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Faith leaders applaud Governor's announcement on cigarette tax plan
Statement of the Rev. Dr. Daniel R. Gangler, convener, Hoosier Faith and Health Coalition

INDIANAPOLIS – The Hoosier Faith and Health Coalition enthusiastically applauds Governor Mitch Daniels for his announcement today of a plan to increase Indiana's cigarette tax and fund tobacco prevention and other critical health programs. The plan represents a visionary commitment by the Governor to the health of Hoosiers, especially children and youth. The combination of a tobacco tax increase and dedicated funding for tobacco prevention programs will go a long way to address the state's number one preventable cause of death and disease – tobacco. Indiana's faith leaders urge legislators of both parties to use Governor Daniels' plan as the starting point during this upcoming session and to pass a cigarette tax of at least one dollar per pack. A significant increase in the cigarette tax is a win-win solution for Indiana – a health win that will reduce tobacco use and save lives and a fiscal win that will raise much needed revenue to fund vital health programs like tobacco prevention that saves lives and reduce healthcare costs.

By combining an increase in the cigarette tax with dedicated new revenue to the state's successful tobacco prevention program run by the Indiana Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Agency (ITPC), Governor Daniels is pursuing the most effective strategy possible for Hoosier health. ITPC has been nationally recognized for running effective programs that have reduced smoking and saved lives, however Hoosier smoking rates have once again been rising after ITPC funding was cut by more than two-thirds a couple of years ago. As a partner in Governor Daniels' INShape program, the revitalized ITPC programs will save lives and reduce health care costs by helping smokers quit and by preventing kids from ever becoming addicted to tobacco. Governor Daniels' proposal will bring tobacco prevention funding in Indiana back up to the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Indiana's current cigarette tax of 55.5¢ per pack is well below the average state cigarette tax of about a dollar a pack. The evidence is clear that increasing the price of cigarettes is one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking, especially among children and pregnant women. Studies show every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes reduces youth smoking by seven percent and overall cigarette consumption by three to five percent. This impact, however, can only be maximized and sustained with an aggressive tobacco prevention and cessation program.

We all have a moral obligation to take a stand against the devastating toll of tobacco. Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in our state, claiming more than 9,800 lives each year and costing the state \$2.1 billion annually in health care bills, including \$487 million in Medicaid payments alone. Government expenditures related to tobacco amount to a hidden tax of \$585 each year on every Hoosier household. While Indiana has made significant progress in reducing youth smoking, 21.9 percent of Indiana high school students still smoke, and 10,200 more kids become regular smokers each year.

The Hoosier Faith and Health Coalition is dedicated to reducing the devastating toll of tobacco because our clergy spend too much time burying mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters who die untimely and many times grueling deaths because they became addicted to tobacco when they were young. That is why more than 400 congregations and faith-groups statewide have jointly signed a pledge calling for a tobacco tax increase and ITPC funding. We call on Indiana's legislators to do the right thing and follow the lead of Governor Daniels, increase the state cigarette tax by at least a dollar a pack, and dedicate the first portion of the revenue to adequately funding our state's tobacco prevention and cessation efforts to help smokers quit and keep kids from starting.

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