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**Teen Advocates from Around NC Challenge Peers to Sign
Tobacco-Free Pledge Live on Statewide Broadcast**
*Pointed Questions, Potentially Life-Saving Answers Highlight UNC-TV's Program
on NC's Teen Tobacco Use Prevention Movement*

Research Triangle Park, NC – Some of the state's most passionate teen tobacco-use prevention advocates and an audience comprised of local high school students participated today in UNC-TV's High School Assembly, a live one-hour talk show. The discussion focused on the dangers of tobacco use, ways to reach young people who use it (about 33 percent of teens in North Carolina) and a challenge from teen advocates to their peers in the audience and across North Carolina to sign a pledge to live tobacco-free. The town hall meeting provided another opportunity for the tobacco-use prevention initiative to reach young people around the state.

Teen panelist Portia Cannady told students they're wrong if they think they don't have to worry about the effects of tobacco and secondhand smoke until they're senior citizens. "Studies show if you're a teen smoker, there's a strong chance you'll have health problems by the time you're 30. You can count on it. Research also tells us that cigarettes affect the brain like heroin and morphine. The longer you smoke, the worse it gets."

The audience was made up of students from **Triton High School in Erwin, NC (Harnett County)** and **Raleigh's Mary E. Phillips High School**. These students represented teens from across North Carolina and asked questions that had been submitted to the TRU (Tobacco. Reality. Unfiltered.) Web site, www.realityunfiltered.com. Teen advocates urged audience members to take a stand by signing TRU's Tobacco-Free Pledge, which states: "I promise because I matter! As a promise to myself and those who care about me, I pledge not to use tobacco and if I currently use tobacco, I pledge to quit using tobacco today. I make this pledge of my own free will." Advocates urged teens watching at home to visit the Web site and submit their pledge as well.

"I have witnessed some incredible things this past year due to the dedication and diligence of the fine people in this room," said Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, chair of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF), in a taped video message. "Every person here serves as a role-model to the young people of North Carolina. It takes all of us to spread the message of tobacco prevention."

The **TRU** campaign is North Carolina's first-ever statewide youth tobacco prevention multi-media campaign using testimonials of real teens as well as hard-hitting facts to dissuade young people from using tobacco. The TRU Road Trip traveled to North Carolina cities and towns this summer, carrying with it thought-provoking exhibits on the dangers of tobacco use and a television crew gathering teen testimonials for new television spots. The testimonial ads launched in October on TV networks with large teen audiences, including MTV, BET, Fox, UPN and the WB.

Panelists included:

- Rachel Biddix, a member of Survivors and Victims of Tobacco Empowerment (SAVE), who had a laryngectomy as a result of tobacco use and travels statewide speaking to teens about tobacco's impact on her life and body.
- Portia Cannady, a Northern High School student who's featured in the **TRU** Road Trip's "Travelogue" TV spot. Portia's mother is a smoker.
- Dr. Adam Goldstein, an associate professor of family medicine at UNC-Chapel Hill's School of Medicine.
- Matt Streng, program manager with the Orange County Health Dept.'s Youth Tobacco-Use Prevention Program.

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- Alison McLaurin, NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund's (HWTF) director of marketing and public affairs, who explained the HWTF's efforts in tackling tobacco prevention efforts.

Special guests in the studio audience offered insight about teen tobacco use in their communities. All special guests are HWTF grantees:

- Bronwyn Lucas, director of Question Why? Youth Empowerment Center in Durham.
- The Rev. James "Bruce" Swett, program manager with Home, Heritage and Health, a faith-based nonprofit in Pembroke, which reaches out to the Native American community.
- M. Zulayka Santiago, program director, El Pueblo, Inc., a statewide nonprofit, which is dedicated to strengthening the Latino community.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH AND WELLNESS TRUST FUND

The NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund 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 \$55 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program for seniors. For more information, please visit www.hwtf.org.

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 \$28 million 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.

ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL ASSEMBLY

Since 1991, UNC-TV has produced High School Assembly, a live, 60-minute forum for all students in North Carolina. This national award-winning show is broadcast statewide with a studio audience and is interactive via a toll free telephone and fax number. High School Assembly is hosted by Natalie Bullock Brown.

The program offers a wide variety of subject areas and has also offered master classes in writing with author Lee Smith, jazz with saxophonist Paul Jeffrey and dance with Chuck Davis. Other shows have focused on addressing anorexia and bulimia, first amendment rights, uniforms in the classroom, racism and sexism.

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