

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 6, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Vice Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Vice Chairwoman Collins,

In less than three years, our country will commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. The Semiquincentennial provides a tremendous opportunity to renew Americans' appreciation and understanding of our nation's history, reinvigorate participation in our civic life and build together toward a stronger future. Like the Bicentennial in 1976, this anniversary also provides a rare opportunity to invest in American communities by helping them preserve and share our American story and ensure its relevance to future generations. By prioritizing programs tasked with carrying out America 250 programming and commemorations in the FY25 appropriations process, Congress can make a lasting impact to preserve the ideals such as liberty, freedom, justice, and civic engagement upon which the country was founded.

To realize the full promise of this momentous celebration of American independence, we urge robust appropriations for the following agencies and programs to support initiatives related to the Semiquincentennial:

## Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act

- United States Semiquincentennial Commission
- National Park Service – Historic Preservation Fund
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Humanities

## Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act

- Institute of Museum and Library Services

## Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act

- National Archives and Records Administration – National Historical Publications and Records Commission

The 250th anniversary arrives at a critical moment. Americans' knowledge of history and civics has declined significantly in recent years. The Nation's Report Card released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)<sup>1</sup> in May 2023 indicates serious deficiencies in eighth graders' understanding of U.S. history and civics. NAEP scores declined five points from 2018 to 2022, landing a full 30 points below the level of "proficiency," a continuation of a decade-long slide.<sup>2</sup> Other troubling signs abound. The Institute for Citizens & Scholars, another

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<sup>1</sup> National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): [Results from 2022 NAEP civics assessment at grade 8](#)

<sup>2</sup> National Report Card: [Trends and Research in U.S. History and Civics](#)

nonpartisan research group, found that only about one in three Americans possess the knowledge of history and civics required to pass the national citizenship test.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, research from the American Association for State and Local History found that most Americans think history is simply a hobby for enthusiasts, rather than a subject relevant to everyone.<sup>4</sup> This concerning decline in historical and civic knowledge coincides with a growing lack of national pride among younger Americans.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, there are encouraging signs as well, suggesting a major opportunity to reverse these troubling trends and rebuild Americans' knowledge and appreciation of history and civics through strategic investments in the lead-up to 2026. For example, a survey conducted by nonprofit, non-partisan research organization More in Common<sup>6</sup> shows 86 percent of Americans (the vast majority of both Republicans and Democrats) agree on fundamental ideas about our national history and how it should be taught. The study states that "Americans of all political orientations want their children to learn a history that celebrates our strengths and also examines our failures."

Fifty years ago, during the lead-up to the 1976 Bicentennial, Congress prioritized programs that strengthened democratic ideals and a sense of civic service. With the right investments, the Semiquincentennial could present the same incredible power to inspire future generations' knowledge and appreciation of our country's history and leave a lasting legacy of increased civic engagement. As Americans are re-introduced to our national story in 2026, it will be a chance for them to reconnect with fundamental American ideals such as liberty, freedom and justice and to pass appreciation for them onto the next generation.

Thank you for your consideration of these priorities. The Semiquincentennial represents a unique opportunity to strengthen the core bond of all Americans in celebration of our shared history. We stand ready to work with you to maximize the impact of this historic occasion.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator

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<sup>3</sup> Institute for Citizens & Scholars: [National Survey Finds Just 1 in 3 Americans Would Pass Citizenship Test](#)

<sup>4</sup> AASLH and FrameWorks Institute, "[Communicating about History: Challenges, Opportunities, and Emerging Recommendations](#)."

<sup>5</sup> Morning Consult Survey – 75% of baby boomers expressed pride in living in the U.S. compared to 54% of Gen Xers, 36% of millennials, and 16% of Gen Z.

<sup>6</sup> More in Common: Defusing the History Wars: [Defusing the History Wars: Finding Common Ground in Teaching America's National Story](#)