

The State of the Region
HAMPTON ROADS 2010
REGIONAL STUDIES INSTITUTE | OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

The State of the Region
HAMPTON ROADS 2009
REGIONAL STUDIES INSTITUTE | OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

THE STATE OF
THE REGION
HAMPTON ROADS 2002
REGIONAL STUDIES INSTITUTE • OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

THE STATE OF
THE REGION
HAMPTON ROADS 2001
REGIONAL STUDIES INSTITUTE • OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

STATE OF
THE REGION
HAMPTON ROADS 2000
INSTITUTE • OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

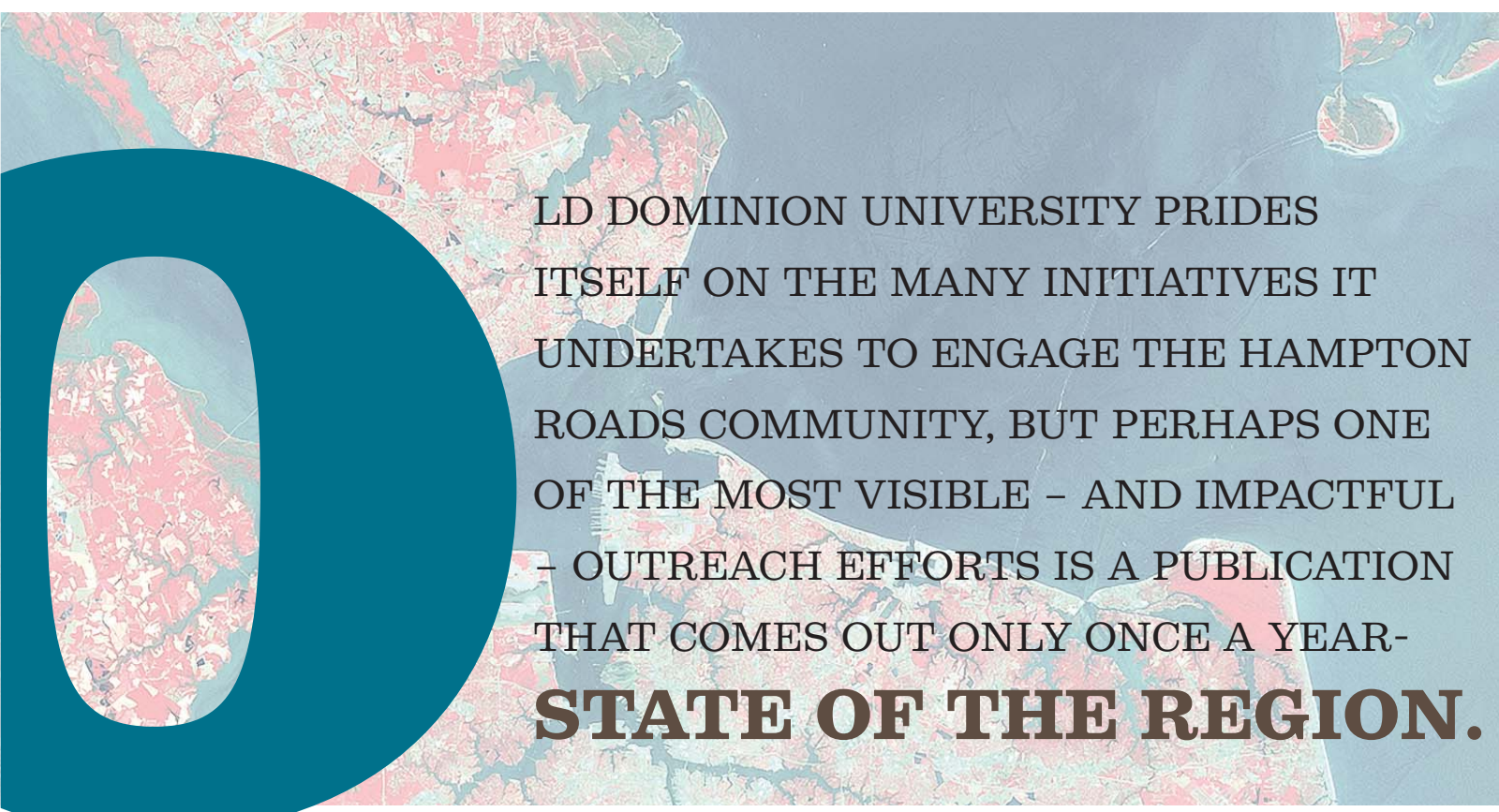
REPORT CARD FOR

Hampton Roads

JAMES KOCH EDITS
STATE OF THE REGION,
A 'MUST READ'
FOR STATE
OPINION LEADERS.



by Steve Daniel



OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY PRIDES ITSELF ON THE MANY INITIATIVES IT UNDERTAKES TO ENGAGE THE HAMPTON ROADS COMMUNITY, BUT PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST VISIBLE – AND IMPACTFUL – OUTREACH EFFORTS IS A PUBLICATION THAT COMES OUT ONLY ONCE A YEAR—**STATE OF THE REGION.**

Since its debut in 2000, the State of the Region report, produced by the university's Regional Studies Institute and edited by former ODU president James Koch, has put Hampton Roads under the microscope, looking at everything from the economy to transportation to partisan politics. Koch now is the ODU Board of Visitors Professor of Economics.

The State of the Region report has gained a widespread following among area leaders, including elected officials, senior civil servants and other opinion leaders. Lead Hampton Roads, a program of the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce and the area's oldest and largest leadership network, sponsors a breakfast each year coinciding with the report's publication, at which Koch talks about the findings of the latest issue, concentrating on the status of the local economy and sharing his thoughts on what lies ahead. Approximately 700 people attend the annual breakfast, and another 300 go to two other introductory breakfasts in the region.

They have come to expect a well-researched forecast, and while they would much prefer to hear good news each year, sometimes, the report's economic outlook for Hampton Roads is less than rosy. Following the publication of the 2010 report, Koch warned that the impending closure of the Joint Forces Command, combined with possible defense spending cuts and the financial issues brought about by rising sea levels, could well portend dark clouds on the economic horizon. It was a message not lost on area leaders.

Quoted in an Oct. 15, 2010, Inside Business story, Dana Dickens, president of the Hampton Roads Partnership, said, "We have some real challenges coming down the pike. The real challenges are the result, as he points out, of our dependency on one industry, which is the military. What Dr. Koch delivered was a wake-up call for the region."

Koch and the researchers who write for the report do not have axes to grind or an agenda other than to make Hampton Roads a better place to live, he affirms. But that

doesn't mean the report will shy away from controversial issues. A case in point was the chapter in 2010 that offered a sound, detached economic analysis of Norfolk's then-forthcoming light rail system, The Tide.

"I don't deliberately seek controversial topics and I don't seek to make people angry. We're not out to create fights. I do look for 'important' topics that relate to issues that citizens either already are concerned about, or probably should be concerned about," Koch says, adding, "We want citizens to have sufficient accurate information to understand the most important issues and to enable them to make intelligent choices."

From the popularity of the breakfast presentations and the 50 SOR talks Koch gives each year, to the response of the local media, to the more than 2,500 Internet hits and 600-plus downloads the report received last year, it is clear that people are paying attention. And, in a number of cases, this has led to both debate and action.

"I must be careful here in saying that 'so and so clearly took an action, or changed her behavior because of the report,'" Koch notes, when pressed to offer some examples of actions that have been taken as a result of facts or opinions expressed in the publication. "I might know this to be true and in some cases the affected parties have told me so, but I won't make friends or influence people if I openly cite examples and attach the changes to specific people."

Some of the more prominent instances where the SOR has influenced the debate and/or action include:

- Major league sports franchises – The 2001 report advised that bringing a major league sports team to Hampton Roads might not be in the best interest of the region.

- Boat taxes – In discussing a series of reductions in taxes levied upon boats, especially pleasure boats, the 2005 report noted: "All in all, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the cities and counties of Hampton Roads have shot themselves in their proverbial feet if they hoped they would be better off economically by reducing boat taxes."

- Beach replenishment – The 2006 report faulted the federal government for paying most of the costs of beach replenishment. It suggested that the city of Virginia Beach, its citizens and the Commonwealth should pay a greater share of the cost.

- Port of Hampton Roads – In discussing the port's assets and challenges, including the competition it faces from other U.S. ports, the 2010 report concluded: "The Port of Hampton Roads already is an important economic engine for the region. This role could become even more important if the region and the Commonwealth are willing to make critical, timely investments relating to the port."

The report has, on occasion, pointed to areas where unification of regional services would be beneficial and has focused on transportation through a regional prism. It has also included pieces about several of the region's assets. But despite its stated desire to play a role in making the region better, the report does not engage in 'boosterism,' Koch says.

"We do not attempt regional boosterism because if we did so, then we would lose valuable credibility," Koch maintains. "What we aim to do is to make Hampton Roads an even better place to live. Sometimes that means increased attention and focus on our positives – for example, the Chrysler Museum, the Virginia Aquarium, WHRO and EVMS – but other times it requires that we focus on things we aren't doing so well: high school graduation rates, affordable housing, high-technology development, economic diversification.

"It also means that we attempt to inform readers and listeners about important topics such as open space in the region, the divergence of views in our region between blacks and whites on issues, the notion of a creative class in Hampton Roads, regional commuting patterns, the prosperity of the port, etc."

Asked what he believes the region should be most concerned about in the near- and long-term, Koch replied, "My greatest concern in Hampton Roads relates to our ability to diversify our economy rapidly in the face of defense spending deceleration

and cuts. We moved the other direction in the past decade. In order to diversify our economic base and excel in the future, we must improve our transportation system and improve the performance of our educational system at all levels. At the higher education level, for example, we must make investments today that will result in a higher education/medical research powerhouse a decade from now. Regions such as the Research Triangle show us the way."

On the subject of the region's assets, he offered the following: "Our greatest assets also in many ways constitute our greatest liabilities. The ocean and the water that courses throughout the region provide us with wonderful recreation and scenery as well as economic opportunities relating to the military, shipbuilding and tourism. But the same features sometimes also divide us, make transportation difficult, and impose costs on us via rising sea levels."

Koch credits local businessman and former ODU rector George Dragas for coming up with the idea, back in the early 1990s, for what ultimately emerged as the State of the Region report. Since its debut, the university has provided partial funding for the report, but as Koch notes at the outset in each publication, it does not constitute an official viewpoint of ODU or its president. His introductory letter each year also lists private donors who have contributed financially to the report, along with the disclaimer: "They believe in Hampton Roads and in the power of rational discussion to improve our circumstances, but are not responsible for the views expressed in the report." Approximately 85 percent of the report's research and writing is done by ODU faculty and staff members.

With the 2012 edition of the State of the Region report scheduled for publication in September, Koch says the area can expect another informative, interesting, neutral, analytical take on important regional issues. Included in the 2012 report are chapters on the economic impact of Eastern Virginia Medical School, the market for lawyers in Hampton Roads, home schooling in the region, the friction between state and local governments when it comes to budgetary matters,

Look for These Articles In State of the Region 2012

- **Gathering Steam: The Regional Economy Recovers (Slowly)**
- **How Much is Too Much? Comparing Income Inequality and the Cost of Living in Hampton Roads to New York City**
- **Lawyers and Law Firms in Hampton Roads**
- **Do We Have Enough Physicians in Hampton Roads?**
- **Does the Commonwealth Balance Its Budget on the Backs of Local Governments?**
- **A Powerful Economic Engine: The Economic Impact of Eastern Virginia Medical School**
- **K-12 Private Education: Southside Hampton Roads**
- **Home Schooling: Our Fastest Growing Alternative in K-12 Education**
- **Modeling and Simulation in Hampton Roads**

State of the Region reports may be found at www.odu.edu/forecasting and www.jamesvkoch.com.

and an assessment of the area's modeling and simulation industry.

While the former ODU president hints that he might be passing the baton to another editor in the not-too-distant future, he says he is hopeful that the report will continue to fill a need and be well received for many years to come.