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NEWS RELEASE

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James Leach approved as NEH chairman

WASHINGTON, DC—The Nebraska Humanities Council and the Federation of State Humanities Councils—the national association of state humanities councils—are pleased to announce that the Senate today approved the president’s nomination of James Leach, a former 15-term Republican Congressman from Iowa, as the next chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), senior member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, which voted on the confirmation, described Leach as “a public servant of the first order. I’m appreciative that Iowa and our nation will continue to benefit from his leadership.”

Calling the confirmation “very welcome news to all of us in the humanities community,” Federation President Esther Mackintosh said, “Mr. Leach brings to this position a deep understanding of the vital role the humanities play in helping citizens address the most urgent issues our society faces.”

During a distinguished career, Leach has been a Congressman from America’s heartland, a congressional leader in banking and international affairs, and a professor at a prestigious university, but in choosing him to head the NEH, President Obama recognized that Leach is something else as well: a champion of the activities and endeavors that make human life meaningful. In a congressional environment that was often contentious and partisan, Leach gained an unshakable reputation for integrity, even-handedness, and an independent and thoughtful approach to issues.

Leach served as chairman of the House Committee on Banking and Financial Services (1995-2001), a senior member of the House Committee on International Relations, and chairman of the Committee’s Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs (2001-2006). Since 2007, he has taught at Princeton University and served as the interim director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

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In 2004 Leach co-founded, along with Rep. David Price (D-NC), the bipartisan Congressional Humanities Caucus to increase awareness of the importance of the humanities in public life. He received the 2005 Sidney R. Yates Award for Distinguished Public Service to the Humanities from the National Humanities Alliance in recognition of his work as a champion for the humanities.

An important component of the agency Leach will be heading are the 56 state humanities councils, established to extend the reach of the NEH to communities in every state, the five territories and commonwealths, and the District of Columbia. The state humanities councils offer programs that support families, children and teachers; provide educational resources for community institutions; and bring citizens together to collectively address issues of public importance.

The Nebraska Humanities Council and the Federation of State Humanities Councils will host the 36th annual National Humanities Conference in Omaha Nov. 5-8. According to Jane Renner Hood, executive director of the Nebraska Humanities Council and Foundation, “We are looking forward to welcoming Chairman Leach back to the heartland for his first official meeting with the staff and board members of all of the nation’s state humanities councils. Our commitment to public service mirrors his, and we are looking forward to working with Jim Leach to advance the informed civic involvement that the humanities can provide us in a time when change is so rapid and human needs so great.”

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