

# **FRIENDS of the BARNES FOUNDATION**

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February 15, 2011

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **U.S. CONGRESSMAN GERLACH AND MONTGOMERY COUNTY COMMISSIONER CASTOR URGE GOVERNOR CORBETT TO HALT TAXPAYER FUNDING OF PARKWAY BARNES**

(MERION STATION, PA, U.S.A. – Feb. 15, 2011) **U.S. Congressman Jim Gerlach** and **Montgomery County Commissioner Bruce Castor** have long stood out as supporters of **Friends of the Barnes Foundation**'s efforts for permanent preservation of the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania. Now they are urging **Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett** to end the senseless waste of close to \$50 million in state taxpayer funds on a facility being constructed less than five miles from the Barnes historic site in Merion. The construction is part of a plan to transform The Barnes from an internationally-revered educational institution and unique art experience in Merion, into a typical art-tourism venue on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway at a cost of at least \$200 million. The tourism project was envisioned by **Pew Charitable Trusts CEO Rebecca Rimel** and a consortium of City commercial and political interests. The plan to dismantle the Merion site has long sparked worldwide condemnation in the arts and historic preservation communities, further fueled by the release in 2009 of the documentary "**The Art of the Steal.**" The Merion site is eligible for National Historic Landmark status, but only if it remains intact. Private-sector fundraising for the project has apparently leveled-off, while public-sector funding has dramatically increased under former Governor Ed Rendell, from \$25 million to close to \$50 million.

Congressman Gerlach and Commissioner Castor have written a joint letter to Governor Tom Corbett's Legal Counsel, **Stephen S. Aichele**, about the "wrong-headed decision to borrow money and compel current and future generations of Pennsylvania taxpayers to pay off the debt incurred for the unnecessary Barnes relocation project." The full text of the letter follows below. Philadelphia artist and member of the Friends of the Barnes Steering Committee **Barbara Rosin** remarked, "The Corbett administration has an historic opportunity to halt this waste of taxpayer dollars in its tracks and prevent the destruction of a unique, irreplaceable gem. Will Governor Corbett halt public funding for a project that threatens to make The Barnes a 'Poster Child' for political corruption? Thousands of people in Pennsylvania and the international art world certainly hope so."

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February 7, 2011

Stephen S. Aichele, General Counsel  
Office of Governor Tom Corbett  
225 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Steve:

We are writing to request your review of the continuing use of Pennsylvania taxpayer funds for the further subsidization of the controversial relocation of the Barnes art collection in Lower Merion Township, Montgomery County to the Ben Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia.

By way of background, the collection's original owner, Dr. Albert Barnes, specifically stated in his will that the collection must permanently be displayed in the unique museum he built in the Township.

After the Montgomery County Orphans Court granted the Barnes Board of Directors the opportunity to pursue this project, the previous administration compounded our concerns – and those expressed by many of our constituents – by committing slightly more than \$47 million of taxpayer funds through the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Project (RACP) to building a new museum in Philadelphia. It is our understanding that approximately \$38.7 million of that RACP money remains unspent.

Consequently, we are seeking your assistance in having the Corbett Administration thoroughly re-evaluate the wrong-headed decision to borrow money and compel current

and future generations of Pennsylvania taxpayers to pay off the debt incurred for the unnecessary Barnes relocation project. Further, we would respectfully request that the Corbett Administration take any and all steps necessary to halt the release of additional funding for this relocation project until a review is completed.

We sincerely believe that at a time when our Commonwealth faces the enormous challenge of closing a multi-billion dollar budget gap, our constituents – and all taxpayers – deserve the peace of mind in knowing that every dollar is spent prudently on projects of widespread community support and benefit. Unfortunately, in this instance, it appears our taxpayers are subsidizing the relocation of an unparalleled art collection from its home township and community in order to benefit another municipality just a few miles away. Lower Merion Township officials, the Montgomery County Commissioners, and their respective citizens have expressed outrage at this raid, yet their hard-earned tax dollars apparently are being used to accomplish it. Such a use of tax money should not be condoned or allowed any longer, and we would appreciate your immediate review of this matter with the hope that you will recommend the cessation of RCAP monies being used for this project.

Thank you for your cooperation and please let us know if we can provide additional information or assistance.

Respectfully,

Jim Gerlach  
Member of Congress

Bruce Castor  
Montgomery County Commissioner

JG: kaw

cc: Senate President Pro Tempore Joseph Scarnatti  
Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi  
House Speaker Smith  
House Majority Leader Michael Turzai  
Sen. John C. Rafferty Jr.  
Sen. Stewart Greenleaf  
Sen. Bob Mensch  
Sen. Daylin Leach  
Rep. Mike Vereb  
Rep. Todd Stephens  
Rep. Warren Kampf  
Rep. Bob Godshall  
Rep. Kate Harper  
Rep. Tom Quigley  
Rep. Marcy Toepel  
Rep. Matt Bradford