

Walter Capps' remarks at the Reception in the U.S. Senate, in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of a state humanities program, September 12, 1985

I am Walter Capps, president of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils, and I have the privilege of welcoming all of you to this splendid reception here in the Mike Mansfield Room of the Senate, in commemoration of two very significant anniversaries.

Before offering some very brief remarks, I wish to acknowledge the presence of several of our very distinguished guests. First, John Agresto, Acting Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities is here. Thomas Kingston, Acting Deputy Chair of the Endowment is also here. And I'm pleased to identify Marjorie Berlincourt, who is Director of the Endowment's Division of State Programs, and one with whom I have been working very closely over the past months. Also, Steve Weiland, the Executive Director of the Federation is here. And we are surrounded by members of the Federation's Board of Directors as well as by chairpersons and executive directors of a number of state humanities councils from throughout the nation. Indeed, everyone in the room deserves to be introduced.

We have two specific purposes this evening. The first is to commemorate the important anniversaries. The second is to pay tribute where tribute is surely due.

1985 is being called the year in which there is an an-

nual of anniversaries. Not many weeks ago we commemorated forty years since the end of World War II, indeed, forty years since the beginning of the nuclear age. A few weeks before we recognized the tenth anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. And only yesterday was the fifty-seventh anniversary of the game in which Ty Cobb took his last turn at bat. Tonight we celebrate twenty years since the Congress authorized a National Endowment for the Humanities, and fifteen years since a Division of State Programs was established, authorized by Congress, within the Endowment.

If we can turn back further in history, not twenty years ago, not even a hundred years ago, but two hundred years ago, to the time of the Founders of this great nation, I'd like to call your attention to a brief letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Banister. Writing in September, 1785, Banister had sought Jefferson's counsel as to whether American youth ought to be encouraged to gain their education in Europe rather than in the United States. In his reply, Jefferson acknowledged that a European education carried many positive features, but it was not to be compared with the value of an American education, at least in potential. And in making his case, Jefferson offered the following invitation:

Cast your eye over America. Who are those of most learning, most eloquence, most beloved by their fellow citizens, and most trusted by them?

Then, answering his own question, Jefferson continued:

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