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**NEH CHAIRMAN LEACH BRINGS ‘CIVILITY TOUR’ TO MISSISSIPPI**

**(JACKSON, MS)** – National Endowment for the Humanities Chairman James A. Leach will visit Mississippi next week as part of his fifty-state “Civility Tour.” He intends to visit all 50 states during the next 18 months to call attention to the need for civil discourse in American society.

Leach’s Mississippi stop will coincide with the Mississippi Humanities Council’s 2010 Public Humanities Awards banquet February 26, 2010, at the Hilton Jackson hotel. Leach will give opening remarks at the banquet, which recognizes outstanding contributions by Mississippians to the study and understanding of the humanities.

“We are delighted to host Chairman Leach as he brings his Civility Tour to our state,” said Dr. Rod A. Risley, chair of the Mississippi Humanities Council. “His priorities are our priorities, as reflected in the recently adopted long-range plan for MHC. Our four areas of focus are: civil discourse, Mississippi history and culture, books and reading and capacity building. We join with Chairman Leach to raise awareness of the critical need for engaging our citizens in civil discussions about important issues and developing among them broader awareness of and appreciation for differing cultures.”

At a speech at Washington’s Press Club in December, when he announced his tour, Leach said his remarks are aimed at overcoming the divisiveness that marks so much political and other social discourse in the United States today. The tour is part of a larger “Bridging Cultures” effort that Leach has proposed with the goal of “enlarging our understanding of America’s diverse cultural heritage and the history, language and art of other societies.”

“Bridging cultural divides and developing a sense for a common humanity are moral and social imperatives,” Leach said in launching his tour. “Civilization requires civility. Words matter...Little is more important for the world’s leading democracy in this change-intensive century than establishing an ethos of thoughtfulness and decency of expression in the public square.”

Leach began his four-year term as NEH chairman in August 2009 after serving 30 years in the U.S. House of Representatives. As a congressman representing southeastern Iowa, he chaired the Banking and Financial Services Committee, the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China. He founded and co-chaired the Congressional Humanities Caucus.

The public is welcome at the Mississippi Humanities Council Public Humanities Awards banquet, but reservations are required. Tickets are \$45 each or \$340 for a table of eight and may be purchased by sending a check to the Mississippi Humanities Council, 3825 Ridgewood Road, Room 317, Jackson, MS 39211. The banquet begins with a reception at 6 p.m. followed by dinner at 7 p.m. Information about the awards and the banquet is available at [www.mshumanities.org](http://www.mshumanities.org) or 601-432-6752.

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