



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

**Remarks by Jim Leach, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities
“Briefing on the Humanities in the 21st Century: Addressing National Security & Other Global
Challenges Through Cultural Understanding”**

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Welcome. This briefing is sponsored by the National Humanities Alliance, a coalition of over one hundred non-profit organizations, colleges, and university, and the Association of American Universities, a coalition of sixty of our largest research universities, including two from Canada, in cooperation with the Congressional Humanities Caucus chaired by two of Congress’s most distinguished members—David Price of North Carolina and Tom Petri of Wisconsin.

It is my role to give a brief overview of why the humanities are of relevance to national security and then turn the program over to David Skorton, the President of Cornell University, to lead a panel discussion.

To set a framework for the program, I would make three brief points:

First, the challenges of the day, the politics of the moment, are surface issues. Stewards of public policy need to understand immediate problems that pose threats to the security of our country and have the capacity to advance and defend the national interest. But to understand what’s on the surface—the reasons for discord—it is necessary to know what is below the surface: the history and culture of a society or region.

When addressing fundamental questions like how to avoid conflict; how to determine whether and what kind of policies including the prospect of use of force may be prudent; how, if force is called upon, to intervene effectively; how to end conflict on a credible basis; and how to create a sustaining cooperative relationship in the wake of conflict, it is imperative that cultural considerations be part and parcel of decision-making.

Second, national security has an economic component. A strong economy is critical to the capacity to exercise strong leadership. One of the myths of our times is that the liberal arts are impractical, unrelated to the creation of jobs and American competitiveness. But to compete in a global economy it is essential that Americans understand our own history and values as well as those of foreign cultures.

And in change-intensive times it is critical that we are trained not only in the basics—readin‘, ‘ritin‘, ‘rithmetic—but in the disciplines that provide perspective and nourish capacities to analyze and think outside the box—history, literature, philosophy, the creative arts.

Third and finally, humanities disciplines provide a basis both for our understanding of other societies and for other societies to understand our history and values. To the degree America is understood as an idea and an ideal, this idea and ideal should neither be tarnished nor allowed to be swept under the new radars of human communication.

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