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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Addresses Annual Meeting of Smokeless States National Tobacco Prevention and Control Program

Gov. Christie Whitman today attended the annual meeting of the American Medical Association's Smokeless States National Tobacco Prevention and Control Program where she told the convention that New Jersey is doing everything possible to ensure that kids kick the cigarette habit.

"As the mother of a couple of young people who left their teen years not that long ago, I know that those years can be as foolhardy as they are wise. And when it comes to cigarettes, too many teens are making foolish decisions," the Governor said.

Gov. Whitman said more than 300,000 New Jersey teens begin smoking each year. Ninety percent of all new smokers are under the age of 18.

"These otherwise bright kids probably think smoking will help them fit in with their peers, or make them seem more grown up," Gov. Whitman said. "They may enjoy the excitement of taking risks. Whatever their motivation, they are almost certain to face powerful media messages that present smoking as cool and sophisticated."

Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the national Smokeless States Program was launched in 1994 to reduce tobacco use among children. It has provided \$30 million in grants to programs in 28 states, including New Jersey Breathes.

The annual meeting of the Smokeless States Program convenes more than 150 public health advocates and tobacco coalition members from across the country to discuss tobacco control issues and strategies. The group chose to hold its annual meeting in Princeton because of Governor Whitman's efforts to reduce teen smoking. Specifically, the group has lauded her for signing legislation that doubled the cigarette tax from 40 cents to 80 cents per pack in 1997.

"Governor Whitman's support for tobacco control measures proves her understanding of New Jersey's largest public health threat - tobacco use," said Larry Downs, director of New Jersey Breathes. "Her latest proposal to use a portion of the tobacco settlement for a comprehensive tobacco control program represents some of the best thinking in the country on the tobacco issue."

In her proposed budget, Gov. Whitman dedicated \$18.5 million for a comprehensive anti-smoking initiative with funds collected from the states' settlement with tobacco companies. Under that settlement, New Jersey is expected to receive about \$7.6 billion over 25 years to repay the cost to the state

of treating smoking-related illnesses. The first year's payment in fiscal year 2000 will be about \$93 million.

Each year, about 12,800 people die in New Jersey as a result of tobacco use. One in three people who begin smoking in youth and continue smoking will die prematurely from a smoking-related condition.

