

Prepared Testimony of Steven Knapp
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On the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
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Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and Members of the Subcommittee: on behalf of The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the George Washington University, I wish to thank you for the privilege of addressing this distinguished panel.

From the dawn of our nation to the present, the humanities have shaped our common identity, framed the momentous debates of the day, and informed our decisions about the future.

We revere the brilliance of Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*. We return again and again to the compelling logic of *The Federalist Papers* written by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay. But those authors and those documents could have emerged only from a citizenry steeped in the study of philosophy, history, and literature: in short, the humanities.

Consider the idea that most defines us as a nation and a people: the idea of liberty. That concept did not arise spontaneously from colonial pamphlets and newspapers. It was drawn from the wellspring of the humanities: the philosophy of Aristotle and Locke, the history of Tacitus, the literature of Shakespeare, the voices of the biblical prophets, and even the poetry of Vergil. If we as a nation forget that heritage, we will sooner or later lose our ability to understand not just the origins but the very meaning of the principles on which the nation was founded. And no single institution or agency plays a greater role in preserving that heritage than the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Allow me to cite just two examples from the George Washington University:

For the past twelve years, the NEH has provided indispensable support, in partnership with many private donors, for the Eleanor Roosevelt Project. That support has enabled our scholars, with the help of some 130 students, to comb through millions of pages of

records stored in archives across all 50 states, to select the most historically significant of those documents, and to make that material available to the public both in printed volumes and in digital form. Through the teaching aids the Project has created, approximately 6,000 teachers, 500 civil society leaders, 100 policymakers, and countless citizens have been able to study the contributions of our nation's longest-serving First Lady. I want to thank Congressman Moran for his longstanding support of this project.

We have also received NEH funding for the First Federal Congress Project. So far, this project has published seventeen of a projected 22-volume documentary history of what was arguably our most important and productive Congress. The Project also assists with teacher training and serves as a source of information for all three branches of the federal government as well as scholars, teachers, jurists, and students across the nation.

Without support from the NEH, universities like ours would not have the resources they need to sustain their role in enabling our citizens to understand our nation's history, to cherish its core values, or to strive together to realize our shared aspirations.

In addition to their role in preserving our national identity by keeping alive the history and the values we share, the humanities yield more immediately practical benefits. They are, to begin with, essential to national security, and there is little doubt that the nation's security would be strengthened if our citizens and their leaders were better informed about the languages and beliefs of our allies as well as our adversaries. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, for example, points out that many Americans had no knowledge whatsoever of the "history, culture, and body of beliefs from which Bin Laden shaped and spread his message." At the same time, business leaders are far more likely to succeed in understanding and exploiting global opportunities if they are better informed about other cultures.

Those practical benefits are not to be minimized, but the real utility of the humanities is better perceived in cases where practical considerations are intertwined with questions of value. As recent debates have shown, the simple act of classifying a prescription drug in one category or another not only has far-reaching market

implications but can raise moral questions that cannot be answered by scientific investigation alone. As we meet this morning, genomic research is racing ahead, and science is making it possible to collect and disseminate more and more information about every one of us. Here again, ethical questions about when and how such information should be collected and used are beyond the scope of science per se. Questions of fairness, of privacy, of the definition of humanity – none of these can be answered without the kind of reflection that the study of the humanities, including the study of philosophy, religion, and history, makes possible.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I submit that the humanities are essential to the identity of this nation; to the defense of this nation; and to this nation's ability to chart its future through reasoned debate in the light of its deepest values. The NEH has played a vital role in helping to ensure that the humanities continue to serve our democracy in all these ways. Yet, at a time when the need for what the humanities provide has never been more urgent, funding for the NEH has been reduced for each of the last three fiscal years. I urge the committee to reverse this trend, and I respectfully request that Congress consider funding the NEH at a level of \$154 million for the next fiscal year.

Thank you.