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Jeff Sec.

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August 18, 1999

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20502-2000

Dear President Clinton:

Recently, over 40 organizations and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area and the State of Utah nominated Mrs. Phyllis Wattis for the National Medal of Arts, Outstanding Patron Award. We were disappointed to learn informally that Mrs. Wattis's name was not put forward on the list of finalists recommended by the National Council for the Arts to the White House.

I am writing to request that you address this oversight in your final selection of the National Medal of Arts recipients. I understand that you have the authority to introduce candidates into the selection process along with those forwarded by the Council. I encourage you to exercise this authority on behalf of a truly exceptional citizen and patron of the arts, Phyllis Wattis.

Mrs. Wattis has donated nearly \$300 million dollars to arts and cultural organizations in the Bay Area and her home state of Utah. She has done so selflessly and, at times, anonymously, preferring that the organizations, projects and causes she supports receive attention instead of her. She has contributed to an extraordinary variety of arts organizations including ballet companies, art schools, symphonies, public television, opera companies and, most significantly, museums (you may have seen last week's article in the Wall Street Journal about the recent major acquisitions by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art fueled by Mrs. Wattis' generosity). Her donations have frequently supported new buildings and the endowment of existing activities – in this way, she has assured access to art and culture for generations to come. As the great-granddaughter of Brigham Young, she continues his pioneering spirit in her exceptional commitment to new and contemporary art – her gifts have supported the creation of new dances, new music and opera, and new works of visual art at numerous institutions. At the age of 94, Mrs. Wattis remains alert and involved, and attends countless civic events in her wheelchair.

I am sure that there were several worthy individuals nominated for this prestigious award. Still, I join many other distinguished members of this community in hoping you will re-consider Mrs. Wattis and her impact on the culture of the Bay Area and our nation. I urge you to select her for this honor or add her to the august group of individuals already selected. I know that your current Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, William Ivey, and his staff are very aware of Mrs. Wattis' credentials, and can provide you further information if needed.

Thank you so much for your timely consideration of this matter. Mrs. Wattis' life's work has been advancing the arts and culture of our nation. It would be most appropriate and timely if you choose to recognize her now with a National Medal of Arts.

Sincerely,

Sanford R. Robertson
Sanford R. Robertson

9/1/99
Send to Burkhardt?
Yes ☒
No ☐