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What We Know About Trump's Arts Council Nominees

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Two Obscure Picks With No Public Profiles, No Presences in the Creative Community

This article was first published in [DCReport](#). It is written by Jeanette Lenoir.

Today we look at two of Trump's nominees for the National Council on the Arts. The council is an 18-member board that advises the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, or NEA, on grants and policies.

Barbara Coleen Long

Barbara Coleen Long is the wife of Rep. Billy Long (R-Mo.), who lists his top policy issue as "Conservative values." A 20-year search of the Nexis news database turns up not a single mention of her before her July 12 nomination to this prestigious federal advisory board. Repeated requests to the congressman's office to interview with Mrs. Long were unsuccessful.

The nominee is unknown in the national arts world—or even in her own small community of Springfield, other than as someone who attends local performances. Indeed, prior to July 12, the day Trump nominated her, we could not find a single news report mentioning her.

Leslie Forrester, executive director of the Springfield Regional Arts Council, said that although she isn't familiar with Long, she supports her nomination.

"Congressman Long and his family have been involved in the arts. They've been involved in our local community theater, local cinema and others. They've been patrons of the arts for a very long time and we certainly count them as allies in terms of advocacy work as well," Forrester said.

"I have not had the opportunity yet to meet Mrs. Long but I think that having her representation coming from a mid-western state and coming from a smaller community and understanding what is happening in the arts and in rural Missouri as well as our metro area will be beneficial because there are lots of great arts things happening outside of metro areas and continuing that kind of representation at the national level will ensure that the National Endowment for the Arts is able to fully engage with the arts at all levels," Forrester said.

If the Longs were truly allies of Springfield's art community, Forrester would have been familiar with her, but she's not. The city population is 167,000 and the metro area only 550,000 people, small enough that people engaged in any broad field of activity tend to be known by the leaders in

specific fields, like the arts.

Rep. Long makes his conservative views crystal clear on his congressional website—he wants to overturn *Roe v. Wade* which allows abortion. So unless the Longs live in a house divided, it's logical to surmise his wife holds similar conservative viewpoints.

Considering Long's family stance on morality, the question then must be: Will she support art deemed controversial? Or is her nomination a signal of the type of country Trump wants to create, one that shares his philistine views on arts and culture?

Michelle Itczak

The fourth nominee is Michelle Itczak, a board certified, registered art therapist and a licensed mental health counselor in Indiana. What she will contribute to the national arts scene is anyone's guess.

Itczak did not respond to a message left on her answering machine. A secretary in her therapy office said she would notify Itczak. The nominee did not respond to these requests.

How did Itczak get nominated, being relatively unknown in her own town's art scene? Even Jeremy Efroymson, a major name in the Indianapolis art scene, declined to comment.

People named to federal boards usually have track records that get them into the news. So we did a Nexis news database search for all English language news going back 20 years to find news reports prior to the July 12 appointment by Trump.

Here is the entire file on Itczak from The Terre Haute Tribune-Star, first from a story in 2010:

Michelle Itczak has resigned from her position as South Vermillion's girls' soccer coach to work at Riley Children's Hospital in Indianapolis. Itczak will begin an art therapy program at Riley.

And there is this from a story six years ago on a group dynamics:

In the conflict resolution workshop, the participants discussed how to avoid mismanaging conflicts to avoid more damage. "If handled positively, I believe conflict is an opportunity to grow," said session leader Michelle Itczak, an adjunct professor in SMWC's Master of Art in Art Therapy Program. "Overcoming those challenges can build trust and strengthen relationships."

And from The Indianapolis Star that same year:

"Art is a positive outlet for anyone, but particularly incarcerated individuals because it is a nonviolent way for them to express themselves," said Michelle Itczak, a board-certified registered art therapist, licensed mental health counselor and president of the Indiana Art Therapy Association.

The only other published report we could find was from The Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette in 2012:

Every week, Katherine travels to Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis so medicine can be put into her blood. And that's where she met Michelle Itczak.

Itczak is an art therapist who helps children. She urged Katherine to start drawing and painting on the days she had her treatments.

Whatever Trump's, or more likely his staff's, reasoning for selecting these four nominees to sit on the National Council on the Arts is anyone's guess but we don't have to dig too deep when it comes to understanding his shallowness and the arts. There's no mystery to Trump. He's all about worshipping him and money.

When Aretha Franklin, the queen of soul, passed away last month week, many took note of her stirring performances and her [2015 Kennedy Center Honors, which brought former President Barack Obama to tears](#). Not Trump. He reduced her decades of contributions to the arts as one of the greatest singers the world has ever known to this: "[She worked for me.](#)"

Trump, the only president to deliberately skip the Kennedy Center honors that are arguably America's most important evening for the arts, doesn't care about the arts. His selections seem to fit this pattern.

Featured image: Still from the video [The NEA: Serving Our Nation Through the Arts](#).

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