

Testimony on behalf of the Federation of State Humanities Councils

Prepared for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies by Trent L. Clark, Director of Public and Government Affairs for Monsanto Company; Board member, Idaho Humanities Council; Addressing the National Endowment for the Humanities, April 1, 2011.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the state humanities councils, the state affiliates of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am the Public Affairs Director with Monsanto, an agricultural technology business whose western U.S. manufacturing is based in Soda Springs, Idaho, and I am here to support the humanities community request for FY 2012 of \$167.5 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities, including \$47 million for the Federal-State Partnership (combining the FY 2010 levels of \$40.3 million through the Federal/State Partnership and \$6.8 million through We the People).

As a businessman, I understand the importance of investment, and this is what the state council funding is—an investment in our communities. But what an investment! The \$47 million in funding for the state councils is allocated among the 56 councils and goes directly to the states for activities that educate and engage individuals and strengthen our communities. Our heritage, our culture, our stories, our ideals and values matter, and funding for what defines us as a people is as vital to our nation as is an investment in science and technology.

I also understand the importance of maximizing the return on investment, and this is what the state humanities councils do with the federal funds they administer. As full partners of the NEH, councils receive their core funding through the Federal/State Partnership line of the NEH budget and use that funding to leverage additional funds from such sources as state government, foundations, corporations, and private individuals. In 2010, every federal dollar the councils awarded through grants to local institutions leveraged, on average, \$5.50 in local contributions. Councils further extend their resources by forming programming partnerships with organizations and institutions throughout their states. As a taxpayer, I applaud the care with which councils use these funds; as a citizen, I appreciate the many benefits Americans gain through their programs. The funding you allocate to the state humanities councils represents an investment in the nation's communities, cultural and civic organizations, and educational infrastructure.

There are a number of other reasons that maintaining the current funding level for the state humanities councils is so important at this critical time.

1) **Council programs educate citizens across the country every day.** In my home state of Idaho, the Idaho Humanities Council awards over \$200,000 annually in grants. At a recent meeting, the council fielded an unprecedented number of requests for grant support and awarded more than \$85,000 to organizations to fund programs ranging from new museum exhibits in Bonners Ferry in Idaho's panhandle to a Welsh cultural festival in Malad in southeast Idaho, and from a project launched by the Fort Hall Shoshoni-Bannock Reservation exploring the history of the Fort Bridger Treaty to community-wide reading programs in Rexburg and Lewiston. In 2011 and 2012 the council will sponsor a tour of the Smithsonian traveling exhibit, "The Way We Worked," about the history of work in America, to six Idaho communities—Priest River, McCall, Coeur d'Alene, Burley, Twin Falls, and Bonners Ferry. The council will also sponsor

lectures by journalists and historians in three Idaho cities. These are examples from just one state of the array of council programs. The councils make education an accessible community experience, at very low or no cost.

2) **Council programs reach communities in every corner of the states.** In 2010 council programs reached 5,700 communities, many of them in rural areas where council programs were the only cultural or educational programs available to the citizens. These programs are tailored to the needs of the state and are often designed by local institutions and organizations. The Kansas Humanities Council, for example, in 2004 launched an initiative called “Kansans Tell Their Stories” to support projects allowing citizens of the state to explore their heritage and traditions. The initiative has so far supported 64 grant programs in 55 communities, engaging 314,440 Kansans either in person or online, in community-initiated programs including oral histories, research projects, museum exhibitions, television series, podcasts, and special speakers. As the librarian who hosted one of these programs said, “We can keep the doors open and provide basic services, but it’s the Kansas Humanities Council programs and projects that really kick us up a notch and enhance our library and community.”

Since 1992, the Kentucky Humanities Council’s Kentucky Chautauqua has educated citizens about the state’s history, heritage, and culture through engaging presentations by scholars portraying famous figures, such as Henry Clay and George Rogers Clark, and lesser-known but important Kentuckians such as Lt. Anna Mac Clarke, who was the first African American officer to command white troops. From 2008 to 2010, 726 Kentucky Chautauqua presentations took place, serving all of the state’s 120 counties and engaging 53,000 adults. During the same period, the Kentucky Chautauqua classroom programs provided education in American history and civics for 35,346 Kentucky schoolchildren.

Many programs and activities supported by council grants simply would not happen if council funding disappeared; citizens in thousands of communities across the country would be deprived of opportunities to learn about the events and ideas that shaped their state and nation.

3) **Councils preserve and strengthen local institutions.** Councils are the primary support structure for culture across their states. Over the past few years, as the economic downturn hit one organization after another, council grants and collaborations have made it possible for these organizations to continue providing programs that kept their communities vibrant. Because of the collaborations forged by state humanities councils, 175 organizations in each state, on average, were able to continue to serve their citizens. The councils are particularly effective at providing support that builds the professionalism of community institutions and organizations. A prime illustration is the Museum Interpretation Initiative in Utah, which helps Utah’s 255 museums strengthen their interpretation skills, create more effective exhibitions, provide more sophisticated learning experiences for their own community residents, and attract tourists to the area. A curator at one of the participating museums told the council, “Our museum’s capacity to provide interpretive programming has increased tremendously. Rather than just throwing together displays, we now know how to create interpretive exhibits, and supplement them with interactive elements, self-guides, and more educational tours and programs. I think we have become a very different and better museum.”

Museums and libraries are among the most important institutions in any community, and state humanities councils are principal supporters of both. Since 2009 the California Council for the Humanities, with financial support from NEH and the California State Library, has worked with the County Library Systems to train librarians to facilitate dialogue in their communities. Librarians in the participating systems develop their own programs and lead discussions of importance to their communities. As evidence of the benefits of this program to the libraries themselves, the Riverside Library System reported in 2009 that all 34 libraries in their system had formed new partnerships, forged closer relationships with civic and political leaders, attracted new volunteers, and strengthened professional relationships with other library branches. The initiative provided citizens of the communities with an opportunity for highly participatory conversations in a welcoming atmosphere about important questions affecting their day-to-day lives, while also transforming libraries into vital community centers.

4) **Councils support K-12 education.** In this economic climate, state budget cuts are not just killing innovative programs for students and teachers but in some states are eroding such basic programs as history, civics, and social studies. Councils are the only resource in many states providing professional development for teachers and are often the only entity providing support for civics education, an increasingly important area of learning for students. The state of Rhode Island recognized the seriousness of this need several years ago and created a commission that developed standards for civic education, but at the time, the fiscal environment made it impossible to implement the standards. A year ago the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities revived this effort with a statewide initiative called “Democracy Demands Wisdom: Grants for Civic Education.” Grants have been awarded to fund professional development for teachers, creation of curricular materials, and creative opportunities for students to learn about their responsibilities as citizens in a democracy.

Engaged and well-educated teachers are essential to ensure that our nation’s classrooms are a creative and vibrant learning environment. Humanities Texas offers a “Teacher Enrichment Program,” which enables classroom teachers to study important topics in U.S. and Texas history with the nation’s leading scholars. This program helps teachers expand their mastery of the subjects they teach and provides instructional resources such as facsimiles of historical documents and photographs as well as digital and online resources. The council actively recruits early-career teachers working in low-performing schools, thereby serving those in greatest need of training. Of the 492 teachers who participated last year, 85 percent teach in schools, districts, or areas in which students struggle on statewide assessments, and 54 percent have just five years or less of classroom experience.

Councils also provide grounding for teachers in subjects of specific importance to the students of their state. Last year the Ohio Humanities Council offered a two-week summer institute for teachers called “A People and their Homeland: the Miami Tribe,” which immersed teachers in the cultural history of the Miami as well the natural history of the tribe’s ancestral land, plants and animals.

Despite severe cutbacks in public education recently enacted by the Idaho State Legislature, the Idaho Humanities Council, with sufficient federal funding, will continue to provide transformative opportunities for K-12 teachers, including annual intensive week-long residential

summer institutes exploring such topics as Native American literature, the works of Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway, the U.S. Constitution, Idaho history, and the presidencies of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson. But the council already receives far more applications than it can accommodate each year, and a reduction of federal funding will further harm this program.

5) Councils help build understanding of community history and identity. The local history and heritage programs councils support are of tremendous value to the residents of the state, helping not only to promote understanding of the challenges and triumphs individual communities have experienced but also to unite them. A program funded by the Oklahoma Humanities Council, entitled “Drought, Determination, and Displacement: A Dust Bowl Symposium,” offered a day-long event that included lectures, exhibits, films, and oral histories commemorating the 75th anniversary of Black Sunday, the day the worst “duster” struck the area. Humanities scholars helped guide 675 individuals from Panhandle counties through an exploration of the cultural, social, and economic legacy of the Dust Bowl in one of its hardest hit areas. The program enabled citizens of all ages to explore a difficult but important period, engage in dialogue with their neighbors, and learn from the leading humanities scholars in the field. One participant commented, “This program was valuable since younger people need to know and understand the past.” The financing of the program was itself a demonstration of community cooperation—and of the multiplier effect of the federal dollars awarded by councils: a \$7,000 grant from the council leveraged \$50,960 from a local community foundation that included funds from several local banks, the local library, a utility company, and local citizens.

The Wyoming Humanities Council’s “A Wyoming Conversation” program several years ago drew more than 60,000 citizens into facilitated conversations in twelve communities on changes affecting Wyoming. The council followed this up in subsequent years with conversations on three topics of particular importance to the citizens of the state—family, newcomers, and the balance between preservation and development. These conversations were launched through a variety of formats, including radio programs, theater productions, newspaper editorials, and a public television forum with the Governor and First Lady participating in a citizen panel.

Council programs play a valuable role in helping communities put current issues in historical context. In 2008 the Tompkins County legislature approved a comprehensive county-wide plan to achieve an 80 percent reduction of carbon emissions by 2050. The New York Council for the Humanities funded an exhibit to educate residents about the local environmental sustainability movement. Displayed in the History Center in Tompkins County, it drew from a series of public programs involving experts and concerned citizens. The exhibit narrative spans hundreds of years, from the contributions of the Haudensaunee, or Iroquois, to the creation of local environmental and energy efficiency organizations, and illustrates the evolving meaning of environmental sustainability.

To help meet growing needs in their communities, councils have steadily expanded and diversified their funding base over the past decade, but the federal investment in these programs is critical to their ability to leverage other funds and maintain their core operations. We are asking you to provide funding that will allow them to continue to build on that federal investment to serve the citizens of your states and those of your colleagues across the nation.