

**Testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor
at the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities Hearing entitled “*The
National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts:
Overview of Programs and National Impact*”**

**By Jeanne H. Schmedlen, Board Member and former Chair, Pennsylvania
Humanities Council; former Speaker’s Representative, Pennsylvania
Council on the Arts**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

In delivering the Nancy Hanks Lecture in March, modern philosopher Daniel Pink spoke of society’s absolutely required shift to creativity and innovation for the United States of America to remain a leader in the new global economy. Bob Lynch of Americans for the Arts, in recent testimony said that “art is a pillar of creativity and innovation.” So are the humanities. Together, the arts and humanities have become our 21st century keystone for the future, in our economy, in education, in enlightenment.

I am Jeanne Schmedlen, Director of Special Projects and Chief of Protocol for the Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Dennis M. O’Brien. Previously, I held senior staff positions with two Speakers, a First Lady and a Governor. I know the Commonwealth well, I am a lifelong supporter of the arts and humanities and I greatly value the contributions of the National Endowments to the well-being of Pennsylvania over the past forty-plus years. The endowments elevate, educate and stimulate like no other federal agencies and they do this through direct grants and, more importantly, through support of their state counterparts. Today I will talk about how our partnerships with the endowments allow us to reach some of whom I consider underserved populations in Pennsylvania – those living in the vast region between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and in our northern and southern tiers.

As former chair of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, I know the value of the state councils in extending the reach of the humanities to underserved populations. Across the country, councils use their funding from the NEH’s Federal-State Partnership to do this. And this means starting and developing relationships that last over many years, and building the capacity of rural organizations to do high quality programming, connect better to their surrounding communities and expand public participation in the humanities.

In Pennsylvania, I have seen the council devote enormous staff effort to reach into every county in the Commonwealth, and there are 67. Just last December, in making decisions on grants, we were delighted that the application judged to be the highest quality was from the Northern Tier Cultural Alliance for “*2008: The Year of the Barn,*” a project on the importance of agriculture in the heritage and culture of Pennsylvania’s north country.

We shaped our speakers bureau, *Commonwealth Speakers*, to be strongest in presentations rooted in state heritage and the arts and made this a 67- county program almost every year.

One of our speakers, Paul Ferhrenbach, gave a presentation in remote Cameron County on “Bagpipes: A Historical Perspective.” Sixty people showed up. He told us: “As always, rural areas are starving for more cultural programs. An audience such as this was rather large for such a small community -- which indicates this need.”

In the 19th Congressional district, where I live, which includes Adams, Cumberland and York counties, I know that there has been an abundance of *Commonwealth Speaker* presentations. In the two-year program period of 2006-2007, there were 31. The PHC also has forged a splendid partnership with the Pennsylvania General Assembly and together, we annually host the Speaker’s Millennium Lecture at the Capitol, just across the river from Cumberland County. Most of our live audience for the free public lecture by prominent historians, academics and authors come from the 19th district and our Pennsylvania Cable Network (PCN) sends the lecture far and wide across the state, reaching millions more. We hosted John Updike and David McCullough for these lectures, among others.

The PHC systematically promotes humanities programming to county historical societies in rural counties and has achieved amazing results there with groups such as the Warren Historical Society and the Jefferson County Historical Society, variously embracing Native American history, family histories, the heyday of the timber industry, the Depression, World War II and the New Deal. Empowered by the council’s support, the Jefferson County group also achieved a major direct grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The PHC also formed a partnership with the state arts council to expand arts-related programming into rural areas. The council linked art to heritage and this had strong appeal in rural regions. The PHC awarded a grant to the Community Education Council of Elk and Cameron Counties for “*Young Mark Twain*,” a presentation by the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera’s Gallery of Heroes program. The presentation at five elementary schools meant, for many children in this remote rural area, the first time that they had seen a performance by a professional theater company.

The council has worked intensively with public libraries in rural districts to expand their programming for adult and inter-generational audiences, especially in literature, through its book discussion series, *Read About It!* Since 2000 41% of these discussions have been in rural counties.

The council also has developed special projects with NEH funds, and then leveraged its success to raise private money for specifically rural projects. An example is “Technology and Community,” developed with NEH funds and then expanded with a grant from the Heinz Endowments, and, later, “Schools and Communities,” a public engagement project for schools in southwestern Pennsylvania, also funded by the Heinz Endowments.

In addition, the council has taken the initiative to shape the behavior of large institutions located in rural areas, in order to make them more responsive to local needs. An outstanding example of this is the partnership with the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at Penn State. Together, we developed “Public Humanities Scholars” to match Penn State faculty from its main and branch campuses with local organizations to both plan and conduct public programs in 16 mostly rural counties.

I greatly value my close association with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA). Here I have seen a deep commitment to outreach to previously underserved regions which has been greatly expanded during recent administrations.

Just last month, 20 Pennsylvania communities across the Commonwealth participated in PCA’s *American Masterpieces*, a four-week tour of the works of American master choreographer and Pennsylvania native Paul Taylor’s dance companies. Students in small cities across the state gained an unsurpassable experience and creative opportunity in their own Pennsylvania hometowns that would not have been available to them otherwise.

Federal arts funding also flows to benefit Pennsylvania’s school students and help build the workforce of the future through the PCA’s Arts in Education Partnership. NEA funding in partnership with state dollars assists hundreds of Pennsylvania’s schools to support curriculum, enrich the important work of art educators and provide additional opportunities for students to explore and develop their creative abilities.

Other arts education projects in previously underserved regions undertaken by the PCA include:

Aliquippa Middle School in Beaver County, where 7th and 8th grade students worked with textile artist Cathleen Richardson Bailey on a collaborative quilt project, “From Our Hands,” designed to stimulate creativity, cognizant and tactile abilities.

Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 in the Lehigh Valley’s RESOLVE program hosted a residency by ensemble members of Touchstone Theatre. RESOLVE serves 12 school districts in Monroe and Northampton counties and is part of the intermediate unit’s work with students from Partial Hospitalization Program sites and Emotional Support program classrooms.

A sculpture garden was created by an artists and students at the Bentworth Elementary School in rural Bentlyville.

South Brandywine Middle School in Coatesville developed a residency with The People’s Light & Theatre Company as part of their social studies curriculum in exploring Underground Railroad history with 8th grade students.

As a result of its groundbreaking work with 17 Bradford-Tioga Head Start centers across Pennsylvania's north central region, the rural Northern Tier Partnership for Arts in Education/Bradford County Regional Arts Council was named one of three international models for its Learning Communications Skills through the Arts program in early education.

Yet another outstanding example of educational excellence fostered by federal and state arts dollars took place just yesterday in the Chamber of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives during our state's annual Arts in Education Day celebration. Pennsylvania State Poetry Out Loud Champion, Francesca Fiore, a West Chester Area School District student recited a poem to enthusiastic response from the House members. Her performance was carried "live" across the state by PCN, to communities large and small.

The arts and humanities truly are our keystone for the future. The ingenuity of the mind can not be computerized or outsourced. The power to create and learn is in all of us and through every citizen's continued access to arts and humanities programs we can cultivate and unleash the innovation and creation that will sustain our country's leadership and enrich and enhance our lives through the 21st century and beyond.

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