

Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives—by John Churchill, President, National Humanities Alliance and Secretary, The Phi Beta Kappa Society (April 3, 2008)
Regarding Fiscal Year 2009 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Humanities Alliance and its 93 member organizations and institutions, I am pleased to testify for the record in support of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Our members, and the thousands of teachers, scholars, humanities organizations and institutions they represent, use NEH grants to maintain a strong system of academic research, education and public programs in the humanities. ***The Alliance respectfully urges the Subcommittee to support funding of \$177 million for NEH in FY 2009, an increase of about \$32 million above the FY 2008 appropriation and the President's request.***

SUMMARY

The President's FY 2009 Budget requests \$144.4 million for NEH in FY 2009, approximately the same amount as in FY 2008. The President would offset increases for overhead costs and Administration priorities with nearly \$7 million in cuts to two of NEH's core programs, **Preservation & Access** and **Challenge Grants**. NEH's other core programs, which include **Education, Public Programs, Research**, and the **Federal-State Partnership**, would receive level funding in the President's Budget. We strongly oppose the President's proposed cuts and urge increased funding for all core programs.

As the single largest source of humanities funding in the U.S., NEH plays a pivotal leadership role in the education of our nation's citizens; the creation and dissemination of new knowledge; and the preservation and enrichment of American intellectual and cultural life. Our nation's schools and universities are falling behind in almost every aspect of humanities education and research. A serious reinvigoration of the nation's investment in the humanities is desperately needed if we are to keep pace with the rapidly transforming global environment, and its pressures on our economy, citizens and civic institutions.

Increased NEH funds will enable the agency to sustain its core programs, while extending the reach of its two major initiatives: ***We the People*** (along with a new *WTP* program, **Picturing America**), and the **Digital Humanities Initiative**. The Alliance applauds the agency's responsiveness to national needs. We support the increased funding for special initiatives included in the President's FY 2009 Budget. However, we believe funding for these initiatives should be in conjunction to, not in competition with, NEH's core programs. We are extremely concerned about the proposed elimination of a critical Preservation grant competition, **Stabilizing Humanities Collections**, and urge Congress to instruct the agency not to terminate or substantially reduce this program in FY 2009.

FUNDING ANALYSIS

NEH is funded at a level of \$144.7 million in FY 2008, an increase of \$3.6 million over the previous fiscal year. The humanities community deeply appreciates the final, enacted increase, as well as the extraordinary support demonstrated by the \$19 million increase recommended in the FY 2008 Interior Appropriations bill drafted by this Subcommittee and approved by the full House. The combined impacts of inflation and budget cuts over the last two decades have

seriously eroded NEH's ability to carry out its Congressional mandate. NEH reached its *nominal* funding peak of \$177.5 million in FY 1994, the benchmark set by the humanities community to begin restoration of the agency's budget. However, NEH reached its *real* historical peak in Fiscal Year 1979; if funded at the 1979 level, NEH today would have a budget of more than \$400 million.

The NEH's current funding level is not adequate to meet the needs of humanities practitioners and the communities they serve. There is significant, unmet demand in this country for new knowledge and programming in the humanities—from **history and literature**, to **world cultures, foreign languages, philosophy**, and **ethics**. In FY 2007, NEH was only able to make \$118 million in new awards, but it received more than \$440 million in funding requests.

NATIONAL CORE PROGRAMS

The NEH's national, core program competitions are at the center of the agency's mission to create, preserve, and disseminate knowledge in the humanities. However, since 1994, these programs have suffered disproportionately from budget cuts and inflation. In FY 1994, appropriations for the national NEH core program divisions (**Research, Education, Preservation & Access, Public Programs and Challenge Grants**) totaled \$116.3 million. In FY 2008, appropriations for these divisions totaled only \$66.0 million—a 43% decline in nominal funding.

Preservation and Access Programs—The NEH Preservation & Access Division supports the preservation of materials important to research, education, and public programming, including: books, journals, newspapers, manuscript and archival collections, maps, photographs, films, sound recordings, oral histories, and objects of material culture. NEH works with the community to preserve these resources and supports the creation of reference materials and new methods to increase access to them.

The President's FY 2009 Budget requests \$13.9 million for the Preservation & Access Division, a decrease of \$4.5 million from the FY 2008 level. In addition, the administration proposes to eliminate an important grant competition, Stabilizing Humanities Collections—a program funded at a level of \$3.6 million in FY 2007. We are extremely concerned about the President's proposal, and ask for Congress' assistance in restoring funds to the Preservation & Access Division, and in ensuring that the Stabilization grants are not cancelled in FY 2009.

The President's proposed reduction is an inappropriate response to documented needs for the preservation and dissemination of our nation's cultural heritage. In FY 2007, the Preservation Division reviewed 564 applications, representing more than \$100 million in requested funding. Of these requests, 56 applications were submitted for Stabilization grants, totaling more than \$15.7 million (only 11 were funded). Stabilization grants provide libraries, museums, and historical societies with hard-to-raise funds necessary to improve housing and storage, environmental conditions, security, lighting, and fire protection of collections. According to the Heritage Health Index, a 2004 survey conducted by Heritage Preservation, only 37% of collecting institutions in the United States report adequate storage and over one-half report damage to collections due to poor environmental conditions for their collections.

Challenge Grants—The Challenge Grant program helps local, state and national institutions secure their humanities resources and activities for the long term through fundraising as a means of building permanent resources for the future. Grant uses include: establishing or augmenting

an endowment to pay for humanities staff and programming, renovation or construction of facilities, purchase of capital equipment, upgrade of technology, and additions to collections. Challenge grants are a cost-effective investment of taxpayer dollars. First-time challenge grant recipients must match every federal dollar with 3 nonfederal dollars; recipients of subsequent awards must raise 4 nonfederal dollars for every federal dollar. Since the program started, NEH Challenge grants have leveraged \$1.58 billion in nonfederal support.

Over the years, Challenge Grants have made an extraordinary contribution toward strengthening the institutional base of the humanities. Unfortunately, the President's FY 2009 Budget requests \$7.1 million in funding for Challenge Grants, a decrease of \$2.2 million from the FY 2008 level. In FY 2009, the administration plans to decrease both the number (reduced to 10) and size of challenge grants, particularly de-emphasizing endowment grants. We oppose these cuts. Challenge Grants are among the most valued NEH grants by our members. In FY 2007, NEH received 113 application requests for this division totaling more than \$63 million (20 were funded)—nearly nine times the amount recommended by the administration.

We also strongly disagree with the administration's assessment that endowment-building grants "consume a significant amount of federal resources in their first few years while returning only modest benefits as the endowment accumulates earnings". Endowment building allows institutions to realize years of return on an initial investment, as opposed to a one-time expenditure. Moreover, the increased organizational capacity afforded by the annual return on endowment funds often allows institutions to further expand humanities programming and activities well beyond the scope of the original challenge grant.

Research—NEH Research grants are among the most coveted and prestigious awards for scholars. They support fellowships, stipends, collaborative research, and scholarly editions. Investing in humanities research yields new knowledge, consumed by the public in the form of books, TV/radio documentaries, museum exhibits, course materials, and web resources. The President's FY 2009 Budget requests level funding of \$13.0 million for Research. Research has been among the hardest hit areas of the Endowment. In FY 1994 NEH made 1,054 research awards, including fellowships and stipends, totaling \$31.6 million. In FY 2007, the NEH Research Division made only 309 new awards totaling \$15.6 million (including additional *We the People* funds). NEH research grants are the most competitive offered by NEH, with demand far outstripping supply. In FY 2007, NEH considered 2,537 research applications representing over \$107 million—a 12% success rate. By comparison, in FY 2006, the National Science Foundation made awards to 25% of proposals.

Education—The Division of Education Programs supports professional development opportunities for teachers and faculty members, model curricula, and classroom resources for the humanities. Education grants strengthen teaching and learning in the humanities through all grade levels, from kindergarten to graduate level education. The President's FY 2009 Budget requests level funding of \$12.6 million for Education programs. In contrast, the FY 1994 budget allowed NEH to award \$29.1 million for 352 education projects, including seminars and institutes. In FY 2007, NEH was only able to make 104 new education awards totaling \$13.3 million (including additional *We the People* funds). The division received 429 applications in FY 2007 for \$54 million in requested funds.

Public Programs—It is through NEH-funded public humanities programs that the Endowment works most directly with the American public. From traveling exhibits in local museums and

libraries to film, television and radio productions, NEH public programs reach literally millions of Americans each year. The President's FY 2009 Budget requests level funding of \$12.7 million for Public Programs. In contrast, the FY 1994 budget allowed NEH to award \$27.5 million for 201 public program projects. In FY 2007, NEH was only able to make 113 new public program awards totaling \$13.7 million (including additional *We the People* funds). The division received 494 applications in FY 2007 representing more than \$70 million in requests.

We support significantly increased funding for NEH's competitive, peer-reviewed grant programs through each of the agency's national core programs.

STATE PROGRAMS

Federal/State Partnership—The NEH Federal/State Partnership is a collaborative effort of the NEH and the 56 state humanities councils to ensure the delivery of high-quality humanities programming to communities throughout the country. State councils are nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations governed by local volunteer boards; every federal dollar received by a council for operating support is matched equally by local contributions of cash, goods, or services. The President's FY 2009 Budget requests flat funding for the Federal/State Partnership at \$31.7 million. ***We support significantly increased funding for the state councils through NEH.***

NEH PROGRAM INITIATIVES

Digital Humanities Initiative (DHI)—Launched in FY 2007, DHI offers grants to support the use of digital technologies in conducting research and presenting scholarship. This area has been identified as a high priority by the National Humanities Alliance membership. The President's FY 2009 Budget recommends essentially flat funding of \$2 million for the newly renamed Office of Digital Humanities. ***We support the agency's modest request for this initiative and encourage further investment in the digital humanities throughout NEH.***

We the People (WTP)—*We the People* is an NEH initiative established in 2002 to boost the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture. Over the last five years, *We the People* funds have been used largely to support grants made through the agency's regular program divisions. The President's FY 2009 budget requests an additional \$5 million to support *We the People* and allow full implementation of the NEH's new *Picturing America* initiative—an agency-directed program to distribute reproductions of American masterpieces to schools and libraries nationwide beginning in 2008. ***We support the requested increase for We the People, but urge that new funds be found without drawing resources away from other NEH programs.***

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The well-being of this country depends now, as perhaps never before, on our ability to understand the history, cultures and languages of the world's diverse societies. We appreciate the Subcommittee's request last year for an evaluation by NEH of its global society activities. We look forward to the release of the agency's report, and to working with Congress and the NEH on the future enhancement of the agency's international education programs.

We recognize that Congress faces difficult choices this year. We are asking the Subcommittee to recommend a significant funding increase for the National Endowment for the Humanities of \$32 million in FY 2009, as a necessary investment in the nation's education and research infrastructure. We appreciate the Subcommittee's outstanding support for the arts and humanities in America. Thank you for your consideration of our request.