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Inspired by art and a Kennedy's example



Massachusetts Cultural Council executive director Anita Walker discussed the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy at a GuitarFest event. Photo by Lauren McFalls

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Invoking the wisdom of the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy regarding the role of government in the arts, Massachusetts Cultural Council executive director Anita Walker said Thursday that the arts are "our collective asset and collective responsibility."

Walker's speech, titled "Senator Edward Kennedy and Support for the Arts," was part of Boston GuitarFest, a joint collaboration between Northeastern University and the New England Conservatory. The event, which was dedicated to the memory of the late senator, was held in a lecture hall at the conservatory.

Walker applauded Kennedy's commitment to the arts, which, she noted, he incorporated into his argument for universal health care. From doctor training to patient treatment, Kennedy maintained that the arts play a vital role in health care, she said.

In contrast with Kennedy's viewpoint, Walker said that public school officials often choose to cut art programs from the school-wide curriculum when budgets are lean. The schools need more creative courses for the imaginative mind, said Walker, adding that all children deserve the opportunity to participate in the arts -- a right that begins at birth.

Walker has served as executive director of the council since April 2007 and is the Commonwealth's highest-ranking cultural official, overseeing a \$14 million budget that supports a range of grants, services, and programs for the arts, humanities and sciences in every community in Massachusetts.

In April, Northeastern announced the renaming of the public charter high school Health Careers Academy to the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers, in honor of the late senator. Northeastern is home to the academy, which was founded by health professionals in 1996 and prepares Boston students for careers in health sciences and related fields.

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