

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*New Strategies for Southern Progress*, a major conference scheduled for February 24-25, 2005, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will convene national, state and local policymakers, advocates, journalists and academics to rethink critical issues facing the South and to spur the development of a new regional progressive narrative.

The South has a rich history of forward thinking and progressive leadership. A generation ago, the South was propelled by a collection of “New South” governors who gave the region an energizing vision and an agenda for progress. Running on platforms promoting racial equity, educational quality and economic development, they offered a new regional narrative to the political arena, which had long been dominated by the single issue of race.

Indeed, the South’s economic advancement and population growth over the past two decades owes much to the policies of the “New South” leaders and their allies in business, universities, and community organizations. But as recent political campaigns have demonstrated, the regional narrative that once bound Southern progressives has faded. The rise of suburban sprawl, the impact of globalization and free trade, the emergence of heated social issues, and the intensification of political polarization, among other factors, have contributed to a blurring of a regional progressive narrative and agenda.

The purpose of this conference is to begin to redefine and update a progressive narrative in the South, one that builds on the past, yet recognizes changing circumstances and new realities. Leaders from the state, local and national levels will explore policy options to address current regional challenges such as the constraints on state financing for health care and education, immigration, and the need to develop and sustain a strong, innovative, regional economy. Through panel discussions on issues that define the current Southern landscape – religion, demographic change, and economic and community transformation – we hope to identify vital components that will form the core of a revitalized Southern progressive agenda.

## PANELS

**Southern Progress: Where We’ve Been and Where We Can Go.** To form a new regional progressive narrative, it is essential to recognize and learn from the experiences of the past. A distinguished group, consisting of a former Southern governor, senator, mayor and a leading journalist, will kick off the conference with a conversation about the ideas, leaders and movements that inspired progressive change in the South. These leaders will explore what policies, practices and personalities may inform a new narrative today.

**Mind of the South: Understanding Public Attitudes.** Public opinion experts will analyze post-election trends and data in examining the current attitudes of the Southern electorate. Political strategists will then draw on personal experience to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of recent attempts to articulate a progressive vision for the South and will relate these lessons to the current political landscape.

**Rethinking Tax Policy.** In the past several decades, the debate over tax policy has been locked in a stalemate. Right-wing conservatives successfully called for lower taxes and limited government, as progressives struggled to articulate an alternative. Having recently faced record deficits, Southern leaders have been forced to take a fresh look at tax policy and have recognized that their tax systems have become outdated. Panelists will highlight recent tax battles in the region as case studies to showcase progressive successes and failures, and how these lessons can inform a winning tax reform agenda backed by a strong, progressive regional narrative.

**Rethinking the Role of the Faith Community.** This panel will highlight how Southern culture and religion can serve to buttress, not contradict, a progressive narrative in the South. Panelists will examine how the faith community helped motivate and sustain progressive battles of the past and how it can have a renewed impact on progressive policies of the future. Panelists will also explore whether progressive advocacy on divisive issues clashes with the religious and cultural values prevalent in the South.

**The Changing Face of the South: Rethinking Culture, Community, and Politics.** Over the past decade, the face of the South has changed dramatically. Globalization has forced a rapid transition in the region's economy and, at the same time, immigration and inter- and intrastate migration have contributed to unprecedented demographic change. This panel will focus on how these two dynamics are altering the landscape of the South, affecting race relations, social conditions, and the cultural atmosphere, forcing policymakers to grapple with adapting outdated policies to changing circumstances.

## CONFERENCE PARTNERS

**Center for American Progress:** a progressive research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all.

[www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org)

**The Program on Southern Politics, Media and Public Life at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill:** serves the people of North Carolina and the South by informing the public agenda and nurturing leadership.

[www.southnow.org](http://www.southnow.org)

**Center for a Better South:** a new pragmatic, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to developing progressive ideas, policies and information for leaders who want to make a difference in the American South.

[www.bettersouth.org](http://www.bettersouth.org)