

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lt. Gov. Unveils New Spit Tobacco Use Prevention Ads To Combat Dangerous Trend Among NC Youth

HWTF also ratchets up youth smoking prevention efforts with new TV campaign

(Raleigh, NC) –Lt. Governor Beverly Perdue, chair of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), today unveiled four new **TRU** (Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered.) television commercials – including an ad that spotlights the dangers of smokeless – or spit – tobacco use. This is North Carolina's first teen media campaign addressing spit tobacco. The ads were previewed today at the annual "Training and Information Exchange" meeting of HWTF's teen tobacco use prevention grantees at Raleigh's McKimmon Center.

The smokeless tobacco spot, *Facing Reality*, features Gruen Von Behren, who began using spit tobacco at the age of 13. By 17, he had developed cancer of the mouth. Despite a 75 percent chance that the cancer would kill him, Von Behren survived, and now uses his harrowing story to educate young people on the dangers of spit tobacco. According to research, it's a lesson that North Carolina's teens desperately need to hear.

While the 2003 Youth Tobacco Survey shows that cigarette use in North Carolina's high school students decreased by nearly 10 percent from 1999 to 2003, spit tobacco use rates have not declined. Spit tobacco use rates among high school students increased by 20 percent between 1999 and 2003. Current use among middle school students in North Carolina is greater in most cases than among middle schoolers nationwide. Spit and other forms of smokeless tobacco can lead to serious health risks, including ulcers, oral cancer, cardiovascular disease and eventually lead to death.

The emphasis on spit tobacco earned applause from advocates on the front lines. "North Carolina is one of the states taking the lead in educating young people that spit tobacco is not a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes," said Paul Turner, director of the North Carolina Spit Tobacco Education Program (NCSTEP). "Nicotine is in spit tobacco and it is addictive. Of the young people who use spit tobacco, many get hooked on cigarettes. And spit tobacco itself has terrible health consequences."

In addition to the spit tobacco spot, HWTF launched three other ads focusing on teen smoking. The ads, *Stop and Think*; *Family Loss* and *Choices* emphasize the serious health consequences of smoking and encourage teens not to start.

"We continue to build momentum on our statewide campaign to educate young people about the dangers of tobacco use," said Lt. Gov. Perdue. "Recognizing the growing prevalence of spit tobacco use among teens, North Carolina is taking a national leadership role to address this growing problem. I'm proud of our new television campaign, and I strongly believe it will help save lives in North Carolina."

The commercials will air on TV networks with large teen audiences, including MTV, VH1, BET, UPN, the WB and ESPN beginning October 24.

The Training and Information Exchange is designed to help HWTF grantees leverage their knowledge base, share successes, build relationships, hone skills and strategies, and have them return home energized and empowered to make a difference in their communities.

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ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$127 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit www.HealthWellNC.com.

ABOUT TRU

Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered, commonly known as **TRU**, is North Carolina's first-ever statewide youth tobacco prevention multi-media campaign that uses testimonials of real North Carolina teens as well as hard hitting facts to dissuade young people from using tobacco. This campaign is part of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's teen tobacco use prevention initiative. Funded at \$15 million annually from HWTF, this grassroots initiative includes the **TRU** media campaign, as well as a grant program including 70 grants (50 community-based grants, 4 statewide grants and 16 tobacco free school mini-grants) to a total of 55 organizations. To find out more about **TRU**, please visit www.realityunfiltered.com.

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