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**BILL SUMMARY INCLUDED

Kennedy, Kerry, Frank, Tierney, Delahunt introduce Fishermen's Health Legislation

Bill would expand Massachusetts Fishing Partnership Health Plan

Washington, D.C.---Senators Edward M. Kennedy and John F. Kerry and Representatives Barney Frank, John Tierney, and William Delahunt today introduced bipartisan legislation to provide low-cost health coverage to fishermen and their families in Massachusetts and other coastal states. For Massachusetts, where the Fishing Partnership Plan currently provides health care to many fishing families, the bill would offer a valuable infusion of additional funds to keep the program on a firm financial footing.

Senator Kennedy said, "This is a unique opportunity to provide good coverage to the nation's fishermen. The Massachusetts Fishing Partnership Plan is a proven success in covering the state's fishermen, and federal funds have contributed significantly to that success. This bill will enable fishermen in other states to get good coverage as well."

Senator Kerry said, "Despite technological advances since fishing schooners first left the harbors of Gloucester and New Bedford, the job of a fishermen remains among the most dangerous. This legislation will allow fishermen, many facing mounting financial pressure, to provide critical health coverage for themselves and their families. No fishermen should go to sea worried about whether their child will be able to get the prescription or medical treatment they need."

Congressman Frank said, "Finding and keeping affordable health care coverage has often been difficult for fishermen, given the inconsistent work schedules common in the industry. The Massachusetts Fishing Partnership has led the way in showing how to provide reliable coverage to the fishing community, and I believe it is time to take the next step by establishing a national program that can help keep the Massachusetts plan strong and also give other states the chance to adopt their own plans. I had hoped that we would be able to include legislation along these lines in the Magnuson-Stevens reauthorization bill passed by Congress in late 2006. When that didn't happen, this health care proposal became one of the key unfinished items on the fishing agenda. I appreciate the key role that Senator Kennedy has taken on this bill, and I look forward to working with him and the other supporters of the bill from both parties in pushing for its passage."

Congressman Tierney (D-MA) said, "Fishing is an arduous occupation, and the industry has been hit hard in recent years on the North Shore and across the nation. The availability of

comprehensive, affordable health coverage is crucial. Passage of this legislation will not only enable continued support for our local fishing community, but it will extend the successful Massachusetts Fishing Partnership Health Plan model across the nation."

"Fishing is one of the most dangerous and hazardous occupations in the country. It is important that the federal government help provide affordable health care coverage for all our fishermen," Delahunt said. "I am proud to support this legislation which will not only help sustain health care access for our fishermen but weather these very difficult economic times for the industry."

The bill introduced today would authorize funding to replicate the Massachusetts Fishing Partnership Health Plan in other coastal states, while allowing states to tailor their plans to their own circumstances and types of fishing. It authorizes \$50 million over five years for program planning, implementation and continuation grants in states with commercial fishing industries. Massachusetts would be eligible to receive continuation grants.

The Fishing Partnership Health Plan in Massachusetts provides coverage to over 2000 fishermen and their families. Since the program's launch ten years ago, the rate of uninsured fishermen in the state has fallen from 43 percent to 13 percent. The plan is financed partly by federal and state funds and the fishermen receiving coverage.

Also cosponsoring the bill are Senators Ted Stevens Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, both Republicans, and Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), Don Young (R-AK), Tom Allen (D-ME) and Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD).

COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY HEALTH CARE COVERAGE ACT OF 2008

Establishment of Program.

Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish a grant program under the Health Resources and Services Administration for establishment of health care coverage programs for the commercial fishing industry.

- *Program planning grants (for commercial fishing states or organizations in such states).
- *Implementation and Administration grants for no more than 15 commercial fishing states.

Program Planning Grants.

*Up to \$200,000 annually for no more than two years to organizations or states

*If awarded to an organization, the group must have knowledge of the industry

*Recipients to conduct initial research and planning for development of a qualified health care coverage program within the state, including a demographic survey of the industry and its health needs; development of a strategic plan for implementation of a qualified program, and a detailed financial plan.

*The Secretary must consult with states when awarding a planning grant to an organization to help determine if the group has the necessary knowledge and familiarity with the industry and doesn't have a history of fraudulent or abusive practices.

Implementation and Program Administration Grants.

When a program planning grant is completed, a State may apply, as appropriate, for implementation and administration grants

*Grants for initial implementation of a program are not to exceed \$2 million annually and are limited to no more than 2 years.

*Grants for actual administration of a program are not to exceed \$3 million annually and are limited to no more than 5 years.

*Continued administration grants – after completion of 5 administration grants, up to \$3 million annually if bad economic conditions or poor fish stock conditions jeopardize the ability of the program to continue providing affordable health care coverage.

*Implementation, administration and continued administration grants can be awarded even if there was no planning grant under this Act (i.e. if a group did the planning work on its own), or if the program was developed or administered without funds from this Act and/or before enactment of this Act.

Eligibility Requirements (for implementation and administration grants): include enrollment of fishing industry members and their families if they were uninsured or underinsured; need for federal funding in order to operate; state assurances that, if a program already exists, new funds will not simply supplant existing state funding; state assurances that for new programs there will be appropriate financial and consumer protection policies, licensing and oversight, including insolvency protection, stop-loss protection, reinsurance requirements, receivership/liquidation protection, etc.

Matching Funds. (for implementation and administration grants): required ratio of 2:1 federal to non-federal funds. The latter can include in kind, services, equipment, etc.

Contracting Authority. States may contract with organizations or companies (which can in turn subcontract) for the purposes of carrying out implementation or administration grants. The Secretary shall issue regulations governing eligibility for contracts and subcontracts addressing concerns about a history of fraud or abuse, capability to administer a health coverage program, and familiarity with the fishing industry.

Definitions. The following terms are defined:

*Commercial Fishing State (includes U.S. territories).

*Commercial Fishing Industry Member (includes shore side fishing businesses)

*Qualified Health Care Coverage Program (includes enrollment, eligibility, coverage and rate standards)

*Qualified Health Care Coverage (must be actuarially equivalent to Federal Employees Health Benefits Program or State government health plan).

Authorization of Appropriations.

\$5 million the first 2 years; \$10 million the second 2 years; and \$20 million in year 5

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