

## ***Statement on the FY-1990 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities***

**Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations), by Nancy Stevenson, Chair of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, Speaking on behalf of the National Humanities Alliance**

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My name is Nancy Stevenson, I have been a volunteer in the public humanities cause for almost ten years and am currently the Chair of the Federation of State Humanities Councils.

The Congress began a great public initiative when it created the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. This nation has a culture which is diverse in geography, heritage, and experience, yet has an overriding belief in the power of the people to understand, respect and gather strength from our differences while living and acting as one nation. This Congressional initiative recognized the importance of national support for the appreciation and development of institutions that encourage all citizens to take part in that special national culture.

Today, I have been asked to testify for the National Humanities Alliance of which the Federation of State Humanities Councils is a member. We urge increased support for the National Endowment for the Humanities. While we understand that the words "increased support" bring horror to Congressional ears in this era of concern about the national debt, we feel our cause has sufficient need and reason to allow a hearing of our petition. I thank you for this opportunity to appear today.

Our concerns about the NEH's budget fall into two categories: The shrinkage of the buying power of its grant-making resources during this decade, and the more symbolic issue of an imbalance in the distribution of resources between the two Endowments.

While we are most grateful to this committee and its counterpart in the House for maintaining the dollar level for NEH despite the difficult budgetary climate of recent years, we also have to recognize the very significant decline in the value of the appropriations. The American Association of Museums has calculated that in order to have grant-making resources equivalent to the level of 1981, the FY-87 funding for NEH would have had to have been \$53 million (38%) higher than the actual appropriation of \$138.9 million.

At the beginning of this great experiment of the Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, Congress gave equal sums to each effort. Over the intervening years, the arts have been granted funds at a more rapid pace than the humanities, causing an imbalance of significant proportions. Despite the encouraging budgetary step taken last year that narrowed this imbalance to about \$16 million, that amount still represents a gap of more than 10%. I believe Congress is just as concerned about education and the life of the mind as it is in the expression of our culture through artistic means. But, until recently, we in the humanities have been shy about presenting our case.

NEH is an important part of the national system through which we as a nation study and reflect upon our history and our culture. Each division of the Endowment contributes to this enterprise -- the scholarship supported by the NEH through its research and fellowship programs is the engine that drives the educational and public projects. The budgets of virtually all of the programs at the NEH are in need of additional resources. Their ability to respond to the most urgent needs from the

field has become increasingly strained as the real dollar value of their appropriations has declined on average by more than one third over this decade.

So that the humanities can enter into the reauthorization process next year on an equal footing with the arts in keeping with the original intention of the enabling legislation, we urge the Committee to adjust the FY-90 appropriation for NEH upward to the level of \$170.1 million -- the level requested for the Arts Endowment. By making this plea, we do not wish to diminish concern and funding for the arts. The life of our nation has been greatly enriched by the blossoming of the performing and visual arts in every segment of our society, from small groups in little towns to the major institutions in our largest cities. Indeed, it is almost impossible to separate the arts from the humanities. They flourish best when they work together. For the sake of the arts and the cultural life of our nation, we cannot afford to diminish the humanities. It would be an important symbol of support for the life of the mind if Congress would increase the level of funding to that of the arts.

In considering our request, it is important to recognize that the National Humanities Alliance represents all aspects of the humanities community from primarily scholarly organizations such as the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association to the organizations for public outreach like the American Association of Museums, the American Library Association, and my own special cause, the State Humanities Councils. We can and do join together because we see in every effort we undertake that our work depends upon the particular skills and insights each can give to the other.

The national call for school reform provides a perfect example of the necessity for supporting humanities programs at all levels. The accumulated work of scholars is the backbone of our educational system. Every reform package speaks to the need for the teacher, whether at the elementary, secondary, or college level, to be deeply engaged in the subject matter to be taught. Studies and personal student testimony indicate that the interest of the teacher has a profound effect in the classroom. The NEH supports institutes in which scholars who have studied deeply in a field meet with teachers for several intensive weeks of research, reflect upon, and discuss in depth a subject which the latter teach. Many state humanities councils have also funded teacher institutes. Most have stipulated that the institutes reach out to teachers within their region. This gives the added advantage of scholar-teacher contact that can be maintained and sustained by follow-up sessions through the school year or teacher-scholar discussions about additional reading, and/or debate on particular questions that arise in the teacher's classroom. In extensive evaluation with both the teachers and the scholars, the councils have had exceedingly enthusiastic reports. Both say that it refreshes their spirit, gives new life to their classrooms, and deepens their commitment to teaching and learning. While I have not read the evaluations of the NEH-supported institutes, I feel certain that they have had similar responses.

State councils have also brought scholars together with state agencies for the improvement of the curriculum in some areas and sponsored scholars in the schools who visit classrooms, give lectures and slide shows, hold teacher workshops and a myriad of other programs that meet the expressed need of particular communities.

But there is no reform or program that will change the climate of our nation's education until the public at large demands it. The scholar, the learned societies, and the public humanities organizations must continue to demonstrate the excitement of bringing thoughts over time to bear on problems of public policy. We must reach out to the elderly who may be isolated to learn from their experience and to share ideas. We must persuade every citizen that he or she has a stake in learning not just how to read and write but how to communicate ideas and break down the barriers of distrust and loneliness. TIME magazine (December 19, 1988) reports that one quarter of the

American work force lacks "the basic reading, writing, and math skills necessary to perform in today's increasingly complex job market." Corporations are turning to the expensive and cumbersome job of teaching basic literacy to their workers. We won't be able to prevent a continuation of one out of four teenagers that currently drop out of school and the large number of graduates who are functional illiterates unless we take seriously the needs of our society and provide the resources to meet those needs.

It is the humanities that can make a bridge of communication across the boundaries of generations and cultures. We must hear and interpret the songs, the stories, the images, that define our differences. We must learn to surmount the fragmentations, to reach beyond the boundaries of place, traditions, or disciplines, in order to make use of the riches of our heritage and find our common purpose.

We all know that money alone will not solve any problem. That is one factor which makes the Congressional experiment, the creation of the NEH so remarkable. For here, in this mechanism, the professionals who deliver programs come together with those who receive them. The citizen and the scholar have the opportunity to find common ground and to speak the same language. Lynne Cheney has spoken enthusiastically for "the parallel schools" that abound throughout our society. Thousands of people like me volunteer in state councils, libraries, and museums. These parallel schools work side by side with the academy to create a climate for learning and they have made a difference. When one looks at the \$153 million NEH will be investing in humanities activities this year, we find a potent force in motion. But the job is far from done. The resources are stretched too thin. For these reasons, many groups in the humanities community -- especially the state councils and the Federation -- have greatly expanded their efforts to raise more funds in the private sector. And the humanities community turns to this Committee with a modest request for more resources.