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## **Tobacco Settlement Trust Board Endorses Excise Tax Increase and Workplace Smoking Restrictions**

**OKLAHOMA CITY** – The Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust Fund unanimously adopted resolutions Wednesday, calling for an increase in the state excise tax on tobacco products and supporting workplace smoking restrictions.

Citing state tobacco use rates that are much higher than the national average, and costs of tobacco use at \$600 per Oklahoman per year, the Board of Directors passed a resolution urging the Oklahoma State Legislature and the people of Oklahoma to support a significant increase in the excise tax on tobacco products, at least to the national average.

Oklahoma's 23 cent tobacco excise tax ranks 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation. The national average is currently 67 cents. The resolution states that a \$1 per pack increase would generate an estimated \$185 million in increased revenue and would reduce tobacco use by about thirteen percent.

“A substantial increase in the tobacco excise tax is needed to save lives and save money by dramatically reducing tobacco consumption, particularly among youth,” said Dr. Robert McCaffree, Chair of the Board of Directors.

The resolution calls for the excise tax increase to be used to meet health related needs in the State of Oklahoma. The board specifically recommended that a small portion of the excise tax increase be set aside for immediate funding of an effective statewide tobacco use prevention and cessation program, stating that it would be at least ten years before there would be enough earnings from the Trust to support such a statewide program, even if the board directed all of the earnings for that purpose.

A second resolution encouraged the adoption of effective public policy to prevent exposure to secondhand smoke inside workplaces and public places. “Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to children and those with asthma and other respiratory diseases,” said McCaffree. “Valid studies clearly show that smoke-free policies have no negative economic impact on businesses, and that they may actually improve business.”

**(more)**

A February 2003 statewide poll conducted by Oklahoma State University found that 71 percent of Oklahoma adults, including 31 percent of smokers, support legislation to prohibit smoking inside work places and public places.

In other action, the Board of Directors adopted a resolution to recognize the Integris Health Lifespan Program's outstanding initiative to aggressively promote sound tobacco use prevention and cessation policies and programs through a paid public education campaign.

More information on the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust is available at <http://www.tobaccosettlement.state.ok.us>

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