

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH JIM LEACH

SUBJECT: BRIDGING DIFFERENT CULTURES

MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**DONNA LEINWAND:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon. Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm a reporter with *USA Today*, and I'm President of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists, and we're committed to the future of journalism by providing informative programming and journalism education, and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org).

On behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching us on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Jonathan Salant of Bloomberg and a past president of the National Press Club; Mary Stewart, Vice President for External Affairs for WETA Television and Radio; Matt Small, radio producer for Associated Press; Eva Caldera, Senior Advisor to the Chairman of the NEH; Linda St. Thomas, Director of Media Relations for the Smithsonian Institution; Carol Watson, Deputy Chairman of the NEH.

Skipping over the podium, Melissa Charbonneau of Newshook Media, and Vice Chair of the National Press Club's Speakers Committee; skipping over our guest for just a moment, Andrea Stone, senior Washington correspondent for AOL's Sphere.com and the Speakers Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you very much, Andrea. Jeremy Bernard, White House liaison and Director of Congressional Affairs at NEH; and finally, Bob Keefe, Washington correspondent for the Atlanta Journal and Constitution. (Applause)

Our guest today says he's convinced that "the arts and humanities are vastly more important in troubled times." As head of the federal government's independent grant-making agency supporting research, education, preservation and public programs in the humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Chairman Jim Leach has made it his top goal to bridge cultural divides, telling his staff in a town hall meeting that our era is one where "declining civility increasingly hallmarks domestic politics and where anarchy has taken root in many parts of the world." And he should know a thing or two about declining civility in politics. Mr. Leach spent 30 years on Capitol Hill.

As a Republican Congressman representing southeastern Iowa, he was known as a moderate who often bucked his party on issues from embryonic stem cell research, which he supported, to the 2003 Iraq War Resolution, which he voted against. He is perhaps best known for the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, which deregulated the banking industry and ranks just behind the Federal Reserve Act of 1913 in importance.

Leach lost reelection in 2006 after social conservatives in his party refused to back him over the issue of gay marriage, and gaming interests opposed him over his stance against internet gambling. In 2008, Mr. Leach broke with Republicans to support Barack Obama for President, speaking at the Democratic National Convention in Denver.

This summer, President Obama nominated Mr. Leach as the ninth chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. He was sworn in this August after a brief stint at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, and at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Chairman Leach comes to his present position with an undergraduate degree from Princeton, a masters degree from Johns Hopkins, and eight honorary degrees.

But perhaps most useful in the rough and tumble of Washington politics, he has membership in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Please join me in welcome NEH Chairman Jim Leach. (Applause)

**MR. LEACH:** Thank you very much. my esteemed colleague, Rocco Landesman, thank you for coming, and Debbie, and my wife, Deba. As Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, I speak today to underscore the importance of the humanities at a time the world is in flux, and the judgment of its leading democracy is in question. The United States is currently engaged in military conflict in two countries more than a third of the way around the world, each with a unique set of problems. Our

engagement in South Asia is a result of a terrorist attack on our shores plotted by terrorists from mountainous readouts. Our engagement in the Middle East was undertaken against a country that was not involved in the plot against America, but was mistakenly thought to be on the verge of developing weapons of mass destruction.

In making assumptions about the wisdom and the manner of intervening in the affairs of other countries, would it be helpful for policymakers to review the history of the French colonial experience in Algeria, the British and Russian experience in Afghanistan, the French and U.S. experience in Vietnam before, rather than after, a decision to go to war? Would it be useful to study the differences between and within the world's great religions? And would any aspects of our own colonial history be relevant to decision making? The asymmetric tactics, for instance, of Francis Marion, the South Carolina patriot known as the Swamp Fox who attacked the best trained army in the world at night and then vanished into impenetrable swamps during the day?

The NEH advances scholarship in these and other areas. But how does a society translate scholarship into public policy? This is a challenging undertaking because it involves multiple parties, serious scholars on the one hand, and an open-minded public and professional policy makers on the other. A monk contemplating alone in a cave may be admirable, but wisdom that isn't shared is noiseless thought in the forest of humankind. Likewise, thoughtful scholarship that is available but not pondered by policymakers who might have limited interests or ideological biases, is a prescription for social error with many costly dimensions.

On the assumption that this is neither time for scholarly cave-sitting, nor vacuous citizenship, should it not be clear that little is more costly to society than ignoring or shortchanging the humanities? At issue today is a world struggling with globalist forces on the one hand, and localist instincts on the other. The visions are magnified at home, as well as abroad. It's particularly difficult not to be concerned about American public manners and the discordant rhetoric of our politics. Words reflect emotion as well as meaning. They clarify or cloud thought and energize action, sometimes, bringing out the better angels in our nature, sometimes lesser instincts.

Recent comments on the House floor have gathered much attention. But vastly more rancorous, socially divisive assertions are being made across the land, and few are thinking through the meaning or the consequences of the words being used. Public officials are being labeled fascist or communist. And more bizarrely, significant public figures have toyed with hints of history-blind radicalism: the notion of secession. One might ask, "What problem is there with a bit of hyperbole?" The logic, to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, is the message. If we lost 400,000 soldiers to defeat fascism, spent a fortune and lost thousands to hold communism at bay, and fought a Civil War to preserve the union, isn't it a citizen's obligation to draw on the humanities to lend perspective to words that contain worrying implications? There is, after all, a difference between holding a particular tax or spending or health care view and asserting that an American who supports another approach or is a member of a different political party is an advocate of an ism of hate that encompasses gulags and concentration camps.

One framework of thought defines rival ideas; the other, enemies. The poet, Walt Whitman, once described America as an athletic democracy. What he meant was that our politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was rugged and vigorous and spirited. Nativism, anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic sentiment, and of course toleration of human degradation implicit in slavery and indentured servitude, hallmarked much of American thought and many of our social senators. Indeed, violence was part of 19<sup>th</sup> century political manners. The Vice President shot dead our greatest Secretary of the Treasury for suggesting that he was despicable in a duel in which the dueling pistols were filed to a hair trigger, causing Alexander Hamilton to fire prematurely skyward. Moments later, Aaron Burr vindicated Hamilton's assessment of his character by mercilessly gunning down his adversary, who may have been duped.

So, uncivil behavior is nothing new. What is new are transformative changes in communications technology, in American politics in the issues facing mankind. The impact of new social media constitutes a subject much covered by others. So, I'd like to devote a few minutes to commenting on the changes in American politics in relation to challenges in the world.

In teaching at Harvard and Princeton upon leaving Congress, I developed a series of what I call two-minute courses in American governance. And let me cite several. Political science 101 begins with the observation that with episodic swings, the country over the past generation has been approximately one-third Democratic, one-third Republican and one-third independent. Grade school math tells us that one-half of one-third is one-sixth. So 16 2/3 percent of the voters nominally control candidate selection in a typical election. But because only one in four, often a fraction of this figure, participate in primaries where legislative candidates are chosen, it is one-fourth times one-sixth, that is one-twenty-fourth, that is often the maximum percentage of the electorate which controls the electoral choices offered by each of the parties.

This four percent is socially quite conservative on the Republican side and vigorously liberal on the Democratic. Hence, legislative bodies intended to represent the vast cross section of the American public increasingly reflect principally the philosophical edges. America is a pragmatic, centrist oriented society. For virtually all of our history, citizens have had an aversion to the extremes. Yet, compounded by recent patterns of redistricting, the majoritarian center is vastly underrepresented in Congress today, and in state legislative bodies as well. It hardly has a seat in the legislative table.

Political Science 102: to the degree parties are controlled or defined by their party apparatus, i.e., city, county, state, and national party organizations, it is impressive that the number of participants in party organizations is a *de minimis* part of one percent. Participants are to be respected for giving their time and energy, but it's a mistake to assume that either of the party organizations is reflective of society as a whole. And sometimes, not even of the majority who vote for candidates in a general election.

Political science 103 is that in primaries for President, Republican candidates lean to the right, and then if nominated scoot to the center in the general election. Democrats, vice versa. But in Congress, the scoot is seldom evident. In approximately 380 of 435 House seats are designed, or gerrymandered, in such a way as to be safe for one of the parties. About half of these safe seats are held by Republicans, and half by Democrats. With few exceptions, safe seat members must lean to the philosophical edges to prevail in primaries. And if nominated in an election, have every incentive to remain firmly positioned far from the center because the only serious challenge to their career choice is likely to come from within the party's attentive, uncompromising base. Institutional polarization is the inevitable result.

Psychology 101 relates to the fact that an increasing number of issues in Congress are perceived to be of a moral as contrasted with a judgmental nature. The advocates of one perspective or another assume that an individual on the other side of a moral issue is, by implication, advocating immorality. On the left, the problem is frequently evidenced by those who assume that increased social spending for almost any compassionate cause is the only moral choice. And on the right by those who assume that the moral values of one or another group should be written as law to bind society as a whole.

Philosophy 101 is the absence of abstraction. Legislation is increasingly driven by partisan concerns rather than consideration for philosophical notions like the public interest for the greatest good of the greatest number. Idealism has given way to a legislative dynamic in which the dominant considerations are how to respond to issues vibrant in a party's base constituencies, and how to balance influence of various moneyed interest groups.

Philosophy 102, there's something about the human condition that wants to be allowed to make governing decisions at socially cohesive levels where citizens may have impact. There's a lot written today about globalism in this century. But this century is also about localism. To adapt to a fast changing world, one must understand both of these phenomena. The fact, as Tip O'Neill repeatedly noted, that all politics are local, in a corollary that all local decisions are affected by international events. Caution must accordingly be taken in assuming that great power advocacy of a compassionate cause can necessarily trump the desires of small states to make decisions about their own futures even seemingly irrational ones.

Military Science 101. Military strategy in the last generation has become increasingly sophisticated with consideration of questions ranging from overwhelming force doctrine to end game strategies to concern for the sustainability of American public support for policy initiatives. But left out of in depth consideration have been cultural ramifications. Such issues include protection of cultural heritage sites and respect for cultural traditions but go vastly beyond these concerns. The lesson of our times is that military strategy must include consideration of unintended consequences, particularly to after effects of intervention from the perspective of the society most affected, and those in the world the share similar cultural traditions.

At issue isn't simply whether democracy is better than other methodologies of social organizations, and whether it can be readily imposed from the outside, or whether it is justifiable to seek to advance an individual rights ethic that increases opportunity for women and minority groups. At issue also is the sobering question of whether good intentions can be counterproductive and lead to greater internal conflict, social disruption, and potentially increased radicalization and whether progressive transformation of any society is more likely to be achieved through other means than military intervention.

Culture is more powerful than the politics of any moment, and surprisingly capable of withstanding change brought disproportionately by force of arms. So there is no misunderstanding, what I'm suggesting is that strategic thinking that lacks a cultural doctrinal component is inadequate for the times.

Sports 101: There are profound analogies between politics and sports. A journalist, Grantland Rice, famously got it right three quarters of a century ago when he observed that winning and losing are less important than how the game is played; likewise in politics. The temper and integrity of the political dialogue are more important for the cohesiveness of society than the outcome of any election. The problem in politics is that there are so few rules and no referees. The public must be on perpetual guard and prepared to throw flags when politicians overstep the bounds of fairness and decency. Just as football players, wrestlers or members of a tennis team compete to win, they also learn to respect their opponents. Is it asking too much for candidates and their supporters to do the same in politics?

Literature 101 involves a set of four books called *The Alexandria Quartet* by the British author, Lawrence Durrell. Set in Egypt between the first and second world wars in the ancient city of Alexandria, the first book spins a story from the eyes of one of the participants. Then Durrell proceeds to describe the same events in subsequent books, each the narrative from the perspective of other participants. One wonders, why read about the same event more than once? The reason is that each story is profoundly different. The moral is that to get a sense of reality, it's necessary to see things through more than one set of eyes. This may apply to interactions in community, in a courtroom, or in international relations. For what America does may seem reasonable from our perspective, but look very different from the perspective of a European or African, a Middle Easterner or an Asian. Adding to the eyes and ears of others to one's own capacities illuminates rather than narrows judgment.

Reality 101: in the most profound political science observation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Albert Einstein suggested that splitting the atom had changed everything except our way of thinking. Human nature may be one of the few constants in history, but 9/11 has taught that thinking must change, not simply because of the destructive power of the big bomb, but because of the implosive nature of small acts. Violence and social division are rooted in hate, since such thought begins in the hearts and minds of individuals as in each of our hearts and minds, hate must be checked and our way of thinking changed.

Reality 102: In western civilization's most prophetic poem, *The Second Coming*, William Butler Yeats suggests that the center cannot hold when the best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity. Apocalypse may not be a field of study, but it would seem that the chaos modernity has produced is a perspective related to values. Citizens of various philosophical persuasions are reflecting increased disrespect for fellow citizens and thus for modern day democratic governance. Much of the problem may flow from the fast changing nature of our society, which has so many destabilizing elements. But part falls at the feet of politicians and their supporters who use inflammatory rhetoric to divide the country. Candidates may prevail in elections by tearing down rather than uplifting, but if elected they cannot then unite an angered citizenry. Negativity raises the temperature level of legislatures just as it dispirits the soul of society.

Past Congresses have often been feisty, but what is so confounding about today's politics is a break with the central aspect of the American political tradition. Historically legislating decision making is based in what might be described as a Hegelian give and take between the parties. The thesis being one party's perspective, the antithesis the other's and the synthesis being legislation that accommodates concerns of each.

Over the last several decades, however, a trend has developed, or more precisely become accentuated, where legislative compromises are being made almost exclusively within whichever party controls Congress rather than between the parties. As the majority party increasingly views itself as exclusive vehicle of legislative governance, the minority sees itself more in the European parliamentary tradition as the opposition. And vice versa. Far better it would be for all legislators to consider themselves responsible for governing and for both sides to recognize that the other has something to say and contribute. In a society as complicated as ours has become, it is irrational to think that Republicans cannot find some Democratic initiatives helpful to society. And that Democrats cannot from time to time vote with Republicans.

Unlike natural physics, where Sir Isaac Newton pointed out that action equals reaction, in social chemistry, reaction can be greater than action. Name-calling in the kindergarten of life can lead to a hardening of attitudes and sometimes physical responses. Hence, civil discourse is about more than good manners. To label someone a communist may spark unspeakable acts. To call a country evil may cause a surprisingly dangerous counter reaction. How we lead or fail to lead in an interdependent world would be directly related to how we comprehend our own history, values and diversity of experiences, and how deeply we come to understand and respect other peoples and societies.

Citizenship is hard. It takes a willingness to listen, watch, read and think in ways that allow the imagination to put one person in the shoes of another. In this context, I have proposed that the NEH, in concert with the State Humanities Councils initiate a bridging cultures program aimed at enlarging our understanding of America's diverse cultural heritage and the history, language and art of other societies. I've also determined to commence a 50 state civility tour, not to express judgment on any issues of the day,

but simply to try to make clear that coarseness in public matters can jeopardize social cohesion.

Civilization requires civility, words matter. Just as polarizing attitudes can jeopardize social cohesion and even public safety, healing approaches, such as Lincoln's call for a new direction with malice towards none can uplift and help bring society and the world closer together. Little is more important for the world's leading democracy in this change-intensive century than establish an ethos of thoughtfulness and decency of expression in the public square. If we don't try to understand and respect others, how can we expect them to respect us, our values, and our way of life? Thank you. (Applause)

**MS. LEINWAND:** I heard an uh-oh there. We have lots of questions. So let me start with a few general questions about humanities. What do you think of the overall state of the humanities as you begin your tenure?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, there are many ways to look at it. In some ways, if you take extraordinary successes in the United States, it's impressive that America leads the world in almost every field of humanities, absolutely impressive. On the other hand, in many ways, the future is quite cloudy. You're seeing at colleges and universities a cutback in student enrollments in college and university support for the humanities. At the federal level, the NEH, like the National Endowment for the Arts, represents six one-thousandth of one percent of federal spending. Our particular budget, which is symbolic because it isn't the main brunt of humanities efforts, but it's a significant brunt, peaked in real dollar terms in 1979. We're barely more of a third of what we were then. In actual dollar terms, it peaked in 1994.

And so in terms of spending, we're seeing a crunch from a whole series of directions. Priorities at schools are turning towards what appear to be job-centric disciplines. The universities, both state support and private foundation support, are contracting, and the federal government is not picking up the pieces at a significant level. And so the humanities are in some jeopardy. And so the challenge is to look at priorities and then to ask the question, are the humanities more important in trying times or less important? Are the arts more important in trying times or not? In the Great Depression, vastly higher percent of the GDP was devoted to the arts and humanities than it is today. And there was an understanding in that era that people needed to try to comprehend what was happening around them and they wanted to record what was happening around them.

Today, I think we need to look back a little bit more in our own history and also recognize that all government programs are costly, but there are few things more costly than not to pay attention to the humanities. And that doesn't mean that an institutional framework like the NEH is the be all and end all, it is not. But it is a symbolic and significant role player in the whole area of humanities.

**MS. LEINWAND:** We have heard a great deal about the math and sciences gap between our youth and those in other developed powers. But what is your assessment of



our cultural literacy in humanities and what is NEH's role in promoting humanities importance?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, we have a traditional role of support for the humanities for research, particularly in history, literature and philosophy. But that role isn't exclusively in the abstract academic area. We also have a public humanities component, we have wonderful state humanities councils that are really getting out and talking to publics in very profound ways. Some of these efforts have clearly presaged several of the initiatives that I spoke about earlier in my talk.

But I'm getting more and more impressed that in education, we make a mistake simply to think at the higher levels. Learning really begins young and so we have seen some aspects of the broad humanities downgraded in the new approach to testing and one of the great questions is how you broaden circumstances recognizing that some of these issues are very wise. And so, how do you infuse with the three Rs a creative dimension, which can come in many different directions, some of which might be considered the arts, some of which might be considered kind of more philosophical, historical literary approaches to learning.

And my personal belief is this is something that's a challenge at the college level, it's a challenge at the high school level, it's a challenge at the grade and middle school and we have to look at all of these things.

Now, from the point of view of my kind of institution, we can play a very modest role in all of these efforts, but we cannot realistically size up the way other government agencies might have more resources to do. But we can set models in place and we can make, in an advocacy sense, issues clear to the public.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Enrollment in history courses is way down in comparison to what it was when you were at Princeton. Does that worry you? And if so, why?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, I don't think it's imperative that everyone be a history major. I know at Harvard and Princeton, the largest majors today are economics, which are considered to be a little more job oriented. By the same token, I do think it very important, whether one majors in engineering or physics or biology, that one also gets a sense for the humanities as well. And so I might prefer a history major as a recommendation to an individual. You want to respect how people make their own choices, but I think you also want to make it clear that whatever major, there is a lot to be learned from the humanities.

And the great model out there is the greatest physicist of the century, of the last century, maybe of all centuries, Einstein who used to do thought experiments that were incredibly imaginative. In fact, one of the interesting phenomenon, physics is a very math-based science, that Einstein was never considered the most extraordinary mathematician around. In fact, he was considered of lesser weight mathematically than

many at the top of their field. But no one was a greater imaginist than Einstein. And what the arts and humanities are all about is stretching the human imagination.

Now, as one looks at a discipline like physics, one can see how that was very helpful to an Einstein. But if one looks at society and asks what are the basic hallmark structures of society, it is that these times are symbolized by change and the acceleration of change. And that means that we have an increasing number of circumstances that every family faces that are literally unprecedented, that their grandfathers and grandmothers didn't face. And so what that means is to deal with the unprecedented, one has to have an imagination. And it's also helpful to the degree one can look at others that might have gone through similar circumstances. And that's one of the things you get from reading a novel, from reading great literature.

But it also, to look at the new, you've got to have the imagination to figure out how it might affect you, and then you have to have the imagination to imagine what else might be coming. And so this is an aspect to the humanities that isn't exactly a discipline of the humanities, it's an effect of the humanities that I think is incredibly important in our kind of age.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Putting on your professorial garb, how will cutbacks in newspapers and other journalism staffing affect government and politics?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, they clearly are. Just how and in what ways is not altogether clear to all of us. What we've done is we've democratized the press. Everybody now, with their own handheld instruments can be a purveyor of news. And that has never existed before. In some ways, this is incredibly vibrant, incredibly healthy. On the other hand, we appear to be empowering groups to stick with group thought and it appears we've also been empowering, just by choice to the American public, a new approach to given types of media. So when I was young, as when many of you were a bit younger, we had three national networks and then it became four. But all the networks vied to appear to be the most independent. Some people thought they were all too liberal, or whatever, and some not liberal enough. But they tried to be mainstream.

Now, you have a sense that a group has said part of America's public is quite conservative. We're going to direct our news with a conservative bias. Others have chosen a liberal bias, and others have chosen to try to stay in the center. And then others have chosen, and this has kind of been missed a bit, that maybe to be fair, we'll have someone represent the left and someone represent the right, we're being fair. Well, actually, there may not be fairness in that because there is a center that doesn't quite identify with the left or the right. And so you have these quandaries that the press is dealing with.

We all know there have been studies now of the newspaper media, how it can be saved. I happen to be one that thinks the American newspaper has done a great deal for the country historically and that in many ways, and I'm going to say something that's going to surprise you. If you take the best writers in journalism, one of the things that

happened over the last 30 years is that the best and the brightest in journalism were probably more able, with a greater sense of perspective, than almost anyone in legislative electoral politics. And so you had the press get ahead of-- The reporters on political action became more sophisticated. I mean, whether you think of Tom Friedman, David Broder, E. J. Dionne, a whole spectrum of people have really been extraordinary. You read the editorial page of the great newspapers that people like to make fun of, it is astonishing what thoughtfulness goes into the writing. And if we lose that, it's very awkward for society as a whole.

Now, that doesn't mean that somewhere on the internet, you also don't get extraordinary things. And there are sites that are developing that are terrific. In fact, there's access to every perspective in the world through the internet. And that has to be respected. But the breakdown of the bastions of thought that tries to be representative of the center and then tries to have some perspective of the right and left, I think would be a great loss for society.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What responsibility, if any, do cable TV hosts, radio talkers and like Frank Luntz and Roger Ales have in regard to the nature of discourse that's infected public debate?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, I think the cable shows have become democratic in the sense that they've looked at constituencies and are trying to appeal and also beyond that, that we sometimes forget there can be great truth in a very conservative perspective, and sometimes great truth in a great liberal perspective. And so one makes a mistake to say that this is all bad.

Now, to the degree that some people are using news as an entertainment and as an appeal to a constituency rather than an appeal to a set of ideas, one might have askance. But I have a great deal of respect for great conservative thinkers, great liberal thinks. In fact, on Capitol Hill I used to tell my dear wife, who's here, that I held an extremely high regard some on the left, some on the right, some in the center, and maybe lesser high regard some on the left, some on the right and some in the center.

But the same is true in the press. There have been wonderful conservative columnists, wonderful liberal columnists and wonderful people trying to put it all together, the David Brooks of the world, for example. And so the challenge is to have as many techniques as possible to get as much information to the public and then hope that the public will look at more than one source.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How do you win over those who question the funding of the NEH and the NEA during these difficult economic times?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, simply by asking the question, is it more important to think through the times or to put one's head in the sand? And when you talk about what are costly aspects of our budget today, might they have been less costly if we'd brought greater wisdom to bear at given points in time? And the same applies to the future.

**MS. LEINWAND:** I realize we're not at 1979 dollars, but the NEH recently got a big budget increase. How will you spend it? (Laughter)

**MR. LEACH:** Well, we received, and we're very grateful to the Congress and the President for proposing it, about an 8 ½ percent increase. We will spend it carefully and one aspect of the NEH that I am exceptionally proud of because it's different than virtually all other parts of the government, with a couple of exceptions; one being the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and our sister organization. We make most of our funding decisions based on peer review. That is, we bring in the best and the brightest in the country to make decisions about proposals.

Now in how you design the impact of these proposals, or how much in one category that becomes a judgmental mix. And that is why I'm stressing that we ought to be looking at the importance in American society of what I'm calling bridging cultures, but in effect means understanding our own mosaic of subcultures and peoples of differing backgrounds and differing thoughts, as well as the cultures of other societies. And the importance of language, the importance of comparative religion studies, the importance of history, are just dramatic today.

We in America like to think of ourselves as very pragmatic, which means that we like to balance thoughts before we reach decisions. Much of the world thinks historically, and they think by historical analogy. And not to understand how they think means that we can't interrelate very well with them. And in a world that is increasingly international, whether we all like all of the developments or not, we're going to have to do a better job of understanding the world. And frankly, I think a better job of understanding ourselves.

**MS. LEINWAND:** The chairman of your sister agency, Rocco Landesman, who's over there, of the NEA, has announced an Arts Works initiative. Do you see a Humanities Works counterpart?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, I'm very respectful of Rocco's initiative. We do the same thing, although we don't exactly use the same set of references. And so, we each are coining approaches with a given type of vocabulary. But that vocabulary is aimed at the same kinds of ends.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How specifically will your 50 state civility tour convince people that coarseness can jeopardize social cohesion?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, I can't predict outcome. All I can do is suggest effort. But I do think that the how in American civil society is often more important than the what.

**MS. LEINWAND:** What are your plans for the We the People initiative, the main initiative of your predecessor, Bruce Cole?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, sometimes in governance when there's a switch in parties, people like to think that their predecessor was somehow lacking. I succeeded a fine chairman. In fact, the NEH has had a tradition of great chairmen. And Chairman Cole had advanced a We the People initiative that I have a great deal of respect for and we intend to maintain it. The initiative is really aimed at trying to put out to America a greater sense of our own culture, and doing it in some very innovative ways, one being a program called Picturing America, which is looking at some of the great American painting and other artwork as kind of a-- As items in and of themselves, and as items that can be used to advance an understanding of history itself.

I mean, you can look at an historical painting, one for example a painting called "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," which is by, of course, America's greatest artist, that is a fellow Iowan named Grant Wood. (Laughter) But it's a painting loaded with humor and historical meaning. And from that painting, you can lead a discussion in a history class of the meaning of a moment in history and what is important about that moment and what relevance it has to a student in a class in Idaho or Iowa or New York City today.

**MS. LEINWAND:** A recent news story reported on t-shirts calling for the death of President Obama and citing scripture. What do you think should be done about this?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, there's nothing more dangerous than hate speech and I can't think of anything more devastating to society than an act that would be of the nature implied. And all I can say is people have to come together and recognize we're all one team, we're one people. I sometimes use sports analogies, which sounds very trivial in comparison with the issue that was just laid on the table. But I am a great advocate of the University of Iowa Hawkeyes and they had a great football season, almost a miracle one. But the interesting thing to me is how this team operated as a team and then it had rivals and respected the rivals and the rivals respected them. And there's something about sports, which is all competition that sets a model out there that politics should follow. And politics, I don't simply mean an elected legislator or member of an executive branch at a state level, but the notion that all of us as part of a national politic ought to be very competitive and advance all of our convictions vigorously.

But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't respect the other side, listen to the other side. That's what people do in sports. I sometimes think the great models of leadership today are the great coaches, whether it be Joe Paterno or Kirk Ferentz. Whether it be Vivian Stringer. I mean, these are great coaches and they set a model. And then you have great players that they get in the news sometimes for doing something arrogant or uncivil. But the fact is, athletes are taught to compete full blown and then they know they're playing against people that the result might not come out exactly the way they want. But they don't cry about it, they get up and go ahead. And brother, to me, that's the way politics should be.

Now turning from athletics, if you go to a great orchestra, what is it all about? It's about a conductor leading people working together in many different ways. And it's the

same kind of discipline. The same with a play. You've got to have an interaction of people, and yes you have stars versus lesser stars, but it's all a cohesive thing. And to me, what's so central in American culture and so great in American culture isn't always reflected in politics, and politics has to take lessons outside of politics. And we would be stronger as a society.

**MS. LEINWAND:** How can your agency work to prevent a return to the culture wars as the divide between the GOP and President Obama grows?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, first of all, I think we ought to be very careful about words. I mean, war has lots of implications that are truly wrong in this setting. We have cultural differences and we should be proud of those differences. That you have people of different backgrounds, you have people of different thoughts. And the idea of having everyone of one culture, of one way of thinking, would not be a healthy society. And so, it's great that we have diversity of cultures, but we shouldn't be thinking in terms of warring, we should be thinking in terms of respecting differing, trying to bring out the best in everybody.

My favorite approach to this is one of the most remarkable people in our history, Thomas Jefferson, who once talked about the various religions in the world. And he said what matters isn't so much where they differ, but where there are commonalities. I consider that to be one of the profoundest thoughts going. And he even tried to write them up. I mean, this is a man who was a politician and he was also an engineer. This was a renaissance man of renaissance thinking, and one of the great questions is why can't we learn from this and think ourselves in similar kinds of ways?

And so my view is let's celebrate our differences and let's be very cautious of when you put down the notion of war, you're setting forth an uncompromising and potentially violence-inducing ethic.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Is there any room for a moderate in today's Republican Party?

**MR. LEACH:** Really, I hope so. I mean, if you go to the modern day history of the Republican Party, there's always been a larger conservative dimension than a so-called modern dimension. When I was younger, it was the famous division between Barry Goldwater and Nelson Rockefeller, who was a kind of urban Republican, Barry was an individual rights Republican. The conservative thinking has changed somewhat. Barry Goldwater was the classic individual rights Republican who today would be considered quite a liberal Republican. That is, he favored a skinny budget, but he also believed in-- He was pro choice, believed in gay rights. That doesn't fit a lot of social Republicans.

But to me, there can be room for all sides of the Republican Party. And if one side is eliminated, the party will be in some difficulty. But if you can obtain a position of mutual respect, I think it works. Likewise in the Democratic Party. There's a role for

moderates and moderation in it. I personally recognize that there are major differences in judgment in citizens in issues like pro choice versus pro life. But I don't think those issues should be captured within a political party. They should be the judgment of individual citizens and individual legislators and individual office holders and people should be asked to be true to their convictions and hopefully respectful to others. But it shouldn't be a Republican position versus a Democratic position. You should have respect for each side within each party.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Did you make a mistake by supporting Gramm-Leach-Bliley? Did it contribute to the economic turndown? Why or why not?

**MR. LEACH:** Well, I think it's a much misunderstood bill. This particular bill was a bill that enhanced competition within three areas of finance, but it was a bill that in terms of regulation changed the regulatory environment in ways that would surprise most people who haven't thought it through, but it increased regulation rather than decreased in a whole spectrum of areas. It included the most pervasive, or the strongest, privacy regulation in the history of Congress. It also called for what is called functional regulation where each activity would be regulated in a separate way, but there would be a cohesive regulator over all of the functional parts. And it's my view, and it's different than many in public life, and I have to be very careful because I'm in the humanities where I'm to express opinions on process but less on policy.

But as we look backwards, I think you'll see that the great decisions that were quite awkward were judgmental ones and the major one, although there are a whole spectrum of aspects of the current fiasco, was a decision of the executive branch to allow vastly greater leveraging within the largest financial institutions. And it's the lure of leveraging that needs to be constrained by government, and it's that lure that not only was not held in check, but was given a green light in the last five or six years in which, in my view, is the principal problem behind what we've seen in the economic community.

**MS. LEINWAND:** To that end, what new banking regulations do you support, if any?

**MR. LEACH:** Let me just say that I've written somewhat extensively on this subject, and anyone may-- I will be happy to provide anyone any information in that regard that you may want, all written before taking this job. And I'm not expected to comment extensively on it. But I will say I think the role of an independent regulator is essential. I think a regulator that pays attention to leveraging issues and one of the footnote aspects of all of this is that we need to have different types of people brought into government, particularly those that are mathematically oriented, particularly CPAs. Because finance, after all, is about numbers and one of the missed aspects of the regulatory environment was that there was no one out there, whether you talk about certain banking institutions or certain hedge fund operations that asked the questions, "Where was the money?" And that's kind of something a CPA does by nature. And so I'm very inclined to a CPA orientation to financial regulation.

**MS. LEINWAND:** A member of our audience asks, “Is Sarah Palin qualified to be president?”

**MR. LEACH:** Well, I think that's a case that all candidates have to make. I consider her one of the most interesting people in American public life, and I think she has every right to present herself for any office in the land. And she certainly gained a lot of experience in the last election and she has a base that has to be respected.

**MS. LEINWAND:** Okay, we are just about out of time. But before I ask the last question, which is funny, I swear, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. First of all, let me remind our members of future speakers. On Monday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, Ambassador Nancy G. Brinker, founding chair of the Susan G. Komen for the Cure will address the controversy over new federal breast cancer screening at a special speakers news conference at twelve noon. On November 30<sup>th</sup>, Prince Albert II of Monaco, Marquis of Baux, will address a National Press Club luncheon. December 4<sup>th</sup>, Joy Zinoman, Artist Director and co-founder of the Studio Theater will be here.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional and much-coveted National Press Club mug. (Applause)

**MR. LEACH:** Thank you very much.

**MS. LEINWAND:** You're welcome. Okay, we've got one more question for you. You've still got one more to go. Does your experience as a wrestler have any bearing on your role as head of the NEH? (Laughter)

**MR. LEACH:** Well, I have a view that all sports are equal except wrestling, which is superior. But the most equalitarian circle in the world is the circle on a wrestling mat. But sports teaches you a lot of things. One is to compete with rules, with fairness. But wrestling with ideas can be a tougher challenge sometimes than wrestling against the sinews of somebody else. (Applause)

**MS. LEINWAND:** I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson and Joann Booz for organizing today's lunch. Also, thanks to the National Press Club Library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club's Broadcast Operations Center. And our events are available for free download on iTunes as well as on our website. Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio and videotapes by calling 202-662-7598 or emailing us at [archives@press.org](mailto:archives@press.org). For more information about the National Press Club, please go to our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Thank you, and we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel)

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