Senate Speeches on the Arts and Humanities (1994-1996): Speech 02

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Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Washington and the Capitol. I would like to thank you for your constant and effective efforts on behalf of the humanities in the United States.

I am fond of saying that the strength of our nation is determined not by the amount of gold in Fort Knox nor the number of missiles in our silos, but by the education and character of our people. As the great jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "A mind that is stretched to a new idea never returns to its original dimensions." The humanities opens the door to lifelong learning. Through the humanities we are able to understand and build upon the ideas that have shaped this great country.
In my state, we have a wonderful program in the schools called Rhode Island Legacy where actors portray characters with conflicting views on an event in our state's history, eliciting a lively response from the students during the discussion period. As Joseph Finkhouse, our able director of the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities, can tell you, this program teaches young people creativity, analytical and communication skills while providing them with an understanding of American culture and civilization.

What I envisioned thirty-one years ago, when I cofounded the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities with Senator Jacob Javits, was the power of federal funds to leverage other funding. Today, with your help, we have a strong and balanced partnership between the federal government and state and local governments, and with the private sector. The delicate balance created through this collaboration
is vital to the future health of our nation's cultural heritage. It must be maintained.

The American people are wondrously inventive, original and ingenious. We must not become the only Western industrialized nation to declare that our government cares nothing about the development and transmittal of these cultural assets. We simply cannot afford to lose the structures, artifacts, texts, wisdom and insights that tell us where we came from, who we are, and how we might make wise decisions for the generations that follow us.

I remain hopeful that we will succeed in continuing national support for the humanities and I will do my best during my remaining months in office to ensure that this is so.

Thank you for inviting me to join you. I wish you success during your day on the Hill and for the years to come.