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**STATEMENT BY SENATOR KENNEDY ON THE IRAQ SUPPLEMENTAL
AND THE MINIMUM WAGE AGREEMENT**

Mr. President, the conference agreement includes a landmark provision which outlines a new way forward in Iraq. Rather than continuing our failed policy, it changes the mission of our troops, requires the President to begin to withdraw them from Iraq in October, and sets a goal of next March for the completion of the withdrawal.

I congratulate the Democratic leader for his bold and decisive leadership and his determination to bring our troops home from Iraq in an orderly, responsible, and safe way. Those Republicans who are disparaging him are engaged in nothing more than a ploy to change the focus of the debate. Harry Reid is an effective and capable leader. What the American people and our soldiers in Iraq need is new leadership from the White House and a new policy in Iraq that requires the Iraqis to take responsibility and our troops to begin to come home.

A timeline for the withdrawal of our combat troops is the only realistic way to encourage the Iraqis to take responsibility for their future. The Bush Administration supported deadlines for three Iraqi elections and for the writing of the constitution as part of its strategy to ensure that the Iraqis would make essential decisions. Yet, the Administration remains emphatically opposed to any timeline for the withdrawal of our military.

The Administration should follow the logic of its past actions and embrace – rather than reject – a timeline. And it should stop defying the will of the American people who want us to begin to bring our troops home to the hero's welcome they've earned.

The President is wrong to threaten to veto this legislation. He was wrong to get us into this war, wrong to conduct it so poorly, wrong to ignore the views of the American people, and wrong to accuse those of us who are working to change course as harming our troops. Now he is wrong to threaten to veto this bill, delaying funds and keeping our troops in a civil war with no end in sight to our commitment. Instead, President Bush should be listening to the American people and working with Congress to bring this tragic war to an end.

Instead of continuing to defy the will of the American people and Congress by threatening to veto this legislation, he should put the Iraqis on notice. He must make it clear to the Iraqi Government that it's time for them to take responsibility for their country, and resolve their political differences. The American military will not police Iraq's civil war indefinitely.

It is time to end the loss of American lives and begin to bring our soldiers home. For the sake of our troops, we cannot repeat the mistakes of Vietnam and allow this war to drag on long after the American people know it is a mistake.

The Administration insists that we are making progress in Iraq and that its so-called surge must continue.

In fact, the only thing surging is the violence.

More than 80 American soldiers were killed in each of the first four months this year – the longest period of such high casualty rates since the war began.

Sectarian violence in Baghdad continues unabated -- despite the Administration's claims to the contrary. According to an April 25 report by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, "civilian casualties of the daily violence between January and March remained high

concentrated in and around Baghdad." The violence is so bad that the Iraqi Government has refused to provide mortality figures to the UN.

It says, "by late February, government officials announced that the number of such killings had decreased, which they attributed to the success of the Baghdad Security Plan. Despite this announced decrease, the number of victims was nevertheless high, with up to 25 bodies still being found on some days during this period in Baghdad. March again witnessed a rise in the number of casualties, with reports of large number of bodies found in Baghdad, al-Ramadi, al-Hilla, Kirkuk, Mosul, Khalis, Tikrit and Himreen."

The report also states that, "Despite reports from Iraqis in late February that security had somewhat improved, there were a series of indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians, and the rate of kidnappings remained high."

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 200,000 Iraqis have been displaced since last December.

Attacks within the international zone are increasing.

Violence is spreading out of Baghdad and spiking elsewhere in Iraq, such as in Diyala province, where 53 American soldiers have been killed this month.

We know that insurgents are using new and deadlier bombs, including chlorine gas bombs.

We know that General Petraeus has proposed the segregation of Baghdad into "gated communities" drawn largely on sectarian lines.

We know that Sadr has withdrawn six members from Prime Minister Maliki's cabinet and that the Prime Minister has made no progress on political reconciliation – despite the arrival of tens of thousands of additional American troops which the Administration argued were necessary for him to do so.

Mr. President, no one in the Administration can tell the American people in good faith and in good conscience that we are making progress in Iraq. Iraq is sliding deeper into civil war, and our military cannot solve their problems.

It's time the President listened to the Iraq Study Group, the Congress, and the American people, and worked with us to bring our troops home.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. President, I am very pleased that this conference report includes the minimum wage bill. After 10 long years, we will finally be able to send a minimum wage increase to the President. It's long overdue, and it's yet another reason why the President should sign this important bill.

The minimum wage bill passed the House and Senate by overwhelming margins in January and February of this year. Under it, minimum wage workers will get a raise of \$2.10 per hour. Those who work full time will earn an additional \$4400 a year.

That's enough to pay for utilities that might otherwise be shut off. To put gas in the car so you can get to work. Or to pay for after-school care for a son or daughter who might otherwise be left home alone.

In many ways, including the minimum wage increase in this bill on Iraq couldn't be more appropriate. The minimum wage represents the values our troops are fighting for – basic fairness. It's about what we stand for as a nation.

Americans believe that hard work should help you build a better life for your family. They

believe that a job should keep you out of poverty, not force you to live in poverty.

Our troops are away fighting to provide a better future for the people of Iraq. We'd like to think that our men and women in uniform don't have to worry about the economic security of their families here at home. But many of our fighting forces have husbands or wives back at home who are struggling to make ends meet.

10% of military spouses earn between \$5.15 and \$7.25 per hour. 50,000 military families will benefit from an increase in the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour. Our troops are overseas putting their lives on the line for their country, and we should provide fair opportunities for their spouses who are working hard here at home.

I hope we can provide these families – and all other struggling families across the country – with the fair wages they deserve as soon as possible. I hope the President will do the right thing for our troops and for America's minimum wage workers by signing this important bill.