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# Not all cash is equal to film fest

## State funds nixed; fund-raisers set

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Ann Arbor Film Festival organizers hope a pair of benefit events this week will close a financial gap created by their decision earlier this year to turn down a state grant as a protest against censorship.

They are trying to raise at least \$10,000 through a day-long drive by Ann Arbor Radio on Tuesday and events Friday and Saturday at the Ann Arbor School of Yoga.

The film festival faces a \$13,650 shortfall in its \$192,000 budget.

"We have an international reputation as an experimental film festival," says festival executive director Christen McArdle. "We don't want to limit the content of our films."

The issue began in March, when a study from the private Midland-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy singled out festival films for questionable content. The report caught the attention of state Rep. Shelley Taub (R-Bloomfield Hills), who gathered testimony from festival board members before proposing an amendment that would prevent the festival from applying for state grant money for two fiscal years.

That amendment never made it into the state budget, which passed the House and Senate last week. The festival board, meanwhile, had decided to seek money independently.

Taub said Friday, "If they're not accepting state dollars, then I have no concern. The Supreme Court has spoken on this. There is a difference between what you as an individual can pay to watch and what taxpayers pay for with their money."

McArdle is frustrated by long-standing language in grant agreements from the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs that states that money will not be awarded to "projects or activities that include displays of human wastes on religious symbols, displays of sex acts, and depictions of flag desecration."

"The definition of sex acts is especially vague," says McArdle. "When you ask for some guidelines, you're told with a wink, 'Oh, you know what we mean.' It's ridiculous."

According to McArdle, the festival board is sensitive to films that might be deemed inappropriate for some audiences, and screen them late at night. The festival has shown envelope-pushing experimental films since 1963, including early works from Andy Warhol, Yoko Ono, Brian DePalma and Gus Van Sant.

McArdle can't understand why legislators would give such credence to the Mackinac Center study, which singled out films largely based on title: the animated "Boobies," the short live-action satire "Tampon Tragedy" and an experimental documentary about vice president Dick Cheney called "America's Biggest Dick."

Of the films actually seen by representatives of the Mackinac Center, the documentary "American Dream" includes a hard-core sex clip on a TV screen in one scene. "Proteus" is a sexually charged prison drama with a handful of graphic sex scenes. Objections to Crispin Glover's "What Is It?" whose cast is comprised mostly of actors with Down syndrome, come from its preview trailer.

Chicago filmmaker Dolores Wilber was surprised to find her film, "Chests," among the highlighted titles. The 2 1/2 -minute film shows two men, naked from waist to neck, continuously bumping into each other. "It's a pretty straightforward film about headless conflict," says Wilber. "It may have sexual undertones, but it's not about sex and certainly not pornographic."

For Bob Bolak, the general manager for Ann Arbor Radio (WQKL 107.1 FM), the Tuesday fund-raiser sends a message about the need for government arts funding. He thinks that events like the film festival are what encourage progressive companies like Google to settle in a place like Ann Arbor.

"If you strip away the arts from Ann Arbor, it's not Ann Arbor anymore," he says.

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