



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 8, 2010 2:00PM

CONTACT:
Chuck Hamsher 304-552-4084
Dan Cronin 202-481-9332

63% OF WV VOTERS FAVOR \$1 TOBACCO TAX INCREASE

Tobacco tax would bring in \$ 117 million in new revenue, reduce youth smoking

Charleston, WV (June 8, 2010) – A new poll released today shows that 63 percent of West Virginia voters support raising the tobacco tax by \$1 per pack to help address budget shortfalls and reduce youth smoking .

This support comes from a broad-based coalition of voters, including 61 percent of Republicans, 65 percent of Democrats, and 62 percent of Independents. In addition, voters from around the state and across every demographic group strongly support the tobacco tax increase.

“Now is the time for legislators to listen to the large majority of West Virginia voters who want to raise the tobacco tax instead of cutting critical programs. These results show that, regardless of party, voters across West Virginia understand raising the tobacco tax is a smart way to address budget shortfalls and debt while protecting our kids from tobacco,” said Chuck Hamsher of the American Heart Association. “Raising the tobacco tax is a win, win for West Virginia.”

The survey of 500 registered West Virginia voters was released by [the Coalition for a Tobacco Free West Virginia](#), which includes the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

West Virginia voters also express a preference for candidates who support the tobacco tax. By a margin of 55 percent to 33 percent, voters opt for a candidate who supports the tax over one who opposes it. The preference for candidates who support the tobacco tax holds for Democrats, independents, and Republicans.

“Clearly, West Virginia voters view the tobacco tax as different than other taxes,” commented Mark Mellman whose firm conducted the poll. “Far from punishing policy-makers who support the tobacco tax, they are more likely to reward them.”

West Virginia voters strongly prefer the tobacco tax over other options for addressing the state's budget woes. When presented with a list of options for closing the budget gap 58 percent support increasing the tobacco tax for this purpose, while a majority *opposed* other options such as increasing state sales, income, or gasoline taxes, and reducing funding for health care, education, or nursing home care. Increasing the alcohol tax was the only other proposal to garner majority support.

A recent report by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and other public health organizations found that a \$1 increase in West Virginia's tobacco tax would raise \$117 million in new annual revenue for the state, despite the declines in smoking it would help bring about. The tax increase would also prevent 19,100 West Virginia kids from smoking, save 9,500 state residents from premature, smoking-caused deaths and save \$458 million in tobacco-related health care costs (for more information, go to www.tobaccofreekids.org/winwinwin). These health benefits would be even greater if some portion of the tax is used to fund tobacco prevention and cessation programs, which are underfunded in West Virginia. Three-fourths of voters in the poll support funding prevention efforts at the level recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

West Virginia's current cigarette tax is 55 cents per pack, which ranks 44th in the nation and is well below the national average of \$1.44 per pack.

The survey was conducted by the polling firm The Mellman Group. The statewide poll has a random sample of 500 registered West Virginia voters and was conducted May 8 to May 11, 2010. The poll has a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percentage points.

###