

**Prepared Statement of  
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Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities  
Before the  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives  
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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Simpson, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

After thirty years in Congress, it is curious to find myself on the other side of the hearing table. But, I could not be more honored to come before a panel of former colleagues whom I hold in such high esteem to testify on behalf of the fiscal year 2011 appropriations request for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In my seven months as NEH Chairman, I have been constantly reminded of just how important this small but vital agency is to the humanities in the United States.

The budget justification we submitted to Congress last month describes in some detail our current activities and our plans for the next fiscal year. I would like to take a moment of the committee's time today to discuss some of the key features of our request and to offer a perspective about the agency and how the humanities fit into the fabric of American society.

My view of the humanities is rather straightforward: They are about bringing perspective to the personal and public challenges of the day. History, literature, philosophy, and related disciplines illuminate the human condition. Values, for instance, cannot simply be understood as abstract concoctions. They take on meaning as individuals address enduring questions about life's purposes. Such examinations are made possible by the study of civilization's greatest literary and cultural works—that is, by engaging in humanistic inquiry and reflection.

In carrying out my duties as NEH Chairman, I have come to see that culture can be used either to unite peoples of differing backgrounds, or magnified as a lightning rod to accentuate their differences. At issue are not only problems of social cohesion at home but also direct challenges deliberately leveled to our values and capacities abroad.

It is in this overall context of a challenged America that the NEH has launched an initiative we are calling *Bridging Cultures*. The initiative is being designed to help American citizens gain a deeper understanding of our own rich and varied cultural heritage, as well as the history and culture of other nations. We have requested a modest sum of money in our FY 2011 budget that will be used to launch pilot projects that engage scholars, public audiences, the state humanities councils, and educators in the cultural bridging themes. Projects relating to these themes also will be encouraged

through each of our grant programs, and the traditional work of the state humanities councils, utilizing where possible public and private sector partnerships.

There is abundant evidence of the need for a *Bridging Cultures* initiative. Numerous reports indicate that many Americans lack even cursory knowledge of other nations, not to mention their own history. Such lack of knowledge has serious and ultimately dangerous ramifications: incivility and disharmony at home; misunderstandings detrimental to our national security abroad; an inability to compete effectively in the global economy; and an uninformed and limited view of the world in which we live. As President Obama said in his address last June to students at Cairo University: “There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other, to respect one another; and to seek common ground.” The NEH’s *Bridging Cultures* initiative is intended to reflect the concerns the President so eloquently expressed.

As a key component of this initiative, I have begun a fifty-state civility tour to try to make clear that coarseness in public manners can jeopardize social cohesion. Civilization requires civility. Words matter. Just as polarizing attitudes can jeopardize social cohesion and even public safety, healing approaches, such as Lincoln’s call in the closing days of the Civil War for a new direction “with malice toward none,” can uplift and help bring society and the world closer together.

To some, the connection of “civility” to the humanities may not be immediately apparent. The Oxford English Dictionary helpfully reminds us that among the original definitions of this word is “training in the humanities.” Through humanities studies, it was believed, citizens could acquire a depth of understanding of history and culture that more readily allows civic engagement free of the rancor that often characterizes the expression of ill-informed opinions.

These notions of civility form the backdrop for the civility tour. Little is more important for the world’s leading democracy in this change-intensive century than establishing an ethos of thoughtfulness and decency of expression in the public square. The teaching and learning of the humanities will be central to this endeavor. The exchange of ideas and the consideration of other viewpoints are central to the humanities. Thus far, I have been to more than a dozen states and spoken at venues ranging from university and museum lecture halls to hospitals for veterans. The response I’ve received has been overwhelmingly positive. There is a hunger in America for thoughtful dialogue and balanced debate on the issues of the day.

While *Bridging Cultures* will be a special emphasis of our activities in FY 2011, the Endowment will continue to pursue its primary mission of providing support for high quality projects in the humanities—programs that improve instruction in the humanities in the nation’s schools and institutions of higher education; the efforts of the state humanities councils to bring the humanities to citizens in their states; public programs that creatively draw people into the humanities; scholarly research that creates new

knowledge and insights and that preserves and makes accessible the best works and ideas of the past; and efforts to leverage non-federal support for the humanities.

With the funds we receive from Congress each year, the Endowment is able to support approximately 1,000 humanities grants that reach citizens in all areas of the nation. Noteworthy projects and programs that appropriations make possible include:

**Opportunities for school teachers and higher education faculty to improve their instruction in the humanities**

- Each year, NEH-sponsored summer institutes, seminars, and workshops provide opportunities for intensive study of the humanities to approximately 2,400 school teachers and 750 college teachers. In the summer of 2010, for example, school teachers will be able to attend such programs as a workshop at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on the creation of the American republic, a seminar at Swarthmore College on the Arabic novel in translation, and an institute at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse, on archaeology in the Upper Mississippi River valley.
- In FY 2011, the Endowment will launch a special initiative in the Challenge Grants program to encourage two-year colleges to strengthen humanities programs and resources at these important institutions of higher education.
- NEH's EDSITEment website is a nationally recognized gateway for teachers seeking rich humanities resources on the Internet. A partnership with the Verizon Foundation, the site now contains over 250 websites, selected for their excellent humanities content and interactive design, and over 400 lesson plans for teachers spanning the humanities curriculum for grades K-12. More than 300,000 visitors—teachers, students, parents—avail themselves of EDSITEment's rich resources each month.

**Projects sponsored by the state humanities councils**

- Funds appropriated each year to NEH are provided to the 56 state and jurisdictional humanities councils to help the councils sponsor thousands of reading and discussion programs, documentary films, symposia, literacy programs, Chautauqua presentations, and state and local history projects. These projects reach millions of Americans in rural areas, urban neighborhoods, and suburban communities.
- Through NEH's *We the People* program, the state councils also receive special support for projects related to American history and culture. For example, the Virginia Foundation on the Humanities is sponsoring special programs through the Virginia Folklife, Virginia African American Heritage, and Virginia Indian Heritage programs; and the Idaho Humanities Council is supporting a program, *American History/American Identity*, that includes presentations for scholars and

other experts, institutes for K-12 teachers, and a reading and discussion series exploring the theme of American identity.

### **Opportunities for Americans to engage in lifelong learning in the humanities**

- Millions of people annually visit NEH-sponsored exhibitions in museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions. In addition, more than 35 million people annually watch documentary films on television or listen to radio programs made possible through the Endowment's grants, including, for example, recent documentaries on PBS on twentieth-century U.S. presidents, the life and times of Louisa May Alcott, and *The Rape of Europa*, a film about the theft, destruction, and survival of Europe's art treasures during the Third Reich.
- NEH support helps museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions draw significant audiences and thus to spur local cultural tourism. In 2009, 310 traveling exhibitions and 122 long-term exhibitions appeared at hundreds of venues across the country. For example, with funds from NEH, the traveling exhibition, *Pride and Passion: The African-American Baseball Experience*, has attracted more than 720,000 people at 35 libraries coast to coast, including Poughkeepsie Public Library in New York; Natrona County Public Library in Casper, Wyoming; and Milwaukee Public Library in Wisconsin.

### **Preservation of and access to cultural and intellectual resources essential for the American people**

- NEH supports projects that preserve and reformat the intellectual content of historically significant books and periodicals; preserve and provide access to important archival materials and library special collections; create humanities research tools and reference works such as dictionaries, bibliographies, and encyclopedias; record, document, and archive information relating to an estimated 3,000 of the world's 6,000-7,000 spoken languages that are on the verge of extinction; and offer preservation education and training opportunities. Funds requested for FY 2011 will continue support for the National Digital Newspaper Program, a long-term NEH/Library of Congress partnership that is converting millions of pages of historically significant U.S. newspapers into digital files and mounting them on a national, web-accessible database. Over 1.7 million pages have been processed and posted to date on the Library's "Chronicling America" website.
- The Endowment also provides more than one hundred grants each year to small institutions in support of their special preservation and training needs. Since this program was established a decade ago, NEH has awarded more than 1,300 such grants to institutions in every state of the nation. Recent grantees have included, for example, the Kitsap County Historical Society in Bremerton, Washington; the Oglebay Institute in Wheeling, West Virginia; the Mountain Home Public Library

in Mountain Home, Idaho; the Kirtland Public Library in Kirtland, Ohio; and the Chickasaw Nation in Ada, Oklahoma.

### **Research and scholarship that add to our knowledge and understanding of the humanities**

- NEH annually provides grants to hundreds of scholars each year for individual and collaborative research in the humanities. Every year, former grant recipients publish books and journal articles on important humanities subjects. Many of these publications win academic, scholarly, and literary prizes, including Pulitzer Prizes for history and biography, National Book Awards, the Bancroft Prize (generally recognized as the most prestigious award in the field of American history), and other awards for intellectual distinction.
- Nearly \$40 million of NEH grant funds each year support scholarship and other advanced research in the humanities on the nation's college and university campuses, research libraries, archives, and other humanities institutions.

### **Innovative use of digital information technology in support of the humanities**

- In the humanities as in the sciences, digital technology has changed the way in which scholars perform their work. Technology allows humanists to raise new questions and radically changes the ways in which archival materials can be searched, mined, displayed, taught, and analyzed. NEH supports projects that employ digital technology to improve humanities research, education, preservation, access, and public programming. Recent notable awards have included a grant to the University of Kentucky to create digital, web-based tools to enable students to study medieval Latin legal manuscripts, many of which form the basis for modern-day law; an award to North Carolina Central University in Durham for work on a jazz research digital library; and a grant to the University of California, Riverside, to develop an interactive website to examine the historical development of colonial California.

### **Leveraging non-federal support for the humanities**

- NEH continues to be an important catalyst for private support for the humanities. From the establishment of the agency in 1965 through fiscal year 2009, Endowment matching grants for humanities projects have stimulated more than \$2.08 billion in third-party donations: \$1.66 billion in general institutional support leveraged by NEH's Challenge Grants program and \$415 million in non-federal contributions in support of specific humanities projects.
- When institutions undertake a project with NEH support, they typically commit their own resources to bear a share of its costs. In FY 2009, for example, institutional cost sharing contributed nearly \$90 million for the humanities. That same year, third-party contributions in response to NEH matching and Challenge

Grants raised another \$38.9 million for the humanities. In all, in FY 2009 NEH grants totaling \$134.5 million leveraged non-federal contributions of \$128.8 million.

I am convinced that the American people have been well served by these NEH projects and programs, and ask that Congress continue its support of this small agency committed to expanding the idea base of America.

I recognize that this is a difficult budget year and that this committee and the Congress face many tough choices. While NEH is a relatively small part of the federal budget, our impact is significant. Federal funding for the humanities is especially critical during this time of economic distress.

On the assumption that over the next decade the need to restore fiscal order will consume families, cities, states, and the federal government, where does the case for continued public support for the humanities fit in? There is historical precedent for consideration of the humanities during other difficult periods in American history. In the middle of our country's most traumatic conflict, President Lincoln in 1862 signed the Morrill Act in 1862 establishing land grant universities in every state in the union. Likewise, in the darkest days of the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt foresaw that support for the humanities and the arts—via the WPA, the Federal Writers' Project, and other federal programs—would be a unifying act, providing work for some and enlightenment for all.

The universe of individuals working in institutions engaged in the humanities in the United States today is significant. The nation's 4,400 institutions of higher learning employ approximately 125,000 humanities faculty who teach millions of students. An additional 3.7 million teachers—many, if not most, teaching humanities subjects—are hard at work teaching the millions of school children who attend the more than 127,000 K-12 schools in this country. Just as importantly, America's 17,500 museums and historical societies, which each year greet 2.3 million visitors per day, form the cultural backbone of cities and towns across the country. Collectively, these humanities institutions, and the practitioners they employ, form a critical part of the American economy.

A complicating trauma in the humanities today, however, is the recent loss of asset value of the endowments of many colleges, universities, museums, libraries, historical societies, archives, and the philanthropic organizations that support them. In addition, state support of higher education and cultural endeavors has declined, and at the institutional level there has been a general erosion of education dollars away from areas of inquiry like history, literature, languages, and philosophy that provide context and perspective to issues that confront the nation and individual citizens.

Even though globalization requires cross-cultural knowledge, respectful understanding of peoples and their problems, and such basics as the ability to speak other languages, colleges and universities are increasingly emphasizing what some consider

more intensively job relevant studies. Hence the role of the NEH in supporting humanities research and humanities disciplines is more critical than ever.

I recognize that this committee is challenged perhaps more than in any recent year in seeking to sort through priorities, as difficult economic times put pressure on all parts of the federal budget. In this context, I would simply note that hard times have increased demand and utilization of many cultural initiatives at the same time resource capacities have been reduced.

There is, of course, cost involved in any federal program and in many cases a cost as well to not meeting certain social obligations. While public expenditures for NEH programs can be measured precisely, the indirect costs to society of not paying attention to the disciplines that bring perspective to the most pressing issues of the day are more conjectural. The magnitude of that cost is incalculable, but it is not slight.

Thank you.