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For Immediate Release

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Retired educator-turned-legislator says education and discipline, Not federal regulation, are key to curbing underage smoking

Winston-Salem, NC -- Based on his experience as an education administrator and legislator, Rep. Pete Oldham said today that education and discipline, not federal regulation, are the keys to decreasing underage smoking.

A retired administrator from Winston-Salem State University, Rep. Oldham said, "I've dealt with young people for many years. They all want to rush into adulthood, and no federal regulation will change that. What I have observed is that the young people who come from families who have taught them self-esteem, self-worth, and helped them to set limits, are less likely to succumb to peer pressure. And studies have shown that peer pressure and family influence, not advertising, are the greatest influence on a minor's decision to smoke."

According to Oldham, the administration should focus its efforts on supporting educational programs tobacco companies already have in place, like public service announcements by actor/role model Darryl Glover, and on enforcing existing state minimum-age laws.

"R.J. Reynolds and other tobacco companies have already expressed their willingness to sit down with the federal government and work out a plan to curb underage smoking that doesn't infringe upon the rights of adults," he said. "And being a resident of Winston-Salem, I can attest to the integrity and commitment of R.J. Reynolds."

Oldham said he is concerned that proposed bans on the advertising and marketing of tobacco products are a threat to the First Amendment.

"I've always stressed to my students the sanctity of our Constitution and that if we are to protect our rights we must protect any infringement upon the principles it embodies," Oldham said. "As a legislator, I'm uncomfortable with these proposed bans on legal products. The government is stepping over its bounds when it attempts to dictate to millions of adults."

Oldham said he is also concerned about taxpayer dollars being spent on the smoking issue when there are other more pressing issues that need the government's attention.

"Even in Winston-Salem, we've seen an escalation of the illegal drug trade as well as violent crime, which I believe go hand in hand. I can't help but think our tax dollars would be better spent addressing this crisis rather than placing bans on tobacco that make it impossible for adults to exercise their rights."