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KENNEDY, EDWARDS JOIN RALLY FOR FAIR MINIMUM WAGE
OVER ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND CITIZEN CO-SPONSORS OF KENNEDY'S
LEGISLATION

Washington, D.C. – Today Senator Edward M. Kennedy and former Senator John Edwards celebrated the success of their month-long online initiative to recruit “Citizen Co-Sponsors” for the Senator Kennedy’s Fair Minimum Wage Act. Over 100,000 Citizen Co-Sponsors signed a statement supporting Kennedy’s Fair Minimum Wage Act and demanding a vote on the minimum wage as soon as possible. Over the past ten years, members of Congress have raised their own pay by \$31,000, but the minimum wage hasn’t gone up a cent and remains more than \$6,000 below the poverty line for a family of three

“The issue resonates strongly with the people, because it’s fundamentally about fairness. Americans understand fairness. They know the difference between right and wrong,” Senator Kennedy said. “It’s wrong that hard-working men and women can’t afford to put food on the table or heat their homes. It’s wrong to give billions upon billions of dollars in tax relief to the wealthy, and then turn your back on the hard-working families who live in poverty each day. It is wrong that in our prosperous nation, 14 million children go to bed hungry each night.”

Kennedy and Edwards were joined by hundreds of grassroots activists that have been inspired to join the minimum wage fight, and have witnessed firsthand the popular outcry for a raise in the minimum wage. Building on this groundswell of public activism, Senator Kennedy and Senator Edwards called on the Republican leadership for an immediate vote on Kennedy’s bill to raise the minimum wage. Attached is a fact sheet on Kennedy’s plan and his remarks as prepared for delivery.

Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy

Minimum Wage Rally

(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)

In 1776, the founders of our country set forth a bold vision of what our country should be. They declared our independence, because they wanted a nation that was ruled not by a king, but by the people. Today, however, we have an Administration in power that all too often ignores the will of the people and favors special interests, not the millions of hardworking families who are the backbone of America. Nothing illustrates that better than the refusal of the Administration and its rubber-stamp Congress to raise the minimum wage.

It’s been nine long years since the minimum wage was last increased. It’s been stuck at \$5.15 an hour since 1997.

The bill I favor would raise it to \$5.65 right away, \$6.75 a year from now, and \$7.25 two years from now.

Again and again, however, our Republican colleagues have refused to give minimum wage workers any raise at all, let alone the raise they deserve.

workers, poverty has doubled since the late 1970s. An unacceptably low minimum wage is a key part of the problem.

- Minimum wage employees working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earn \$10,700 a year, \$4,500 below the poverty line for a family of three. Since Congress last acted to raise the minimum wage in 1996, the value has eroded by 18 percent.

- Every day the minimum wage is not increased it continues to lose value, and workers fall farther and farther behind. Minimum wage workers have already lost all of the gains of the 1996-1997 increase.

- Today, the real value of the minimum wage is more than \$3.00 below what it was in 1968. To have the purchasing power it had in 1968, the minimum wage would have to be more than \$8.50 an hour today, not \$5.15.

- Seven and a half million workers will directly benefit from the minimum wage increase.

- Raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour will mean an additional \$4,370 a year to help minimum wage earners support their families. It would be enough money for a low-income family of three to buy:

- More than one year of groceries;
- Over 9 months of rent;
- A year and a half of heat and electricity; or
- full tuition for a community college degree.

- This year, the Senate raised its pay \$3,100. It is shameful that Members of Congress receive our seventh pay increase in nine years, yet in those same nine years, we have not provided a single pay increase to the lowest paid workers.

- Salaries of lawmakers will have gone up by \$31,600 since 1997 while minimum wage workers continue to earn just \$10,700 a year.

- History clearly shows that raising the minimum wage has not had any negative impact on jobs, employment, or inflation. In the four years after the last minimum wage increase passed, the economy experienced its strongest growth in over three decades. Nearly 11 million new jobs were added, at a pace of 232,000 per month. In contrast, since President Bush took office the minimum wage has held steady, but only 1.8 new million jobs have been created.

- □□□□□A fair increase is long overdue. Congress should act as quickly as possible to pass a minimum wage increase that reflects the losses suffered as the result of our shameful inaction in the past. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

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