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**Lt. Gov. Jari Askins Reads to Kids,
Inspires Parents to “Reach Out and Read”**

OKLAHOMA CITY – Lt. Gov. Jari Askins stood today with leaders of the early literacy program Reach Out and Read and Oklahoma pediatricians to challenge all parents to read to their young children daily.

37 pediatric clinics and health centers in Oklahoma participate in Reach Out and Read (ROR), the national children’s literacy program that focuses on young children at risk of entering school unprepared to learn. At every medical checkup, clinicians participating in ROR guide and encourage parents to read aloud to their young children every day. Each child receives a carefully selected new, developmentally-appropriate book to keep. By the time that child enters school, he or she will have a home library of up to 10 books.

Reach Out and Read has one of the strongest records of research support of any school readiness intervention. Studies show that parents who receive counseling on reading aloud from their doctors and nurses are more likely to read to their young children, read to them more often, and provide books in the home. Children exposed to Reach Out and Read show improved language development. Children as young as 2 years old are given a six-month head start developmentally.

“It is our hope that we can encourage parents to take home Reach Out and Read children’s books and literacy materials and put them to good use,” Lt. Gov. Askins said. “This program works with professionals in the medical field to help convey the importance of parents reading to their children. Parents reading at home will increase their children’s literacy level while creating lasting memories together.”

ROR-Oklahoma provides books to more than 18,000 children annually, having distributed more than 25,400 books to infants, toddlers and preschoolers across the state last year.

Dr. Marny Dunlap, Medical Director for Reach Out and Read Oklahoma, said one of the major contributing factors to Oklahoma children’s low literacy levels is the fact that less than half of our state’s parents read to their young children every day.

“About 30% of Oklahoma’s children are arriving at school unprepared to read and unprepared to learn. Reach Out and Read works with doctors and nurses to give parents practical tips on how to make reading fun for the whole family,” Dr. Dunlap said. “It gives them the most important tool to act upon that advice—a colorful, new children’s book for the child to take home and keep.”

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Nationally, thousands of doctors this year will give 6 million new books to 3.8 million low-income families at more than 4,535 healthcare locations. Reach Out and Read serve about 25 percent of America's at-risk infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, Reach Out and Read was the only American literacy program featured at the 2006 White House Conference on Global Literacy.

Since it was founded in 1989, Reach Out and Read has trained more than 52,000 doctors and nurses who have given over 20 million books to children in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the United States Virgin Islands. International programs modeled on Reach Out and Read have been started in Bangladesh, Italy, Israel, the Philippines, England, and Canada. For more information, please visit www.reachoutandread.org.

About Reach Out and Read

Reach Out and Read (ROR) is a national, nonprofit children's literacy program that works with medical providers to reach the children at greatest risk – children aged 6 months to 5 years living at or near poverty. Medical providers participating in ROR give books to their youngest low-income patients at checkups and advise their parents about the importance of reading. More than 20 million books have been distributed through ROR, which currently serves 25 percent of the most impoverished children in the U.S. The only American literacy program featured at the recent White House Conference on Global Literacy, ROR is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. ROR has one of the strongest records of research support of any primary care intervention. Peer-reviewed studies indicate that parents who get books and literacy counseling from their doctors and nurses are more likely to read to their young children, read to them more often, and provide more books in the home. Low-income children exposed to the program have shown improvements in language development, a critical component of school readiness, and score significantly higher on vocabulary tests.

Reach Out and Read is working to make literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric primary care. More than 52,000 doctors and nurses have been trained by ROR since its founding in 1989. This year ROR will provide 6 million new books to 3.8 million children at 4,535 healthcare Sites in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. International programs modeled on ROR have been started in Italy, Israel, the Philippines, England, Bangladesh, and Canada. UNESCO awarded ROR an international 2007 Confucius Prize for Literacy in recognition of its particularly effective contribution to the fight against illiteracy. For further information, please visit ROR's website at www.reachoutandread.org.