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Southern Growth Policies Board's 2003 Report on the Future of the South focuses on Leadership and Civic Engagement

Four Southern Governors participate in discussions on building Civic Engagement in Southern Communities as part of Regional Economic Development Policy

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C. —Southern Growth Policies Board, a regional public policy think tank, released today its 2003 Report on the Future of the South at The Southern Leadership Summit conference in Biloxi, Mississippi. The report, *Reinventing the Wheel*, focuses on the link between civic engagement and the long-term economic development of the South. Governor Ronnie Musgrove (MS), Governor Mike Huckabee (AR), Gov. Mark Warner (VA) and Governor Brad Henry (OK) are participating in the Southern Leadership Summit conference to discuss strategies for building leadership capacity in Southern communities on June 1-3, at the Beau Rivage Resort in Biloxi.

The foundation for *Reinventing the Wheel* is emerging research that civic infrastructure directly impacts both quality of life and economic opportunity. The quantity and quality of a community's, or a region's, civic engagement is directly related to its economic success. The South, like much of the nation, has experienced economic restructuring and large demographic shifts that have dissolved many traditional sources of community leadership. The report includes recommendations for strengthening civic engagement in the South by developing leaders at the grassroots level; engaging youth, minorities and new immigrants; and providing collaborative strategies for building social capital and solving community problems.

Governor Musgrove, Southern Growth Policies Board chairman, explained, "The South can do a better job of using our human resource potential. If our region is to be successful in creating technology and innovation-based economies, we have to build the civic capacity of Southern communities."

The report's genesis was a departure from the traditional model of developing policy reports. Guided by the Council on the Southern Community, Southern Growth Policies Board staff conducted regional focus groups in seven Southern states, sponsored an on-line survey and held a regional plenary sessions to yield recommendations from more than 600 citizens that call for more, diverse and better-prepared leaders that reflect the new and evolving culture of the South.

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As Southern Growth Policies Board executive director Jim Clinton explained, “The 2003 Report on the Future of the South was not dreamed up by a blue-ribbon panel of policy experts. We went into Southern communities and asked our fellow citizens how to create connected communities. Their recommendations set the course for our regional strategy.”

Arkansas Governor Huckabee, chairman of the Council on the Southern Community, added, “*Reinventing the Wheel* lights the way for a new generation of Southern Leaders. Every Southerner should be encouraged to participate in building a better community.”

Presentations and panel discussions at the Southern Leadership Summit will further the issues raised in the 2003 Report on the Future of the South. Presenters include Susan Berresford, President of the Ford Foundation, Harris Wofford, co-chair of America’s Promise, Pete Correll chairman and CEO of Georgia-Pacific Corporation, Sara Melendez, former President of Independent Sector and James Ukrop, Chairman of Ukrop’s Super Markets Inc. and First Market Bank. Southern Governors and other regional leaders will also participate in the annual Town Meeting, an open forum discussion with audience participation, which is the culmination of the conference.

Southern Growth Policies Board will support the region’s progress in building social capital and civic engagement following the release of the 2003 Report on the Future of the South and Southern Leadership Summit by creating tool kits and discussion guides to facilitate community deliberation and engagement. Two products, *Pathways to Prosperity* and *Seeing the Future*, are already providing communities with affordable tools for engaging citizens in discussions about prosperity, the Knowledge Economy and their community’s economic development strategies.

For a printed copy of the 2003 Report in the Future of the South, contact Leigh Ann Wilder, at lwilder@southern.org.

About Southern Growth Policies Board

Southern Growth Policies Board is a non-partisan public policy think tank based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Formed by the region’s governors in 1971, Southern Growth Policies Board develops and advances visionary economic development policies by providing a forum for collaboration among a diverse cross-section of the region’s governors, legislators, business and academic leaders and the economic- and community-development sectors. Supported by the governments of 13 Southern states and Puerto Rico, Southern Growth provides its members, and the region, with authoritative research, discussion forums and pilot projects in the areas of technology and innovation, globalization, workforce development, community development, civic engagement and leadership. To learn more about Southern Growth Policies Board, visit www.southern.org.