

Keillor rates Williams above average

Arts stance won over radio host

By MEA ANDREWS
of the Missoulian

Garrison Keillor brought his famous storytelling style to Missoula on Saturday, entertaining local Democrats and arts supporters with stories about a female cousin named Duke and a family gathering a quarter of a century past.

But his main mission was political: to support Montana Rep. Pat Williams' bid for Congress this fall because Williams supports artists and their work.

'I think that's a measure of a man — when he's courageous, and it's not even required.'

— Garrison Keillor

"I am so pleased, at this point in my life, to find somebody else to admire," he told a sold-out crowd of more than 200 people who paid \$30 each for the fund-raiser at the Village Red Lion Motor Inn. "You start to run out of people after a while and you get a little cynical about politicians."

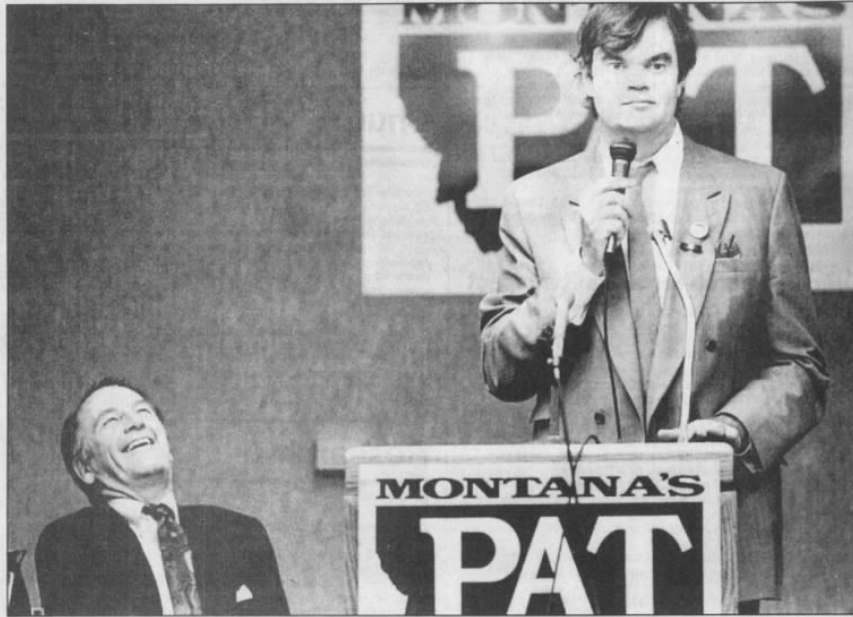
But Williams, Keillor said, "stood up for the arts and the artists at a time when other people were looking for cover. I think that's a measure of a man — when he's courageous, and it's not even required."

Williams has been a champion of continued national funding of the arts through the National Endowment for the Arts, even when the artists and their work come under fire for being too controversial. He opposes

"pornographic" work but overall believes art is a form of speech protected by the Constitution.

Keillor agrees with Williams' assessment that NEA's financial backing helps millions of people enjoy art and music in their own communities, adding to quality of life for all — even people in rural states.

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KURT WILSON/Missoulian

REP. PAT WILLIAMS laughs at a story being told by humorist Garrison Keillor Saturday afternoon during a fund-raiser in Missoula for Williams' campaign.

Humorist offers his signature homespun insights

Humorist Garrison Keillor — as usual, using his mild-mannered, folksy understatement to make profound and humorous observations — expounded on a number of topics at his Saturday appearance in Missoula. Here's a sample:

■ **On family values:** "Politicians are supposed to run the government. When they come to us for election, they are supposed to talk about public issues. Family is not a public issue."

"Politicians who are unable to make sense of government should not compensate for it by telling us what our families ought to look like."

■ **On the month of November:** "A grim month, one that there's little to be thankful for, a month that — as we say in Minnesota — God designed to show people who don't drink what a hangover is all about."

■ **On his family reunion 25 years ago:** "We were too many people under one

roof, joined in close proximity, including members of the family who had not spoken to each other in months and who did not want to speak to each other."

"Some of the few Democrats in our family huddled off in one corner, enduring the stares of the others, hoping that the subject of the war would not come up."

■ **On "freedom of expression":** "My devotion to freedom of expression is astoundingly thin. I have sat for many years in front of a blank piece of paper, trying to express myself, and I found no freedom there at all. It is the necessity of expression that turned the tide for me."

■ **On turning 50:** Days before his birthday, Keillor said, his mother confessed that she lied about his age to get him into kindergarten early because he was so precocious.

He sighed: "To find out that there were a lot of wild oats to sow, if only you'd known that you were young enough to sow them."

■ **On parents:** "Sometimes we look at our parents and have this intense fear of heredity. Sometimes we have this solace and consummate respect."

■ **On parenting:** "If you have a child who's an artist, it's a broadening experience for a person, I'm sure. Like having them join the circus or something, or having them become a lightrope walker."

■ **On Republicans:** "They have a vision of this country and it's not going to work. It's too late. We can't all become sanctimonious brethren."

■ **On Pat Williams:** "He's a man of little vanity. He wears interesting lies. He wears bifocals, the old kind with the lines still visible. One respects all of these things."

■ **On Bill Clinton:** "I think he's doing a great job for us this year. He's stuck to this campaign, he's stuck to his guns, and done it with such cheerfulness, with such good humor, and with such obvious pleasure in the work of politics."

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Keillor

(continued)

"The NEA works in exactly the way conservatives say government should: with a small amount of money — enough to make a difference — and then to bow out," Keillor said.

"It is so ironic and tragic that, thanks to right-wing demagogues, the NEA should be indelibly associated in the minds of most Americans with performance artists in downtown Manhattan.

"It has always been more important to people in the great middle part of the country, who count on the arts as a necessity in life. ...

In a small town, where people live in splendid isolation, the theater and music and performance (art) and galleries are a community focal point."

Williams faces Republican Rep. Ron Marlenee for Montana's single remaining seat in the U.S. House.

Marlenee, arguing that the NEA funds pornography, has made Williams' NEA record a campaign issue.

Arts funding "is not the most important issue in this election," Keillor said. "It is a small issue. But I think it is these small issues that are a measure of a person."

The humorist and author — best known for his 13 years on the wildly successful "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show — also touched on national Democratic politics, and

took some swipes at Republicans along the way.

Americans are tired of preachings about the wrongs of homosexuality and family values, he said.

"It was so reassuring to see that poll in The New York Times that said people want to hear about the economy and they want to hear about health care — by a huge percentage," he said.

Republicans, he said, "have chosen the wrong side. They have come down on the side of the past."

"We believe passionately in the future and we believe passionately in making a country that offers our children, my children ... the same great good opportunity that we had at their age and that isn't there today."

"These were the loyalist moments of my side attempt — is now becoming politically