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BUDGET BOONDOGGLE AWARD

THE SHOW MUST GO ON?

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With unemployment at 9.5 percent and expected to continue rising through the end of the year, it may be understandable that individuals are looking for light-hearted entertainment. It is unclear, however, why the Federal Government – facing a \$1.8-trillion deficit this year – considers it prudent to spend taxpayer dollars on puppets, clowns, and balancing acts as part of an economic “stimulus” package.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 includes \$50 million for the National Endowment of the Arts [NEA]. The NEA will distribute more than \$29 million to 630 nonprofit arts groups across the country. Included in the NEA projects are the following:

- A sum of \$25,000 for the *Spiral Q Puppet Theater*. The theater is described as a “living museum for hundreds of giant puppets and parade items.”
- Another \$25,000 for the *Pig Iron Theatre Company*. The self-proclaimed “dance-clown-theatre ensemble” aims to “create original performance works which test and break boundaries of dance, drama, clown, puppetry, music and text.”
- An additional \$25,000 for *Jess Curtis/Gravity, Inc.* This group, founded as a “research and development vehicle for very live performance,” currently features performances ranging from the “most basic” (rolling balls on stage) to the “most spectacular” (a world-renowned exotic broom balancing act in which performers . . . well, just leave it at that).



While the arts are an important and valuable part of American culture, it is clearly wasteful for a Federal Government burdened by record debt to spend money on puppets, clowns, or balancing acts. But it is the funding of these projects in an emergency economic “stimulus” bill that gets them the latest Budget Boondoggle Award. Vice President Joe Biden was recently quoted saying “we know some of this money will be wasted.” Truer words have never been spoken.

The rest of the projects can be found at:

<http://www.nea.gov/recovery/nea-recovery-act-grants.html>