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To: Special Council of Tax Reform and Fairness for Georgians

I appreciate your membership on this very important council and for coming to north Georgia to hear about our recommendations for Georgia.

At a time when the state of Georgia desperately needs revenue I would urge you to support no less than a one dollar-per-pack increase in the state excise tax on cigarettes and smokeless tobacco.

As a state that ranks fourth lowest tobacco tax in the United States, we need to decrease our smoking rates and health care costs attributable to smoking. Statistics show that the higher the tax, the fewer people smoke so a higher tobacco tax increase will not only generate new revenue, it will reduce smoking prevalence. It's a win-win-win.

First, it's a Win for Public Health - there is sound scientific evidence that a significant increase in tobacco taxes will drive down consumption, especially among kids. Most adult smokers today started before they turned 18 years of age. For every 10% increase in the price of cigarettes, there is a 7% reduction among kids, and a 4% reduction among adults. If we can keep kids from starting to use tobacco products, Georgia will save lives from tobacco addiction and tobacco-related illness.

Secondly, it's a Win for Georgia Taxpayers - an increase of \$1 per pack for cigarettes will generate over \$400 million in new state revenue, as well as, lower the costs of smoking related illnesses that are paid for by Medicaid (\$527 million a year in Georgia). Tobacco addiction costs \$550 per Georgia household annually. It is only fair that those who choose to use the product should shoulder more of the costs.

Thirdly, it's a Win for Georgia's Leaders - a \$1 per pack increase in tobacco taxes is extremely popular with Georgia voters, consistently polling with 73% in favor at that rate. This high level of support is consistent among Republicans, Democrats and Independents.

Non-smoking taxpayers are tired of paying for smokers' poor health. Let's give smokers the choice of quitting or paying for their own tobacco-related illnesses.

Thank you.

