

RELEASE IN PART
B6

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Sunday, March 4, 2012 1:31 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: American Film Showcase/Gasland

FYI – per our conversation

From: Lee Satterfield [redacted]
Sent: Sunday, March 04, 2012 10:46 AM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Cc: Caitlin Klevorick; Stock, Ann
Subject: Fwd: American Film Showcase/Gasland

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Cheryl,

I wanted to share with you an email Rick Ruth sent me on this subject/dispute over Gasland, as I asked his opinion. He's response is thoughtful and the only leg I think we can stand on. See below.

Overall, I think “accuracy” is almost a red herring dragged across the trail and that getting into a discussion/dispute about individual points of fact is (1) not our job and (2) likely to cloud the larger issues. Films, including documentary films, are a form of artistic and cultural expression. They are not pure fiction or artistry, but neither are they meant to be a classroom lecture, the nightly news or the police blotter. Every documentary film is someone’s interpretation of reality. They are inherently tendentious; they have a point-of-view. And to be interesting, gripping, persuasive, provocative, they must have a recognizable perspective. The filmmaker (artist) is allowed to juxtapose images, play with time, caricature, and distort to make a point. Sophisticated audiences understand this—and unsophisticated audiences should be taught it.

Who decides if a film (painting, sculpture, photo, song) is art. Not solely government functionaries, that’s why we work with USC (BAM, Met, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center...). Opinions don’t need to be unanimous (an impossibility in any case). What counts is that recognized professionals and bodies of experts find merit and quality in a film. Gasland, as you know, has received the following accolades:

- 2010 Environmental Media Award for Best Documentary Feature
- 2010 Sundance Film Festival Special Jury Prize
- 2010 Big Sky Documentary Film Festival Artistic Vision award
- 2010 Thin Line Film Festival Audience Award
- 2010 Yale Environmental Film Festival Grand Jury Prize
- 2010 Sarasota Film Festival Special Jury Prize
- 2011 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing for Nonfiction Programming (Josh Fox)

It was also nominated for a 2011 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and 2011 Writer’s Guild Award or Best Documentary Screenplay.

For me, that settles the issue of artistic merit.

As for the debate, it will continue regardless of what we do. Energy in Depth, an oil and gas industry group, posted a list of alleged factual inaccuracies. The *Gasland* posted a point-by-point rebuttal. So it goes.

What matters to me is:

- *Gasland* represents an important point of view that is part of an ongoing debate in the United States.
- With or without disputed portions, it is certainly solidly within the responsible spectrum of the debate and is worthy of viewing and consideration.
- Making it available underscores our commitment to freedom of expression.
- Our posts choose. And they choose based on their foreign policy/public diplomacy needs and goals. Our job is to support their efforts.
- Our government has a long history of airing diverse and controversial opinions. If we did not do so, then our products might justifiably be accused of being little more than propaganda.

One thought—as I climb down from my high horse--when we offer the films, do we provide any kind of synopsis of commentary and reaction along with film to help posts judge (sight unseen in many cases) if the film is right for the audience and purpose they have in mind? If so, we could note-- in the *Gasland* portion—that there is strong controversy and even provide the industry link and the *Gasland* link.

Cheers,
Rick