

## ***Regarding Fiscal Year 2004 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities***

**Testimony Submitted for the Record to the Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations**

**By Robert Vaughan - Director, Virginia Center for the Humanities and President, National Humanities Alliance and  
John Hammer - Director and CEO, National Humanities Alliance**

**Regarding Fiscal Year 2004 Funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities**

**April 2, 2003**

The National Humanities Alliance writes to register our support for President Bush's request for \$152 million for the FY-2004 appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities and to urge you to fully fund that request. The National Humanities Alliance is a coalition of more than 90 national humanities organizations representing scholars, teachers, librarians, archivists, museum professionals, state humanities council leaders and other citizens involved in delivering work in the humanities across the country. A list of our members is attached.

**Introduction** -- The National Endowment for the Humanities is the largest single funder of humanities programs in the United States. The leadership provided by NEH is critical for the national effort to:

- develop Americans' knowledge and understanding of the nation's history and traditions; its values and beliefs
- preserve and provide access to our nation's historical and cultural resources
- strengthen teaching and learning in history, literature, language and other humanities subjects in schools and colleges
- facilitate research and original scholarship in the humanities
- provide opportunities for lifelong learning in the humanities for all Americans
- strengthen the institutional base of the humanities.

With a relatively small investment from Congress, NEH provides access to high-quality educational programs and resources that reach millions of Americans each year. NEH grants are awarded through a competitive, peer-review process based on merit. Not only do NEH grants encourage excellence, but most NEH grants leverage significant private support, stimulating millions of dollars in non-federal support each year. The NEH model is consistent with our nation's commitment to excellence, the democratic process, and a responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

The President's request for FY-2004 is \$152 million, with the proposed \$25 million increase dedicated to the special initiative We the People. As noted in the opening paragraph of this testimony, we support the President's request. We are grateful that the President's proposed increase, if appropriated, would increase the NEH's budget by 22%, a wonderful step in rebuilding this agency that is so important in helping Americans to preserve and understand their past and to confront important issues in the present. As we have mentioned in previous testimony, the combined impact of budget cuts and inflation has reduced the number, diversity, and buying power

of NEH awards over the past decade. We estimate that the agency is running at about 55% of its demonstrated capacity of ten years ago. While the regular NEH programs are level funded in the FY 2004 request, the We the People initiative is consistent with and supportive of the core mission of NEH.

**We the People: An Initiative to Improve the Teaching of American History, Civics and Service aimed at Strengthening Democracy** -- Numerous polls and surveys over the past decade indicate that many Americans lack even a basic knowledge about their nation's history. In 2002, the NEH developed a special initiative to address this problem which chairman Bruce Cole called "historical amnesia". The initiative, We the People, was included in the agency's FY-2003 appropriations request. At that time, no additional funds were requested, but an effort was launched to encourage grant proposals that met the aims of the We the People initiative within regular program divisions. Examples of grants made through the 2003 initiative include: a grant to the Bill of Rights Institute (DC) to create a teachers' guide, pilot workshop, interactive web site, and other teaching aids to improve students' knowledge of the contributions of the founding generation to American democracy; and a grant to the South Valley Academy (NM), for a curriculum enrichment project on World War II and New Mexico's contribution to the war effort.

The initiative appealed to President Bush and others in the White House precisely because of its potential to alleviate one of the many problems faced in combating terrorism. The President and his advisors realized that additional funding would be required to achieve a broader impact. In September of 2002, in a White House Rose Garden Ceremony, President Bush introduced the expanded We the People initiative with the following remarks:

Our Founders believed that the study of history and citizenship should be at the core of every American's education. Yet today, our children have large and disturbing gaps in their knowledge of history...Ignorance of American history and civics weakens our sense of citizenship.

If the President's request is appropriated, We the People will encourage a wide variety of new project proposals that advance our knowledge of the events, ideas, and principles that define the American nation. The initiative calls upon scholars, teachers, filmmakers, museum professionals, librarians, state humanities council leaders and other individuals engaged in humanities work to develop projects on the most significant events and themes in the nation's history and culture.

Another feature of We the People is that it will build upon more than 35 years of significant projects funded by NEH including collections of papers of U.S. presidents such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Dwight D. Eisenhower; the journals of the Lewis and Clark Expeditions; and documentary films about such key figures in American history as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Charles Lindberg, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, George C. Marshall, and Frederick Douglass. The NEH's highly successful summer seminars and institutes may be expanded to include more school and college teachers but also to school administrators and others important to the development of strong school policies.

The initiative highlights the importance of the humanities in understanding the state of our union and in responding effectively in times of crisis. Thomas Jefferson said, "an enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic." NEH's overarching mission -- to encourage the study of history, literature, languages, government, philosophy, ethics, religion and other humanities subjects -- helps us to understand not only our own nation, but also other cultures.

Note: We understand that there are other programs entitled "We the People". The program at NEH is unique and centered upon the agency's past activities and capitalizes on its strengths in terms of

staff and a first rate peer review process. Other initiatives, such as the Department of Education's civics education program, may complement NEH's effort but certainly will not duplicate it.

**We the People and NEH's Core Programs** -- As you know, the \$25 million increase for NEH is entirely devoted to the We the People special initiative (\$23 million for grants, \$2 million for administration). The peer review process at NEH, from which all successful applications must emerge with very high ratings, is itself highly respected and, in some cases, emulated. The competition for NEH applications is fierce (i.e., only an average of 17% of proposals to NEH are funded). Applications to the core programs and We the People will be reviewed in an identical process. Literally, all of the programs of NEH are underfunded, including the federal/state partnership. The national core programs regularly turn down highly rated proposals due to very limited funds. Many of the state councils are further hampered because state funding has been dropping as their tax income has declined. The core programs will be better off if the We the People initiative is fully funded. The initiative is consistent with the core mission of NEH, and in practice is broadly enough conceived that it may allow core programs to fund more of their highly rated proposals.

**Federal/State Partnership** -- State humanities councils address critical needs in the areas of professional development for teachers, family literacy programs, and public humanities programming that in the broadest sense educates citizens for civic life, and strengthens the fabric of our democracy. The state councils are private, nonprofit, grassroots organizations, located in each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five commonwealths and territories. In addition to regularly appropriated NEH funds, state councils are eligible to compete for project support through NEH's national core programs, as well as the We the People initiative. State councils respond to local needs and help to ensure that the best of the humanities reaches Americans in nearly every district of the nation. Every dollar appropriated for the state councils goes directly and immediately into local communities across the country. In addition, since every grant made by a state council must include matching funds from nonfederal sources, the federal dollars are stretched much further. As noted above, many state councils are caught in a squeeze of flat federal funding plus a decline in state support.

**Challenge Grants** -- Challenge Grants strengthen the institutional base for teaching, research, preservation and public programming in the humanities. Each year, Challenge Grants are the catalyst for bringing millions of dollars in private funds to colleges and universities, museums, libraries, humanities research centers, state councils, historical societies and historical sites. Challenge Grants provide first time grantees a \$1 federal match for each \$3 raised privately, and a 1:4 match for second time recipients. Challenge Grants are seriously underfunded. Additional funds are needed to increase both the dollar amount and number of awards possible. In addition, an increase in the Challenge Grant program would greatly enhance the agency's ability to provide support for the newly created regional humanities centers, which are eligible to compete under the agency's regular review process.

**Education Programs** -- NEH Education programs support content-rich teaching and learning in the humanities for our nation's students. NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes offer college and K-12 teachers opportunities to study significant topics and fundamental texts in the humanities and to revitalize their understanding of history, literature and other humanities subjects. Humanities Teacher Leadership awards help elementary and secondary school teachers share the benefits of their participation in seminars and institutes with other educators and schools. Education Development and Demonstration grants support projects to strengthen the teaching and learning of humanities subjects in K-12 schools and in colleges and universities across the country.

The Division of Education Program provides a rather clear illustration of how the shortage of funding for the core program directly plays out in teacher education and school programs. In the summer of 2001, NEH sponsored 54 seminars and institutes in which 550 school teachers and 470 college teachers were enrolled. Over the course of the 2001-2002 school year, these teachers reached an estimated 68,750 K-12 students and 82,250 college and university students. In contrast, in 1995, when NEH's FY94 budget was \$177.5 million, NEH was able to fund 167 seminars and institutes that served over 2,000 teachers across the country. The multiplier effect of this invigorating education meant that over 200,000 K-12 and almost 250,000 college students benefited from refreshed and enthusiastic teaching.

**Preservation & Access** -- The Preservation & Access programs are in the lead in the nation's efforts to preserve and increase the availability of cultural, historical and intellectual resources for generations of Americans. NEH supports preservation of and access to books, journals, newspapers, manuscript and archival collections, maps, photographs, films, sound recordings, oral histories, and objects of material culture held by libraries, archives, museums, historical organizations, and other repositories. NEH also supports preservation education and training, and the acquisition of research tools and reference works; and makes grants for the creation of dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, and other major reference works that preserve and portray the history and culture of the United States and the world. In a way, many of the preservation activities of NEH are in a race with time, which is to say preservation or conservation treatment sooner is better.

From the very beginnings of the preservation activity at NEH in the early 1980s, the agency has worked closely with the Library of Congress. The collaboration continues to be highly useful for both entities. The NEH's work is focused on universities and other non-federal entities (especially for special collections) whereas the Library of Congress is largely focused on its vast collections. In a recently begun effort, LC is developing an infrastructure for the overall preservation effort. Both NEH and LC support digitizing projects in their areas of responsibility. There is virtually no overlap in connection with either entity's preservation work, or in the many other areas where they collaborate.

**Public Programs** -- Each year, Public Program grants generate projects that reach millions of Americans in every part of the country. The Humanities Project in Media program supports the planning, scripting, and production of television and radio programs on significant works and subjects in the humanities. Humanities Projects in Museums and Historical Organizations support exhibitions of cultural and historical artifacts, along with related publications and programming. Humanities Projects in Libraries and Archives seek to increase public understanding of the humanities through the discovery, interpretation, and greater appreciation of texts, media, internet resources, and other collections available to Americans in libraries and archives. Grants have also been made for radio call-in programs that in collaboration with libraries explore regional literature in several parts of the country. The work of the Public Programs of NEH is often the portal through which the general public comes in contact with humanities content. Like other divisions of the NEH, public programs could effectively award many more grants to highly rated applicants.

**Research and Fellowships** -- This division supports basic research, and contributes to faculty development, improved teaching, and quality public programming in the humanities across the country. Fellowships and Stipends support focused, sustained work by individual scholars, for projects that will: advance specialized areas of research, stimulate scholarship in related fields, inform the teaching of humanities subjects at all levels, and provide the foundation for public programs in the humanities. On average, one-third of awards in a given year result in a major publication within five years; most reach publication in subsequent years; over the years, awards

have resulted in the publication of more than 2,600 books, including ten Pulitzer Prize winners. Collaborative Research grants include translation projects, archaeological research, wide-ranging studies of important topics in the humanities, and fellowship programs at centers for advanced study in the humanities. Collaborative Research projects are making significant contributions to our knowledge and understanding of the world.

Scholarly Editions support long-term, complex projects carried out by groups of scholars, including the preparation of documentary and literary editions. There are several more specialized programs in the division. Recent projects are increasingly making use of advanced technologies to produce their results in readily accessible, digital format. The staffs of these editions develop a special expertise and knowledge base that often has a very present day application. For example, the editors at The George Washington University's First Federal Congress Project (the NEH is a funder) recently aided the FBI in authenticating the original copy of the Bill of Rights sent to North Carolina by the U.S. Congress in 1789, during a sting operation to prevent the illegal sale of the document.

It is critical that we continue to strengthen funding for scholarly research and professional development so that we can attract and retain the first-rate humanities faculty needed to teach our nation's students, and to document and expand our knowledge of human history and the human condition for all generations.

\*\*\*

We thank you for this opportunity to share our views. We would be pleased to have the opportunity to meet with you for discussion of the issues raised herein.