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Education, Innovation Headline NGA Closing Plenary

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Contact: John Blacksten

Washington, DC: 202-624-5346

Charleston, SC: (Aug. 4-7): 843-937-8737

CHARLESTON, S.C.—The nation's governors made NGA history today in the closing plenary session for this year's National Governors Association (NGA) Annual Meeting. At the end of the session, which focused on education, creativity and innovation, Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, the outgoing NGA chairman, passed the leadership gavel to incoming NGA Chair Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano. Gov. Napolitano becomes the first female governor to hold that position in the 98-year history of the association. Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty was named NGA vice chair.

"I want to thank Gov. Napolitano for working with me over the past year as NGA vice chair, and especially for co-chairing our Healthy America Task Force," said Gov. Huckabee. "I truly benefited from your experience, counsel and expertise; and I know you will make a stellar chair of NGA."

Before the gavel was passed, governors were given an update on two important NGA initiatives, the NGA Graduation Counts Compact and the NGA Honor States Grant Program. The compact, signed last year by the governors of all 50 states and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico, was an unprecedented commitment to utilize a single, common method for calculating each state's high school graduation rate. "Implementing Graduation Counts: State Progress to Date," which was released at the plenary, provides information about current state policies and plans to implement the compact rate, as well as additional guidance to help ensure comparable implementation across states. The data included in the report recently was gathered by the NGA Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) from governors' offices and state education agencies.

For the past year, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has supported 10 NGA Honor States as they develop and implement wide-ranging policies that support the goals of increasing graduation rates and ensuring graduates are ready for the challenges they will face in college and/or the work place. Gov. Pawlenty and Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine, two governors who have been working to redesign their high schools, shared their states' goals, accomplishments and remaining challenges. Governors also heard a national Honor States Grant Program progress report from Tom Vander Ark, executive director of education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Following the updates, governors heard an inspiring keynote by Sir Ken Robinson, Ph.D., an internationally recognized leader in the development of creativity, innovation and human resources. Robinson made the case that creativity and innovation are key ingredients in educating students to meet the challenges of living and working in the 21st century. Sir Ken also talked about his recent book, *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, which is an analysis of how organizations can jumpstart the creative process by reforming outdated models and assumptions about intelligence and ability. Gov. Huckabee

then welcomed incoming NGA Chair Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano and incoming Vice Chair Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty.

Gov. Napolitano unveiled her year-long NGA Chair's Initiative, Innovation America, which will highlight two areas that are critical to the nation's future success. "To be competitive as a nation, we must prepare our young people to meet the real demands of the job market," said Gov. Napolitano. "The goal of my Chair's initiative is to educate our students to be innovators, and to carry that spirit of innovation through their university experience and into the workforce. Math and science education teaches true problem solving skills that, in turn, will increase our nation's capacity for innovation in virtually every field."

As part of the initiative, NGA will:

- * raise national awareness of the urgent need to embrace innovation as the U.S. path to maintaining competitiveness;
- * share examples of best practices and provide a "tool box" of effective policies and strategies;
- * present each governor with an economic profile specific to their state, including high growth innovation centers and science and math proficiencies;
- * host regional learning labs and workshops to help states improve education in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math; and
- * create new science and math academies to improve student achievement and grow a workforce in emerging occupations.

"Working with Gov. Huckabee as his vice chair was an honor and a privilege. And now I am excited by the opportunity to lead NGA at such a critical time for our nation's economy," said Gov. Napolitano. "I look forward to working with my vice chair, Gov. Pawlenty, and my gubernatorial colleagues to ensure innovation is top of mind for state leaders, educators and the business community."

As vice chair, Gov. Pawlenty will lead NGA's Center for Best Practices, the nation's leading authority on state innovation. The Center helps governors and their policy advisors develop and implement effective solutions to governance and policy challenges facing them in their states. The Center provides tailored technical assistance, tracks and evaluates state innovations and best practices and helps governors and their staffs develop cutting-edge solutions.

The plenary closed with NGA committee reports, consideration of proposed NGA policies and recognition of outgoing governors.