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HOUSE VETO IS FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP

(Baton Rouge – June 16, 2011) In refusing to override Gov. Bobby Jindal’s veto of a cigarette tax extension, the House of Representatives did a disservice to the people of Louisiana, according to the Better Choices for a Better Louisiana coalition.

The governor’s decision to veto HB 591 elevated political ideology above the health of the people and the fiscal stability of the state, spokesmen said. By sustaining that veto, representatives shirked their responsibility.

The House of Representatives voted 58 to 44 to override the veto, short of the two-thirds vote required.

The four-cent tax on a pack of cigarettes had been on the books since 2000. The \$12 million in proceeds, dedicated to health care, is matched by even more federal funds.

“This simply begs the question: WHY,” said LFT President Steve Monaghan, a founding Coalition member. “On this issue, it should have been easy to do the right thing and override the governor’s veto.”

“The bill originally passed the House by 70 votes,” Monaghan said. “Obviously, some members changed their mind about the value of the cigarette tax between May 24 and today. Those who changed their votes should be asked, ‘Why?’”

“Did they change their minds about the addictive nature of cigarettes, the cost to all taxpayers associated with the usage of the product, or the danger that cancer poses because of this product? Why is it all right to surrender over \$40 million in federal matching funds just to give the governor a victory on this issue? This is a strange, dubious victory for the governor, and a sad defeat for Louisiana.”

Coalition partner Edward Ashworth, Director of the Louisiana Budget Project, said. “Leadership is about doing the right thing when it is hard. By refusing to override the governor’s veto of the cigarette tax extension, House members failed that test of leadership.”

“Instead,” Ashworth said, representatives chose Governor Jindal’s political needs over the needs of the

*These organizations are a part of the **Better Choices for a Better Louisiana** coalition.*

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state and the people of Louisiana.”

Coalition partner Melissa Flournoy, who is president of Louisiana Progress, said the legislature’s failure gives Louisiana a national black eye.

I am disappointed in the fact that our legislators have decided to please the Governor's national agenda at the expense of Louisiana's future,” Flournoy said. “What message does it show the rest of the country that Louisiana has decided to take a step backward, rather than forward. This is clearly waterboy-esqe politics at its finest.”