



MAYOR JOHN ROBERT SMITH NAMED AS RECONNECTING AMERICA PRESIDENT AND CEO
The four-term mayor has been recognized for his initiatives to promote sustainability, affordability and livability

Contact: Becky Sullivan, 202-429-6990, x206
bsullivan@reconnectingamerica.org

July 31, 2009

OAKLAND - Mayor John Robert Smith of Meridian, Mississippi, has been named President and CEO of the national nonprofit Reconnecting America. He has served on Reconnecting America's board for five years, and was a founding partner and board member of Reconnecting America's predecessor organization, the Great American Station Foundation, voting to expand its mission and change its name in 2004.

He will replace Shelley Poticha, who has been appointed Senior Advisor for Sustainable Communities at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, where she will advise Deputy Administrator Ron Sims and help facilitate the interagency partnership of HUD, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

John Robert Smith was elected mayor of Meridian in 1993 and was re-elected three times before deciding this year not to seek re-election to a fifth term. He has been an active member of the U.S. Conference of Mayors and has served Amtrak as both Chairman and as Board member.

Mayor Smith was an early practitioner of transit-oriented development, having successfully renovated Meridian's historic downtown train station, a project that helped leverage the revitalization of Meridian's downtown. That experience made him a passionate advocate for the power of station renovation projects to link transportation and community revitalization. He has also been recognized in local, state and national arenas for his initiatives to promote sustainability, affordability and livability.

"John Robert Smith brings real-world hands-on experience to the work that Reconnecting America does. He has initiated and managed the kind of projects that Reconnecting America has long advocated," said Reconnecting America Board President Janette Sadik-Khan, Transportation Commissioner of the City of New York. "He understands how transit-oriented development can breathe new life into communities and help generate lasting public and private returns."

While in office Mayor Smith oversaw a number of development projects to boost investment in Meridian's downtown and several declining inner-city neighborhoods, including

the redevelopment of the historic Union Station, the construction of a new performing arts center and restoration of the Grand Opera House, and the development of a HOPE VI mixed-income housing project. He has been a longtime advocate for the performing arts and raised significant arts funding for Meridian. He also built a coalition that was successful in restoring daily Amtrak service from Atlanta to New Orleans, and has been an influential advocate at the national level for investing in and improving the national passenger rail system.

“I have been involved in transportation on a national level for many years, due to my passion for inner-city and urban revitalization,” Mayor Smith said. “With the next-generation transportation bill being crafted by Congress now, it is vital that the voices of those who believe in a connected, multi-modal approach to transportation are heard. Transportation touches every aspect of life in cities of all sizes and I am looking forward to working with our nation’s leaders at all levels to incorporate smart urban planning and connections to people across the United States.”

Shelley Poticha has been President and CEO of Reconnecting America since 2004, where she has been a national leader for the reform of land use and transportation planning and policy and a tireless advocate for diverse and inclusive neighborhoods. Shelley has also co-chaired the Transportation for America campaign, a broad coalition of 350 organizations, ranging from AARP to the National Association of Realtors, that is working with Congress on the reauthorization of the six-year transportation bill. Smart Growth America President and CEO Geoff Anderson is her co-chair.

###

Reconnecting America provides an impartial, fact-based perspective on development-oriented transit and transit-oriented development, and seeks to reinvent the planning and delivery system for building regions and communities around transit and walking rather than solely around the automobile. Reconnecting America manages the Center for Transit-Oriented Development, the only national nonprofit effort funded by Congress to promote best practices in transit-oriented development.