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KENTUCKY

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NOTE: An electronic version of the report: www.kltrpc.net/books/2008/trends.pdf

Center Releases Report on Kentucky's Future

FRANKFORT, KY (December 31, 2008) — The Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center released its eighth biennial trends report today. *Visioning Kentucky's Future: Measures and Milestones 2008*, a widely used compilation of benchmarks that have measured the state's progress since 1994, also includes results from the sixth in a series of statewide surveys that measures public opinion about the progress of citizen goals for the state and the relative importance of each. A "State of the Commonwealth" index provides another installment of the Center's quantitative analysis of the state's status relative to other states.

Prescribed by the General Assembly, the Center's trends report offers both citizens and policymakers a body of information about the state's standing relative to the nation and other states on critical issues. For Center Board 2009 Chair, State Rep. Reginald Meeks (House District 42, Jefferson County), the report is a uniquely Kentucky product. "The rich body of data presented in the Center's biennial trends report presents policymakers and citizens alike with knowledge they can use to help alleviate and avoid problems and seize real opportunities," Rep. Meeks said. "This is not a remote, overly academic document; it's one of the most useful tools available to policymakers at every level. It's an accessible guide for anyone who wants to improve the lives of Kentuckians."

Like its predecessors, *Visioning Kentucky's Future: Measures and Milestones 2008* is organized around five sections: communities, education, economy, environment, and government. Each of these is linked to citizen goals for the future that were established in 1994 based on and derived from extensive public input. Within the five broad areas are 26 goals and more than 100 benchmarks or indicators that are measures of the progress made toward each goal.

In general, the report concludes that while Kentucky has made progress in many areas, most notably education, it has not gained much ground relative to other states. The report highlights five overarching themes:

- **Education as a Work in Progress** — Despite muted progress overall, Kentucky has made substantial educational progress since the early 1990s relative to its own past as well as to the nation. From high school and college attainment rates to most of the performance test scores, consistent and marked improvement is shown. But Kentucky still lags national attainment rates and still has a gaping achievement gap between advantaged and less-advantaged students.
- **Unhealthy Habits and Undesirable Consequences** — Kentuckians smoke too much, eat too much, and do not exercise enough. The consequences of these and other trends are profound: high rates of chronic disease and disability and unmanageable health care costs. Moreover, an uninsured population of 15 percent, or 600,000 Kentuckians, magnifies the costs and consequences of these ailments.

- **Uphill Running in a Flat World** — Globalization has extended its reach, as Thomas Friedman’s metaphor of a “flat world” suggests, and leveled the playing field of economic competition. While the state continues to benefit from rising foreign direct investment and growing exports, global competition’s highest rewards go to those with high levels of education and advanced skills, leaving many Kentuckians behind. These structural changes in the economy have had an adverse impact on real family income on those at the lower rung of the economic ladder over the last few decades. Kentucky has no problem creating jobs; rather, it has a distinct problem creating *high-quality* jobs. Education remains key.
- **Strong Foundation for Progress** — Kentucky’s transportation, technological, and environmental infrastructure appears relatively strong. However, a significant portion of adults here do not have high-speed Internet in their homes. Too, environmental quality increasingly is a cornerstone of development, one that compels vigilance if the state’s underdeveloped areas are to become more attractive to educated, highly skilled workers.
- **Importance of Leadership and Civic Engagement** — Even before the financial crisis of 2008, an aging population, rising health care costs, and looming government obligations were expected to constrain public resources. In turn, governments are expected to look to the civic infrastructure of community-based organizations, nonprofits, the private sector, and citizens for more collaborative opportunities to address problems and maximize opportunities. Kentucky’s stock of social capital is relatively strong, but the challenges before us are immense.

Copies of *Visioning Kentucky’s Future: Measures and Milestones 2008* are free while they remain available. To request a copy, contact the Center by mail at 111 St. James Court, Frankfort, KY 40601; by phone at 502-564-2851 or 800-853-2851; by fax at 502-564-1412 or 800-383-1412; or by e-mail at pubs@kltprc.net. The full report is available online at <http://www.kltprc.net/books/2008/trends.pdf>.

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