

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

April 11, 2025

The Honorable Michael McDonald  
Acting Chairman  
National Endowment for the Humanities  
400 7th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Mr. McDonald:

We write to you to express deep concerns regarding cuts to previously appropriated funding to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and news that NEH staff have been placed on paid administrative leave. The NEH is a critical federal agency that supports the building blocks of American civil society, helping to examine the human condition, promote civics education, understand our cultural heritage, foster mutual respect and empathy, and develop media and information literacy across communities big and small. Without these critical resources, we fear that Americans will lose access to important cultural institutions and conversations across the country. For that reason, we implore you to reverse course and release grant funding and reinstate staff immediately.

The NEH was established in 1965 alongside the National Endowment for the Arts, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act*. The establishing legislation highlighted the importance of the arts and humanities, explaining that “democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens. It must therefore foster and support a form of education, and access to the arts and the humanities, designed to make people of all backgrounds and wherever located masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants.”

Since its founding in 1965, NEH has awarded over \$6 billion in grants to museums, historic sites, colleges, universities, K–12 teaching, libraries, public television and radio stations, research institutions, independent scholars, and to its humanities council affiliates in each of the nation’s 56 states and jurisdictions. In Oregon, the impacts of these awards have been far-reaching across universities, museums, and our state humanities council, and yet, some of this work is already being cancelled.

For example, the Trump administration recently cancelled an NEH grant at the University of Oregon’s Institute for Resilient Organizations, Communities, and Environments for research to document the “cultural burning” of trees by Indigenous people in the Cascades and create a template for sustainable and resilient forest management. “Cultural burning” is a form of land management passed on by Indigenous tribes whereby Indigenous people set low-intensity fires to protect ecosystems and reduce wildfire risks. Leveraging a partnership with Oregon State University and the National Science Foundation, the project included funding for students to engage in field work on the Willamette National Forest documenting how living trees were historically modified and sustainably managed as a food source by Indigenous peoples.

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Oregon Humanities, which is Oregon's state humanities council, was also recently notified that its standard operating grant from NEH was terminated, even though it was set to run through 2027. The loss of the grant is approximately \$1 million, which is almost half of the organization's yearly expenditure. Without these funds, Oregon Humanities will not be able to distribute federal dollars to other organizations in Oregon and do the critical work of creating conditions for people to connect and think together even when they disagree.

In addition, museums in Oregon like the High Desert Museum have also benefitted from NEH funding and recently had all five of their NEH grants terminated, which totaled more than \$600,000 in funding. This includes funding to increase storytelling about and educational resources for the largely rural High Desert region, and funding to expand the museum and its programming.

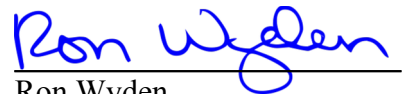
For Fiscal Year 2024, Congress appropriated \$207 million to NEH. We expect the Administration to implement the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act of 2025 in a manner consistent with these allocations enacted in Fiscal Year 2024. We also expect the Administration to allow the NEH to promote progress and scholarship in the humanities in the United States as Congress intended and as authorized in the *National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act*.

We hope you are mindful of these actions and the negative impacts this will have on Oregon's communities, and we look forward to working with you to support NEH in fulfilling its purpose and meeting all of its statutory requirements.

Sincerely,



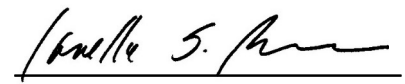
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Maxine Dexter  
Member of Congress



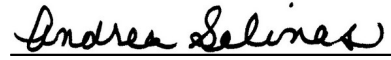
Janelle S. Bynum  
Member of Congress

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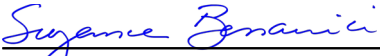
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Val Hoyle  
Member of Congress



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Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



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Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress