

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
Americans United for Separation of
Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of the Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The Newspaper Guild/CWA
PEN American Center
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education
Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

Statement by the National Coalition Against Censorship in Support of Representative Clay's Decision to Re-Display Controversial Painting

As a coalition of national organizations devoted to promoting free speech in general and creative freedom in particular, we strongly support Representative Lacy Clay's (D-MO) decision to put a controversial painting back on display. Another congressman, Representative Duncan Hunter (R-CA), recently removed the work from a House of Representatives office building in an act that demonstrated flagrant disrespect for core free speech principles.

The painting at issue was created by David Pulphus, a high school student from Representative Clay's Missouri district, as part of the annual Congressional Art Competition. After a panel of artists selected it as the best entry from the district, the painting was hung with hundreds of other winning student works of art in a public hallway in a congressional office building. An allegorical representation of protests against police violence, like the 2014 unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, Pulphus' work depicts a group of police officers and protesters, some of them, on both sides, with animal heads.

Conservative media and law enforcement groups complained that the critical portrayal of police officers was offensive and called for the removal of the work. Last week, taking matters into his own hands, Representative Hunter personally removed the painting from the hallway in gross violation of First Amendment principles, claiming he was expressing his support for law enforcement.

Representative Hunter is wrong. Tolerating a diversity of expression has nothing to do with support for or criticism of law enforcement. It is about respect for a basic right citizens of this country enjoy: the right to freedom of speech. A right that is itself protected by our legal and law enforcement systems.

Criticism of government actors such as law enforcement officials is one of the foremost reasons why we have the First Amendment. And feelings of offense do not trump constitutional protections. Citizens' freedom to speak out against perceived governmental abuses and injustices is necessary to the health of our democracy; were government able to silence such criticisms, meaningful political discourse would be rendered impossible.

By silencing speech with which he disagrees, Representative Hunter has demonstrated disrespect for First Amendment values and the voices of young Americans. He has sent a message to young people in this country that they should stifle passionate expression concerning important issues of public policy. We commend Representative Clay for his resolve to stand up to bullying tactics and protect one of our most cherished constitutional rights.