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Center Director Hamilton Joins Justice Rucker In Announcing Plans For Indiana Civic Health Index, To Assess and Improve Civic Engagement

INDIANAPOLIS, April 19, 2011 — A project to assess civic knowledge and engagement in Indiana is under way with support from former U.S. Representative Lee Hamilton and the Indiana Supreme Court.

The Indiana Civic Health Index will assess who participates in community activities such as voting and volunteerism, what resources promote civic engagement, and what obstacles prevent citizens from getting involved in community activities and decision making. The aim of presenting the Civic Health Index is to call attention to the importance of an informed and engaged citizenry.

Hamilton, who is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University, made the announcement in a program at the Statehouse with Supreme Court Justice Robert Rucker standing in for Chief Justice Randall T. Shepard, who unexpectedly could not attend. The Indiana Bar Foundation, the National Conference on Citizenship, Indiana University Northwest and the Hoosier State Press Association are partners in the creation of the index.

“There is a lot that Americans don’t understand about their government,” said Hamilton. “The Indiana Civic Health Index will help us focus on what must be done to improve people’s civic knowledge and skills. Our nation’s success depends on citizens’ ability and willingness to participate constructively in the dialogue of democracy.”

Prior to the announcement, Chief Justice Shepard said, “We want to identify the strengths and weaknesses in our civic culture and motivate all of us — business and community leaders, educators, philanthropists, the media and policymakers — to improve in areas where we are falling short. The judiciary has an interest in building the highest possible civic knowledge in our state.”

The Indiana Bar Foundation supports civic education through We the People and Project Citizen. The index will provide the Foundation and others with information to help in crafting programs to meet Indiana’s needs. Executive Director Charles Dunlap said, “This index will give us a good indication of what is working in Indiana and what we need to improve in civic education.”

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) will perform the analysis, which will be released this fall. NCoC, founded in 1946 and chartered by Congress in 1953, tracks and promotes civic and political participation, supports history and civics education, and
encourages community and national service. Each year NCoC releases a national report, America’s Civic Health Assessment, based on data from the Census Bureau that measures civic behaviors and attitudes, such as giving and volunteering, trusting other people, connecting to civic and religious groups, understanding government, and participating in politics.

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About the Center
The Center on Congress is a non-partisan, educational institution established in 1999 to help improve the public’s knowledge of Congress and to encourage civic engagement. The Center developed out of Lee Hamilton’s recognition during his 34 years in the U.S. House that Americans should be more familiar with Congress’ strengths and weaknesses, its role in our system of government, and its impact on the lives of ordinary people every day.

The Center offers an extensive array of civic education programs, projects and resources that foster an informed electorate which understands our system of government and participates in civic life. These include: print publications; Web-based, interactive modules and other online learning tools in English and Spanish; commentaries for newspapers and radio stations; video and television in the classroom resources; survey research; teacher awards; and seminars, conferences, and a lecture series.

The Center on Congress is supported in part by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at IU Bloomington. For more information about the Center, go to www.centeroncongress.org