

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 19, 2007

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**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY IN SUPPORT OF THE EMPLOYEE
FREE CHOICE ACT**

And comments on the fallen firefighters of South Carolina

(As delivered)

My heart goes out this morning to the families of the nine fallen firefighters in Charleston, and to my colleagues Senator Graham and DeMint and to the people of Charleston. These fallen heroes made the ultimate sacrifice to protect their fellow citizens. And today we remember them and all firefighters and their families for whom courageous service is a part of their service is a part of their everyday lives. My home state of Massachusetts endured similar disaster several years ago when six firefighters died in Worcester, Massachusetts.

I read a poem at the funeral of those fallen heroes, and I'd like to read it again now. And I hope it brings some small measure of comfort to those whose hearts are aching today for their brave husbands, fathers, brothers, and friends who perished so tragically. It's called "May They Not be Forgotten."

'Brother, when you weep for me remember that it was meant to be lay me down and when you leave remember I'll be at your sleeve in every dark and choking hall, I'll be there as you slowly crawl on every roof in driving snow I'll hold your coat and you will know in cellars hot with searing heat at windows where a gate you meet in closets where young children hide, you know I'll be there at your side, the house from which I now respond is overstaffed with heroes gone men who answered one last bell did the job and did it well as firemen, we understand that death's a card dealt in our hand, a card we hope we never play but one we hold there anyway, be that card is something we ignore as we crawl across a weakened floor, before we know that we're the only prayer for anyone that might be there, so remember as you wipe your tears the joy I knew throughout the years as I did the job I loved to do, I pray that thought will see you through.'

Mr. President, I wish to address the Senate on a matter that we'll have an opportunity to vote on as this week goes on, and that is the Employee Free Choice Act, and I think to understand this issue, Mr. President, we have to understand really what has been happening to the middle class, the working families in this country over the period of these last 30 years and then what happened to the middle class in the 20 or 30 years before that and what happened after the turn of the century, as we came into the 20th century.

In my own state of Massachusetts, at the turn of the century coming into the 19 hundred's, 1900's, we had the most extraordinary and excessive exploitation of American work earnings workers, and they weren't just American workers, they were children. all one has to do is travel on up to Lowell, Massachusetts, where we have a national park and travel through some of the areas we have preserved, some of the old textile mills, and you'll read encased in many of those wonderful viewing stands these letters of children that were 8 or 9 and 10 years old that worked 15 hours a day as they were paid very, very minimum salaries and they were required to work.

We had the exploitation of women in those conditions. We had the exploitation of the conditions which were extraordinarily dangerous. And we had wages that were completely inadequate to provide a decent wage for people that were working long and hard. And then we saw the changes that took place in the 1940's as work workers came together and demand demanded economic and social justice. And we saw the changes that took place in the workplace in terms of fairness and equity. And interestingly, we saw the vast increase in

productivity; the American economy growing stronger. The middle class were the ones that brought us out of the Great Depression, the ones that fought in world war ii, the ones that put us back on the track after we had 13 million, 15 million

Americans that served in World War II and brought us back to a strong and an expanding economy where everyone moved along together, where everyone moved along together and we made enormous progress during the 1950's and the 1960's and during the early 1970's. We made economic progress for workers and working means, and -- and forking working families. We passed legislation that dealt with children that were left behind, a whole range of different kinds of programs to make this a fair and more justified just country. Strong opposition, but I don't hear any effort to try and repeal those marks for progress that we have made in terms of economic and social justice and the courts obviously filled an enormous responsibility.

So, Mr. President, can Mr. President Mr. president, what happened during this period of time? We find that during this period of time -- I put on here the -- a chart, Mr. President, that shows from 1941 to 1961. And then I show this part of the chart where we have the -- what we call the abuses in the labor -- in the job markets today. And during this period of time, Mr. President, we have what we are talking about, the employee free choice act. We had it in effect during this period of time, interestingly enough. card check offs were in effect during this period of time from 1941 all the way up to 1961 and then through the national labor relations board and supreme court we found out that there was gradually the elimination that have kind of protection. And, look, we have found the various abuses that we have at this point. That is, firing workers that are interested in forming a union. if the union is actually accepted, even by voting by this, the refusal to accept the outcome -- and we find a series of different kinds of abuses, to make it more and more difficult for people to be able to join the unions. but what I would had here, Mr. president, is -- but what we had here, Mr. president, is the fact that we had labor and management disagreement agreements and we had progress and economic prosperity during this period of time.

Look here, Mr. President. During that same period of time where we talked about peak union membership, wails and productivity rise together. Look from 1947, 1952, 1968, 1962. Increasing in productivity, increasing in wages, America moved along together. Economic progress that moved a along together. And then as we find that the unions are going to decline, we naindz find that workers are falling further and further and further apart. Wages now are flattened and basically in terms of their purchasing power actually going down and we see the productivity grew more than 206% more than wages. So when you had the idea that we had workers that were able to get together, represent their views, the creeps increase in productivity and we saw the country making very important progress. This chart shows what's happening during this period of time. This shows what was happening in 194. Here it is, 1947, 1957, 1967, up to 1973, the lowest 20%, virtually all the same in terms of real economic growth. during the same period that I just pointed out where you had the maximum union activity, increasing productivity, increasing wages and the nation -- the united states of America -- all growing, growing, and growing together. That was going on from 1947 through 1973.

Now let's take a look at 1973 and the year 2000. We have the beginning of America beginning to grow apart. Look what's happening to the middle class hey and look at what's happened to the top. Growing two or three times higher during this period of time. This was the beginning of the Reagan revolution that was taking place. Reflecting it in how America was growing. Were we growing more together or are we growing more apart? And look what has happened now in the most recent times. The lowest 20%, because of the rates of inflation, are actually going down, the second 20%. And this top 1% is the one that is growing at this period of time.

And what has happened, Mr. President? We at the same time we sea -- at the same time, we see that the corporate profits have gone up at the same time. Workers, wages, and benefits now have basically stabilized. This country, the United States, grows together, works together. We are a united people and we see what happening has been happening as a result of

economic problems and the fact that unions have been effectively attacked and diminished in this country.

Mr. President, just before I retire, just this last Sunday we had Father's Day. Look at the difference between fathers and sons in 1964 and 1994. What we have seen is that the sons did better; the middle class was expanding expanding. Sons did can better than their fathers over this period of time in this growth. Look what's happening now in this 1974 to 2004. A decline of 12%. The son is doing poorer than the father, the first time in the history of this country that that's happened. The first time in the history of this country. And we know the corresponding difference, Mr. President, when we're able to have workers that are able to get together; we find out that the corresponding increases.

And when you diminish the unions in this kind of area, you diminish the power of working men and women. That happens to be the fact. Is the trade union asking? All they're asking what they had years ago during the period of 1947 to 1962. And it worked then, Mr. President. Look at the wages and productivity. And what happened in the United States of America? We all grew together. We all grew together. So why this emotional reaction and response on the other side? 'Employee free choice act -- this is some crazy idea we can't think about or even tolerate.'

This is an idea that has been tried and tested. How few the times that we have in the United States Senate where we try to do something that has been tried and tested and successful. when we had that measure which was effectively the card check off during the period of wages and productivity grew together and we had the fact that America -- America -- the United States of America grow together. That's the choice that we have in the employee free choice. That is the choice. Are we going to go back to this period of time where we are as a country and a society growing together? Or are we going to continue to grow apart? That's the heart of the question. The Employee Free Choice is really the resolution and the solution.

So, Mr. President, I look forward to other times. I see my friend and I've taken the time now. I'm thankful that our good colleague and friend from the state of Washington wishes to address this. This is very basic and fundamental about our country and about the kind of America. I come from a state that takes a pride in the fact that the Mayflower arrived on the coast off of Massachusetts. The captain of the crew came together after six weeks and they signed the Mayflower Compact. And that is a compact made Massachusetts a commonwealth. What does it mean? It is a common interest in all of the families and we are going to work together to make a better state, a better country, a better nation, a better world. That is what is at the base of it, what this legislation is all about and I hope the senate will give us a chance to vote in favor of it. Mr. President, my time has expired. I yield the floor.

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