

“Introducing a Distinguished Public Servant and Hall of Fame Wrestler:
NEH Chairman James A. Leach”

Introduction of National Endowment for the Humanities Chairman
James A. Leach

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
President
Indiana University
Frangipani Room
Indiana Memorial Union
Indiana University Bloomington
Tuesday, September 21, 2010
4:00 p.m.

Thank you, Provost Hanson.

Now it is my great pleasure to introduce National Endowment for the Humanities
Chairman James A. Leach.

In remarks delivered earlier this year, Chairman Leach said, “The most meaningful
discovery in a liberal arts education is that everything is related to everything else,
although we may not know it at the time. Maturation is the tying together of threads of
learning.”¹

During his tenure as a congressman and now as chair of the NEH, Jim Leach has been
sharing this message about the power of a liberal arts education, a message that has its
roots in his own education and experience. Mr. Leach earned his bachelor’s in political

¹ “Let Your Speech Be Always with Grace.” Commencement Address. Westminster College. Salt Lake
City, Utah. 29 May 2010. <<http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/speeches/05292010.html>>.

science from Princeton, his master's in Soviet politics from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, and studied under Leonard Schapiro, then the world's leading authority on the Soviet state, at the London School of Economics.²

One look at Mr. Leach's speeches reveals the breadth of his education. In fact, in one speech alone, he references U.S. Statute, several Supreme Court rulings, American poets Walt Whitman and Carl Sandberg, Marshall McLuhan, Abraham Lincoln, Edward Gibbon (author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*), Thucydides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Bismarck, Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz, and the Bible.³

Following his studies at the London School of Economics, Mr. Leach entered the U.S. Foreign Service, working briefly at the Soviet desk then in arms control. In fact, I understand that he settled on this career when he was asked by his eighth-grade teacher to write an essay about what he wanted to do when he grew up. Prior to his service in Congress, he was a staffer to Donald Rumsfeld.⁴

Chairman Leach resigned his position within the Foreign Service in protest of presidential acts associated with Watergate, returning to Iowa and the family business. Within several months, he was approached as a potential congressional candidate. Although he lost his first race, he won an Iowa seat in the House of Representatives two years later. As he explains, "[I] was able to prevail, largely, I am convinced, because between elections I had married a lovely young woman who cared little about partisan politics but had vastly more friends than I."⁵

² "The Gentleman from Iowa." Interview with Jim Leach. *Humanities* 30.6 (Nov./Dec. 2009). NEH Website. <www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2009-11/Interview.html>.

³ "Let Your Speech Be Always with Grace." *Op cit.*

⁴ Trescott, Jacqueline. "GOP's Leach Picked to Run Humanities Endowment." *The Washington Post* (4 June 2009). <www.washingtonpost.com>.

⁵ "The Gentleman." *Op cit.*

Mr. Leach was re-elected fourteen times, serving thirty years in the U.S. House of Representatives. Described as a moderate Republican, he was known to reach across party lines, chairing the Ripon Society and the Republican Mainstream Committee, both of which encourage bipartisanship.

While in Congress, Representative Leach chaired the Banking and Financial Services Committee, the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China. He also founded the Congressional Humanities Caucus, in response, at least in part, to the attacks against the NEH and the National Endowment for the Arts during the 1990s, and he served as co-chair of that advocacy organization.⁶

Leach left Congress in 2007, joining the faculty at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. According to Dean of the Wilson School Christina Paxson, "[h]e proved to be a dedicated teacher and a fine role model for [Princeton] students." He also served on the Princeton Board of Trustees and as interim director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.⁷

In 2009, President Obama reached across party lines when he nominated Mr. Leach to be the ninth Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a position he took up about a year ago.

Over the course of the years, Jim Leach has amassed an impressive list of accolades including eight honorary degrees; the Sidney R. Yates Award for Distinguished Public Service to the Humanities from the non-profit National Humanities Alliance; the Woodrow Wilson Award from Johns Hopkins University; the Adlai Stevenson Award from the United Nations Association; the Edgar Wayburn Award from the Sierra Club;

⁶ Pogrebin, Robin. "Obama Names a Republican to Lead the Humanities Endowment." *The New York Times* (4 June 2009). <www.nytimes.com>.

⁷ Quiñones, Eric. "Leach, Petraeus to Receive Top Alumni Awards." News at Princeton Website. 6 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S26/28/06K01/index.xml?section=topstories>>.

the Wayne Morse Integrity in Politics Award; the Norman Borlaug Award for Public Service; and the Wesley Award for Service to Humanity.

Two of his accolades seem particularly fitting for one who has spent so much of his life in politics. In 1995, he was inducted into the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and he is also a member of the International Wrestling Hall of Fame in Waterloo, Iowa.

Would you please help me welcome hall of fame wrestler, United States Representative from Iowa, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Honorable James A. Leach?