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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR PARTICIPATES IN ANTI-SMOKING EVENT WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TRENTON

Gov. Christie Whitman today demonstrated her commitment to help keep children from smoking when she participated in an anti-smoking event before an audience of 600 Trenton middle school students wearing T-shirts with the message, "Smoking: Don't Get Sucked In."

The Governor proposed in her budget address on Tuesday that \$18.6 million from the state's tobacco settlement be used to fund a comprehensive tobacco control program.

"Each year, in the United States, smoking kills more people than fires, AIDS, car accidents, and murders combined," the Governor said. "The fact is that most adult smokers started when they were kids. They probably thought smoking was cool - and that's what the cigarette makers wanted them to believe."

"But smoking is not cool - no matter what image we get in the media - whether it's the cowboy riding into the sunset or the couple by the swimming pool or Joe Camel," she said. "These ads hide the ugly and painful truth that smoking causes heart disease, cancer, and emphysema."

The Governor said she has proposed that a substantial portion of the tobacco settlement funds be used for health-related programs, including increasing cancer detection and screening among minorities and giving seniors and caregivers more choices for long-term care.

"We owe it to those who died as a result of their addiction to cigarettes to prevent as many of our citizens, especially our kids, from meeting the same horrible fate," the Governor said. "That's why I proposed that, this year, we invest over \$18 million dollars in programs to help adults and young people keep away from tobacco."

The event took place at the Martin Luther King Middle School. The school is one of 76 statewide participating in the peer leadership program organized two years ago through the State Department of Health and Senior Citizens to broaden the refusal skills of middle school students in dealing with substance abuse. Students in the program, called the New Jersey Middle School Peer Leadership Initiative, are able to teach their peers about the hazards of drug and tobacco use.

Another program of the State Department of Health and Senior Citizens aimed at children, the Youth Anti-Smoking Awareness Campaign, reaches children through TV, radio, the print media, in-theater and billboard advertisements as well as through a website (www.dontgetsucked.in.com).

Health and Senior Services Commissioner Len Fishman told the students that surveys show one in five high school seniors in New Jersey is a regular smoker and that one in three middle school students is experimenting with tobacco.

"We've learned that we have to target our message to very young children," Fishman said. "We know that as early as 11 years old, kids are making the decision whether to smoke." According to the 1998 Surgeon General's report on tobacco use among minorities, cigarette smoking among African American teens has increased 80 percent over the last six years - three times as fast as among white teens.

Gov. Whitman became one of the first governors in the country to commit funds from the tobacco settlement for anti-smoking programs. Matt Meyers, executive vice president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids in Washington, praised the Governor for her "aggressive efforts in the area of tobacco prevention" and called the New Jersey tobacco plan a model for other states.

The Governor's \$18.6 million proposal for anti-smoking efforts would be used to fund a high-profile media awareness campaign, smoking cessation programs for addicted adults and youth and school and community-based programs on the prevention of tobacco use. The funds represent 20 percent of the first payment of \$93 million from the tobacco settlement, which is expected to total \$7.5 billion. It will be paid out over 25 years.