that many years ago, you had the Hedda Hoppers, and the Luella Parsons, and you had people who were trying to get scoops on the stars. And they wanted to know about who was having an affair, and who was pregnant and had an abortion, and who is sick and dying, and who is gay, who is a closet homosexual.

And the studios had an obligation, and the studios had a vested interest in managing the flow of that information and controlling the flow of that information. And they did so, largely-- at least compared to now-- very effectively. Until one day, one guy woke up and said, "Why are we killing ourselves protecting these idiots? These fornicating, drug addled"-- you know, you could just see the level of cynicism of the studio heads.

And so they sat there, and they said, "Why don't we go the other way, completely, and make some money off this?" So, when I go to work at a movie studio, when I go to work at a major company, I go to work in a movie studio and shoot a film for them, and down the hall is a television program owned by the same company who's trying to cut my throat on TV, that's a very, very new world we live in these last 20 years with these entertainment programs.

I sign a contract with a major studio, and I've got to go to work. And, on that contract, we have a rider that is a very lengthy rider. All the press we're obligated to do to promote the film. And it's a contractual requirement. And sidestepping some of these people who are just out to, you know, to trip you, or if you trip yourself more likely, and just to mock you-- you know, it's mockery. We live in this world of mockery, now, and reality shows, and people wanting to laugh at other people. And there's a kind of a Roman circus to the whole thing. But I think that, for me, I guess in the case of the *Today Show*, I guess I just expected more from them.

THERESA WERNER: You don't think that something that required legal action on your behalf was newsworthy?

ALEC BALDWIN: I think it's newsworthy. But the problem is, I mean, in my particular case with that story, which all of the facts of that will be laid bare soon, because the woman who was the focus of this, who was stalking me, she's going to go to court, I guess, as I'm told, in May.

I was asked by the DA's office. They said, "Could you do us a favor?" And they were really gentlemen about it. It was two men I spoke to. They said, "Could you do us a favor and not talk about this in the press? Because we've got an ongoing case. We've got an ongoing trial." And I said, "Okay." And I kept my comments to a minimum. And, when I say to you this case is going to come before a judge.

And I have been fortunate enough-- I will say that I have a-- I don't know how to describe it, but I have a tsunami, if you will, of emails and telephone messages and things

from this individual who was the friend of a friend of mine. This is someone who I met through someone else. And met with this person at the request of my friend. My friend said, "I want you to do me a favor and meet this person to discuss X." And met this person.

And, in the ensuing two years since that meeting, something else evolved. And so, but I have a complete deluge of evidentiary material that I have given to the DA that discusses what I put up with. And you can see, in this line as it goes, it takes some pretty hair-raising turns.

THERESA WERNER: Are you leaving *30 Rock*?

ALEC BALDWIN: Well, you know, it's funny. No, in the sense that the show-- We all signed for six years. And I did sign a contract extension for a seventh season. Because, right as I was really sick of it, like for all of us who did the show, we all had the feeling that it was-- we were on to something in season one. And seasons two, three and four were great. And we got all these prizes and all these awards. And the ratings have never been great, but our online ratings keep us there, what they call the Plus Seven Rating is always very strong for us, DVR and Hulu and so forth.

Millions and millions of people watch the show in the ensuing seven days after the show online. We are the beneficiaries of that technology. But then we got to season five. And season five really didn't feel great. Everybody felt pretty crappy after season five. We thought maybe we'd run out of gas.

And, when they came to me about doing a seventh season, I guess because of their syndication edicts and so forth, I said, "Hell no." I was like, "Please. I want a meteor to hit this building right now and put us all out of our misery. Because this is just-- I can't do this another day and say these things again."

And then we got through with season five and got into season six, the season we're in now, and the writing, as is often the case with great writers-- and I say this without an ounce of politeness or kindness-- they are the greatest sitcom writers on television for the last-- since the *Seinfeld* era. This is it.

A lot of sitcom programming is more cute than funny, you know. And there is a whole network who will remain nameless, who their monolithic sitcom lineup is just one frat boy sex joke after another. Which works. It's popular. They're printing money over there. But the *30 Rock* writers are the smartest, best comedy writers on television, bar none, in the last seven years.

And so, of course, they took this dip and came back in this season six. And everybody loved their writing. And we all agreed we would do it for a couple more years. I would have done it next year and the year after that. But the truth of the matter is, is that NBC is in its predicament. And they need to probably scrape all the paint off the building now and start all over again. Because they've got their pride. The Roberts family and the

Comcast people who have taken over, they're like anybody else in media, they're competitive, and they want to win. And they don't want NBC to stay in this predicament.

Because I'll just finish this by saying that-- and I mentioned this to someone else-- you know, working for NBC was not insignificant in my decision. I did not know Tina that well before the show began. I had met her on *Saturday Night Live* but had very little to do with her, because she was the head writer. And you didn't interact with her one-on-one that way.

And Lauren was the person that rang the doorbell for me to come and do the television series with Tina. And Lauren is an old friend of mine. And that got that going. But the decision was also a part or a silver lining was to work for NBC, which I think is the greatest of the three networks in the long term, when you look at the stocks, so to speak, of the company.

Now some of the other networks have had great legacies of news and sports and one-hour drama and half hour, but none that compares with NBC. NBC, to me, really is the greatest network. Their Olympics coverage, their heritage in news was, to me, equal with-- their legacy, rather, is equal to CBS's. And their comedy lineup was king for a long, long time, with *Friends* and *Seinfeld*.

But they've hit this tough place now. And I think everybody who works there, we'd like to see them get out of it. I'd like to see NBC get out of the predicament they're in, ratings-wise. Unfortunately, to do so, it probably means they're probably going to have to cancel most of the shows they have on the air now.

THERESA WERNER: Do you still fly American Airlines? [laughter]

ALEC BALDWIN: [laughter] Next question. [laughter]

THERESA WERNER: I'll look for the Tweet on that one. You were a student at George Washington University and ran for Student Association President. What did you learn from that experience?

ALEC BALDWIN: Well, I lost. So I learned to, you know, when you draw the posters, draw more neatly. [laughter] The graphic design is a key component of electro politics. (?) You know, I was in school. And I went to school here and was an intern on the Hill for Jerry Ambro, who was the Congressman back then from the Third Congressional District on Long Island where I'm from. And Jerry Ambro, I didn't get to see him very much because the interns that were there, we worked eight hours, 12 hours a week maybe. And we'd go in there.

And most of them, most of these guys were all-- of the interns I worked with, they were all just mythical alcoholics in training, these guys. [laughter] Every day, they would have the roster there of all the parties that were in all the House and Senate office buildings. And I came in, and I was like, Gomer Pyle. I was like, "So what are you all

doing? We're done with work now." [laughter] "We licked all the envelopes, and we sorted all the files and everything. And what you all going to do after work?" And they had a list of all the-- The National Association of Carpet Shampooers is meeting. [laughter] The National Association of Q-Tip Weavers is meeting. And they'd have all these organizations meeting.

And these guys I worked with, they knew the skinny on all them in terms of food and booze. They'd say, "Remember that reception we went with the Q-Tip people? They had great food. Remember, they had lobster there." [laughter] And I'm sitting there going, "Well, I guess we'd best go over and say howdy to the Q-Tip people." And I would go, and these [00:52:33] party. And we did a bit of that.

But I also had a guy say to me, "Did you want to work on a project other than opening constituent mail?" Which this was before the internet, obviously. This was '77, I think I did this, '78. And the guy said to me, he said, "I got a project for you." He says, "No Greater Love, the organization that honors returning Vietnam veterans," if you remember No Greater Love back then. He's nodding-- Jerry Ambro he needed for No Greater Love. Thank you.

Jerry Ambro, the guy who worked for Jerry said, "We're going to put you in charge." He said, "No Greater Love wants each of the 435 members of Congress to select the most well-reacclimated Vietnam veteran. You're going to go into the district. We're going to take submissions. You're going to call pastors and priests. And we're going to call all these community leaders, and we're going to contact them, and ask them for submissions." So I go off and I do this project for a couple weeks.

And I come in, and I go, "I've got my report for you." And the guy who was the young staffer says, "Well come on in. We're going to have a meeting with the Congressman." I think I had met him, like "Hello/goodbye" like twice. He was never there, paying attention to me. I was licking envelopes. I was in a room, rather. And they bring me in.

And they go, "Congressman, do you know Mr. Baldwin? Alec Baldwin?" And I was like, "Yes, sir." And he says, "What did you come up with? Who was the person?" I said, "Ron Kovic," who was the subject of *Born on the 4th of July*. The guy, yeah, who Stone made the movie about, this big anti-war film. And this is, you know, working class, kind of boilerplate, you know, Long Island.

And there's a long pause, and Ambro goes, "Are you out of your mind?" [laughter] And shuts down my whole program. He's like, "We're going to get-- Baldwin you're off the case now. We'll get someone else to take care of this." But I loved Washington, worked at the FCC, and worked at a law firm, and worked for Jerry Ambro and all this other stuff.

But I was given the opportunity to audition for, and I got into the acting program. And, to be honest with you, I started working right away, and I never looked back. So that's part of what I'm doing.

THERESA WERNER: Is it true that, when you turned 40, you stopped wearing jeans? And, if this event had been held after six o'clock, would you have worn a tuxedo? [laughter]

ALEC BALDWIN: I might have. [laughter] I don't see anything wrong with that. Someone asked me earlier, "Have you become more like your character?" And I'm like, "Well yeah, when you do a show"-- that is one thing. You know, you're in Washington. This is a suit and tie crowd. And I'm in New York, and that's pretty much a suit and tie crowd. I used to spend a lot more time in LA, which is not a suit and tie crowd as a rule. And they're proudly so.

But I play a guy that's in a suit and tie every day. And it does wear off on you. You know, I do walk around-- I do get a little bit of this Thurston Howell attitude. [laughter] Thank you for those who remember that reference. Thank you. Are you nodding? Thank you. This guy-- he was my roommate in college. I do have a little bit of-- I'll see someone, I'll be like, "You can't wear that. You can't wear brown shoes with a gray suit, my good man. What on earth are you thinking?"

So the sartorial rigidity of my character has worn off on me. But your other question was about jeans. No, I don't wear jeans. I don't wear jeans. And I don't want to say why I don't wear jeans, because that would be to offend all of the men in this room who do wear jeans. [laughter] When you're over 40.

THERESA WERNER: You can tell me afterwards.

ALEC BALDWIN: I'll tell you.

THERESA WERNER: Okay, great. What person in history would you most like to portray?

ALEC BALDWIN: Who would I most like to portray? Oh that's a great question. Who would I like to portray? You know, I don't know if I want to portray him, because I don't really think about it that way, I'd like to see this person portrayed in some way. And I don't know how you could dramatize-- I mean sometimes these things are the purview of literature for a reason. And they don't really make great films.

But, as we live in the world we live in today, and we live in a world that I think is increasingly shaped, I don't want to say recklessly, but I should say the word is-- I'm struggling. You're all writers. Help me out here.-- a world that is being shaped kind of surreptitiously, if you will, by the current Supreme Court. I would like to see that would bring to a new generation of people, a biography-- film or otherwise-- of the life of William R. Douglas.

THERESA WERNER: Do you plan to run for public office?

ALEC BALDWIN: I have a very important announcement I would like to make to all of you today. [laughter] I'm glad you're all here. It is today, it is with great humility, and a sense of pride, and a great love of my country, that I announce that I am running for the East Hampton Library Historical Society Treasurer's position. [laughter] And I would hope all of you will read my literature. I'm going to have a table with some literature outside when we leave. Thank you. [laughter]

THERESA WERNER: We're almost out of time. But, before I get to ask the last question, I would like to remind you of some upcoming luncheon speakers. On April 24th we have Secretary Ken Salazar, the U.S. Department of Interior. May 4th Mike Rizzo, General Manager of the Washington Nationals. And, on May 9th, Billy Jean King, the tennis legend.

Next I would like to present our guest with the traditional NPC coffee mug. [applause] And my last question for you: What is in your wallet? [laughter]

ALEC BALDWIN: I'll give you an insight into my wallet. When I did make the deal with Capital One, they insisted, obviously, that I had to carry Capital One credit cards and destroy all my other credit cards. I had to be a customer there. So I do have Capital One credit cards. And another thing I save is my daughter, when she was a little child, she made for me-- she made, for herself and I, she made us both licensed veterinarians in the State of California. [laughter] So I have drawn with her, by hand when she was five years old, my license as a veterinarian in the State of California. That and my Capital One cards.

THERESA WERNER: Do you practice?

ALEC BALDWIN: Yes, my daughter and I.

THERESA WERNER: How about a round of applause for our speaker today.

Thank you for coming.

ALEC BALDWIN: Thank you.

[applause]

END