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Tobacco Tax/Education & Health Funding Measure Filed

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (Sept. 20, 2011) -- A diverse group of organizations and individual Missourians led by the American Cancer Society has filed a proposition on tobacco taxes to provide badly needed funding for public education, higher education and public health in Missouri.

Missouri has the lowest cigarette tax of all states in the nation, and very high smoking and other tobacco product use rates. This costs an estimated \$565 per household in public expenditures, and claims 9,500 lives per year in Missouri from cancer and other smoking-related diseases.

The measure filed today would ask voters to approve an 80-cent per pack cigarette tax increase and an equivalent increase on other tobacco products. The revenue from this tax increase would go towards local public K-12 schools, colleges and universities statewide, and tobacco use prevention and quit assistance programs. Additionally, it would close a loophole that allows certain small tobacco companies to avoid contributing to a fund that reimburses the state in part for tobacco-related costs.

The coalition sponsoring the measure is comprised of medical and public health professionals, education groups, business leaders and community leaders. In addition to saving lives and reducing current and future health care costs due to smoking, the measure would help Missouri's workforce infrastructure by enhancing education funding for tomorrow's workers.

Increasing tobacco taxes is a proven way to decrease smoking rates and cigarette consumption, especially among children. Tobacco use is the most preventable cause of premature illness and death in the United States and Missouri. Tobacco use accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths and 87% of lung cancer deaths.

"We are pleased this measure has potential to help school districts deal with the funding problems they face," says Missouri School Boards' Association Executive Director Dr. Carter Ward. "This proposition presents the voters of Missouri the opportunity to voice their opinion on this issue."

"This funding would provide much-needed support for Missouri colleges and universities to train the future caregivers like nurses, doctors, and dentists that Missouri's aging population will soon need in greater numbers," said Warren Erdman, long-time Kansas City-area civic and business leader. Erdman also serves as chairman of the University of Missouri Board of Curators.

Funds from the proposition would be distributed as follows:

- 50% for elementary and secondary education (emphasis in the classroom)
- 30% for college and universities (emphasis on training healthcare providers)
- 20% for tobacco prevention and quit assistance

"Each year thousands of Missourians are diagnosed with tobacco-related cancer and some will lose their lives to this devastating disease," said Misty Snodgrass, American Cancer Society. "This ballot measure will mean increased longevity, improved quality of life, and fewer Missourians who will needlessly suffer and die from cancer."

"This is a public health initiative that will impact the lives of Missourians for generations to come," said Norm Siegel, Chairman of the Board, Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City.

Key Facts:

- Missouri has the lowest tobacco tax of any state in the country at 17 cents and has some of the highest smoking rates, lung cancer rates, and heart disease rates in the country.
- Each year, the tobacco industry spends \$349 million to market their products in Missouri.
- Missouri currently has no general revenue funding for tobacco prevention.
- 8,600 Missouri kids (under 18) become new daily smokers each year
- Smoking kills more people than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined.
- Each year, annual health care costs in Missouri directly caused by smoking amount to \$2.13 billion and \$532 million is spent on the state's Medicaid program.
- Every household in Missouri pays \$565 per year in their state and federal tax burden from smoking-caused government expenditures.
- \$2.51 billion in smoking-caused lost productivity

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