

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**\*\*LIST OF PRIORITIES INCLUDED**

**KENNEDY ANNOUNCES HELP COMMITTEE PRIORITIES FOR 110TH CONGRESS**

***KENNEDY COMMITTED TO MOVING AMERICA FORWARD THROUGH HEALTH,  
EDUCATION, AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE AGENDA***

***(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY)***

The message from this election is clear. There's little doubt that the American people want a change of course in Iraq. But they also want a government that stands with them and their families as they look to the future – jobs that reward their hard work, health care that is good and affordable, and education that continues to open the door to the American dream for all of our citizens.

That was the agenda of the voters in this election and it will be the agenda of our Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee when we convene in the new year. And with Senator Reid as our majority leader, America's families will see great progress on the issues that they care most about.

Yesterday, Democrats selected the membership of our committee. Every member is an experienced legislator with a deep commitment to working families and a solid record for getting things done.

So I welcome back Senator Dodd, Senator Harkin, Senator Mikulski, Senator Bingaman, Senator Murray, Senator Jack Reed and Senator Clinton. And I welcome our new members: Senator Obama, Senator-elect Sanders and Senator-elect Brown.

I am also grateful to continue working together with Chairman Enzi. The gavel may change hands, but our partnership will not. He's a true leader and has set the standard for fairness and statesmanship, and I look forward to working with him on the many issues before the Committee in the next Congress.

My first priority will be to increase the minimum wage. Americans are working harder than ever, but millions of hard-working men and women across the country aren't getting their fair share. We're not rewarding work fairly anymore, and working families are falling behind.

The minimum wage has been stuck at \$5.15 an hour for almost 10 years. A minimum wage worker who works 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year still makes just \$10,700 a year—\$6,000 below the poverty line for a family of three. In this era of skyrocketing costs, these hardworking Americans are forced to make impossible choices—between paying the rent or buying food, between paying for gas or paying the doctor.

Americans understand fairness, and they know this is unfair. That's why the American people took the battle into their own hands this year. They pounded the pavements for months to put minimum wage increases on the ballot in six states this year. And all six of these ballot initiatives passed by decisive margins. If there is one message from this election that emerged loud and clear, it's that no one who works for a living should have to live in poverty!

Raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour will benefit almost 15 million Americans. It will help

more than 7.3 million children whose parents will receive a raise.

Minimum wage workers serve in many of the most difficult and most important jobs in our society.

They care for children in day care centers, and for the elderly in nursing homes. They clean office buildings, hotel rooms, and restaurants across the country.

They are men and women of dignity, and they deserve a fair wage that respects the dignity of their work. It's long past time to give minimum wage workers a raise.

Another high priority is to remove the barriers to lifesaving stem cell research.

We are in the era of the life sciences, and no area of medical research has more promise than stem cell research to speed the search for new cures for diabetes, Parkinson's Disease, cancer, and many other serious illnesses.

Thanks to the courage of leaders such as Michael J. Fox, the people of Missouri last week chose hope over fear by approving a constitutional amendment to allow stem cell research.

Congress should learn from that example. Last year, a broad bipartisan majority approved legislation to tear down the barriers that have kept NIH scientists from realizing the full potential of this research. That bill was rejected by the President, but hope can never be vetoed.

We will be back again and again next year until we succeed in overturning the restrictions on stem cell research that hinder the search for new cures, and delay the day when the hope of a better future becomes a reality for patients across America.

We must also address the crisis in college affordability that affects every low and middle income family and that threatens our economic progress. It is more important than ever for our citizens to have a college education so they can compete in the global economy and have a fair chance at the American Dream.

But because of soaring college costs, stagnant student aid and heavy student loan debt, it's becoming increasingly difficult for our citizens to get such an education.

Today, students and families are pinching every penny to save for college – but it's not enough. Each year, 400,000 low income students do not attend a four year college because of cost factors. Student debt is also a barrier to the pursuit of vital but lower-paying professions like teaching, public health, and social work.

Last year, we passed an increase in student aid through the Senate only to see our proposals die in the House. With the House and Senate under new management, next year we will provide needed help to families struggling to put their children through college.

We will increase Pell Grants from \$4,050 to \$5,100.

We will cap college loan payments to no more than 15% of your income.

We will cut student loan interest rates.

We will reform the student loan program so it works for students and not just the banks. And we'll use the savings to increase student aid.

And at long last, we can no longer ignore the need for health care reform. We must reduce the cost of health and we must make it available to each and every American.

Every Member of the Senate, and their staffs, and every federal employee has a sense of security about health care that is denied to millions of Americans. Members of Congress know that if we get sick, or if our children need medical care, our health insurance plan will cover virtually all of the costs.

Tens of millions of our fellow citizens have no such guarantee. Nearly fifty million Americans lack health care coverage entirely, and tens of millions more have inadequate coverage. In a nation with the best doctors and finest hospitals in the world, it is profoundly wrong that so many Americans suffer from illnesses that could have been prevented or treated more effectively -- if only health care had been available and affordable.

The time is long overdue to address the crisis in health care. Bipartisan health care reform is possible, and our first step toward it should be effective legislation to strengthen and re-authorize CHIP, the program that provides quality health care for 4 million children.

But our experience with health reform in Massachusetts showed that we can do more. We proved that people from all parts of the political spectrum can come together to provide health care for all. So this, too, is one of our top goals for the coming Congress.

Together, we can -- we must -- make the promise of this century of the life sciences a reality for all Americans by seeing that every American has quality, affordable health care.

These are our top priorities for the new year, but they are not our only priorities.

We must pass the CLASS Act and create a long-term care infrastructure in this country that will support every American's choice to live at home and be part of their community. Every older or disabled American has this right, and it's our job in Congress to provide them with the support they need to make this a reality.

We will strengthen early learning opportunities, starting at birth, for each of our children. Prevention works in health care and it can work in education as well.

We must also ensure that our schools are equipped to meet the challenges of the global economy. Our nation's future depends on many things, but certainly one of the most important measures of the strength of our democracy is the excellence of our public schools. This year, we'll revisit the reforms contained in the No Child Left Behind Act.

The law charted a sound course for American education four years ago, but it's time for us to reshape our commitment and provide better solutions for schools to respond to the challenges identified by the law. These reforms are right and we're ready to work with President Bush, as we did five years ago. But given the many failures of implementation by his Administration and the meager commitments to education reform in his budgets, the President has a high hurdle to cross to demonstrate that he is seriously committed to these reforms.

In addition, we must give workers a stronger voice in their own futures and in meeting the needs of their families. We must protect workers' right to join together and fight for better wages and working conditions, free from employer intimidation. Workers need opportunities to improve their skills through job training programs. And families deserve paid sick days to care for loved ones without fear of losing their jobs.

Americans who have worked a lifetime to provide for their families deserve to retire in dignity, not in poverty. We must ensure our retirement system works for all Americans, not just corporate

executives.

We can make bipartisan progress, too, on measures that will improve health care and reduce costs – not by denying services to patients, but by improving efficiency and effectiveness. Congress should aid doctors, hospitals, and patients improve their use of electronic medical records, and we should explore responsible ways to reward the quality of health care, not just the quantity of care.

And we must fulfill our duty through our hearings and our legislative program to ensure that government is working for the people.

That we have strong laws to keep workers safe on the job and that workers are fairly paid.

That student loans work for students and not just the banks.

That students are protected from exploitation in the private student loan market.

That prescription drugs we rely on and the food we eat is safe.

That the workers that risked their lives for others on 9/11 are cared for as they deal now with the illness and injury.

These will be my priorities as Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee next year. They come directly out of this election where the American people spoke loud and clear. And I look forward to working with my colleagues to make important progress for America's families.

## **OVERVIEW OF HELP COMMITTEE ISSUES FOR THE 110th CONGRESS**

### **HEALTH**

1) **Expanding access to affordable healthcare.** Medicare provides quality health care for more than 40 million Americans. Administrative costs are low and satisfaction is high. The most straightforward way to see that every American has affordable, quality health care is to extend Medicare to all citizens. Senator Kennedy and Representative Dingell introduced the Medicare for All legislation to do just that. This proposal should be the starting point for discussions on achieving universal coverage. In Massachusetts, all parts of the political spectrum came together to reach a solution that everyone could support, and that bipartisan spirit of compromise is a model for success in Washington too.

2) **Stem Cell Research.** We are in the era of the life sciences, and no area of medical research has more promise than stem cell research to speed the search for new cures for diabetes, Parkinson's Disease, cancer, and many other serious illnesses. A broad bipartisan majority in both chambers of Congress approved legislation to tear down the barriers that have kept NIH scientists from realizing the full potential of this research. The President vetoed that bill last year, but Congress will keep working to overcome the President's opposition.

3) **Health IT.** The Wired for Health Quality Act, sponsored by Frist, Enzi, Kennedy, and Clinton, improves the quality and efficiency of health care through better use of health information technology, which will reduce administrative costs and diminish medical errors.

4) **Medicare Part D.** Senators Kennedy and Stabenow have introduced legislation to lower the cost of drugs by requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate discounted prices

directly with pharmaceutical companies on behalf of beneficiaries. Negotiating discounted prices will result in lower expenses for seniors and savings for Medicare that can be applied to improving the drug benefit by filling the gap in coverage known as the doughnut hole.

- 5) **CHIP reauthorization.** CHIP has been one of the health care success stories of recent years. It provides quality care for 4 million children who would otherwise go without. It is essential to build on the promise of CHIP by not only extending the program, but strengthening it as well. We should finish the job that the original CHIP legislation started by covering all children.
- 6) **FDA Regulation of tobacco products.** Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death in America. Empowering the Food and Drug Administration to regulate tobacco products is long overdue. Effective FDA regulation will help to deter young people from starting to smoke and to assist current smokers in quitting. Senator Kennedy authored FDA legislation to give the FDA this authority. It passed the Senate twice but was blocked by the House Republican leadership. Enacting this important public health legislation should be a top priority for the new Congress.
- 7) **CLASS Act.** Today, the only option for most Americans who develop severe functional impairments is Medicaid. Their reliance on Medicaid for critical functional support services creates the strong incentive for them to get rid of assets and remain unemployed. The CLASS Act will create a new insurance program to help more than 10 million individuals who develop severe functional impairments remain independent.

## **EDUCATION**

- 1) **Enacting a higher education reauthorization that makes college affordable.** Senator Kennedy's proposals to help students and families include the STAR Act, Debt Relief Act and the Contract for Educational Opportunity Grants in the Right TRACK Act. Senator Kennedy's top priorities for reauthorization are increasing student aid, making student loan debt more manageable and making sure our student loan programs work for students, not banks. He also will be looking to expand support for and improve teacher preparation programs.
- 2.) **Funding and reauthorizing the No Child Left Behind Act.** Democrats will make education funding a priority so NCLB can fulfill its promise. As Chairman, Senator Kennedy will advance an NCLB reauthorization agenda that seeks to strengthen key reforms, ensure the law's effectiveness, and promote solutions and strategies for schools to improve. Senator Kennedy's priorities for reauthorization include ensuring that tests are used to improve instruction, not just labeling schools, and ensuring that students struggling to meet high standards have the best teachers and expanded learning opportunities. He also has a proposal to ensure that parents are given the information that they need to navigate the education system and help their children succeed.
- 3.) **Ensuring that our students are competitive in the 21st-Century global economy.** Many of Senator Kennedy's proposals on this theme are in the Right Track Act. They include increasing college student aid, greater support for math and science education, and creating incentives for high quality teachers -- especially in high demand subjects such as math and science -- to teach in high poverty schools, as well as assistance to states to raise standards and ensure that schools are internationally competitive.
- 4.) **Reauthorizing the Head Start federal preschool program** and enacting Senator Kennedy's Early Care and Education Act (ECEA), so that all children can have access to high quality early childhood programs. ECEA would provide support to states to create a more cohesive system of early childhood education programs and improve standards for programs and educators in the early childhood arena.

5.) **Reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act** and provide additional funding for job training programs so workers can obtain the skills they need to succeed in today's global economy.

6.) **Fully funding IDEA.**

## LABOR AND PENSIONS

1) **Raising the Minimum Wage.** Senator Kennedy's bill will raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour in three steps over a two year period. This increase will give nearly 15 million Americans a well-earned raise, including the parents of more than seven million children. This increase will give a family with one minimum wage earner another \$4,400 a year to spend on education, child care, paying the rent, or putting decent food on the table.

2) **Promoting paid sick days for workers.** Over half of American workers do not have paid sick days. Senator Kennedy's Healthy Families Act will guarantee working Americans seven paid sick days to care for their own and their families' medical needs. Providing paid sick days will build strong families, protect our children, and safeguard our public health.

3) **Protecting Workers' Right to Organize.** In today's insecure economy, when too many working families are struggling just to make ends meet, it is more important than ever that workers have a voice at work. Senator Kennedy's Employee Free Choice Act helps workers get their fair share of our nation's economic growth by supporting the basic right of workers to choose their own representative. It puts real teeth in the law by strengthening the penalties for discrimination against workers who favor a union. And it will allow employees to choose a union when a majority of them sign an authorization designating a union as their bargaining representative.

4) **Strengthening Retirement Security.** Workers deserve to retire in dignity, not in poverty. Senator Kennedy's priorities include expanding retirement security for all American workers and finding ways to prevent corporations from using the bankruptcy courts to dump workers' pensions while awarding big bonuses to executives. He will also continue the fight to protect Social Security.

5) **Strengthening Worker Safety.** Too many American workers still face hazardous conditions at work. Senator Kennedy wants to make all workplaces safer by passing the Protecting America's Workers Act to cover more workers, give families a role in safety investigations, strengthen protections for whistleblowers, and increase penalties for repeated safety violators. He will build on the MINER Act to make additional advances in mine safety legislation. Kennedy also plans to exercise close oversight over MSHA and OSHA to ensure that they vigorously enforce our safety laws and issue needed safety standards.

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