

**\*\*Fact Sheets and Remarks Below\*\***

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**KENNEDY ADDRESSES THE CHALLENGE OF POVERTY, CONTINUES FIGHT  
FOR INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE**

***KENNEDY RECEIVES OTIS SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD AT WHEATON COLLEGE***

BOSTON, MA--- Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy discussed the challenges of poverty at Wheaton College upon receiving the “Otis Social Justice Award,” which is awarded to individuals who enhance the understanding of peace, human rights and economic opportunity. Kennedy shared his views of how the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina shined a spotlight on the economic and social injustice that persists in our communities and the work that remains unfinished. He outlined his fight for an increase in the minimum wage which has kept millions of working men and women in poverty, unable to achieve the American dream despite their efforts to work hard and play by the rules. He also discussed his war on poverty and his determination to cut child poverty in half within this decade.

“Raising the minimum wage is not just an economic issue. It’s a women’s issue. It’s a civil rights issue. It’s a family issue. But – perhaps more than anything – the minimum wage is a moral issue.” Senator Kennedy said. “Over the last five years the Bush administration has done a lot for the powerful and the wealthy. They have done a lot for corporate America. But they have done little to provide for the working people who are struggling to survive.”

Kennedy has led the fight to increase the minimum wage in the U.S. Senate, but has been blocked at every turn by Senators who continued to turn a blind eye. In the aftermath of Katrina, he offered a minimum wage amendment to the transportation appropriations bill last month and the measure was defeated. Since the last increase in 1997 costs of health care, education, housing, home heating and fuel have skyrocketed, leaving many families left out and left behind. Also since this time, members of Congress have raised their own pay eight times.

Next week, Senator Kennedy will join in a conference hosted by the Center for American Progress to address the groundswell of grassroots support for an increase in the minimum wage and in the activity happening across the country to push state initiatives through. This month, Senator Kennedy joined national religious leaders in Washington, DC to announce the “Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.” This grassroots effort will team religious and community leaders with legislators to do right by the American worker and finally raise the minimum wage through ballot initiatives throughout the country. Frustrated by federal inaction, the “Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign” teamed over 50 religious and community groups with legislators to fight for an increased minimum wage through ballot initiatives on the ground in 2006.

The minimum wage hasn't increased since 1997, yet Americans increasingly feel the squeeze of the Bush economy. Americans are spending 74 percent more on gas than they did at the beginning of 2001. Heating oil prices are expected to rise by 56 percent this winter. Such rapid price increases will force consumers, especially the poor, to cut spending on clothing, health care and food just so they can get to work and keep warm this winter. The minimum wage was intended to ensure the working Americans would not have to make choices between heating and health care. Instead, our stagnant minimum wage has done the opposite and left even those with multiple jobs desperately straining to make ends meet.

Kennedy believes that we must marshal all our resources to combat poverty and he believes that cutting it in half within this decade is an attainable goal. To do this, Kennedy offered an amendment to the Tax Reconciliation bill earlier this month that would require a one percent surtax to be paid by our wealthiest citizens in order to take care of the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. With the 3.5 billion dollars generated from the one percent tax, the Child Poverty Elimination Fund will be created in order to combat child poverty in America where it starts--in the homes of low-income Americans looking for a way to feed their hungry children. The amendment failed in the U.S. Senate.

Today, nearly one child in six is living in poverty. Nearly 37 million men, women, and children in the United States now live below the poverty line--an increase of over 4 million since President Bush was first elected. The poverty rate for children in the United States is substantially higher -- often two to three times higher -- than that of most other major Western industrialized nations. And the number of Americans living in hunger and malnutrition has soared to almost 37 million.

Wheaton College is dedicated to the value of community, integrity diversity and service. Each year, the "Otis Social Justice Award" has been awarded to those who promote these values and enrich the understanding of peace, world hunger, human rights and economic opportunity. Past recipients of the award include former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, school reform advocate Jonathan Kozol and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson.

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## **Poverty in the United States**

### **Massachusetts**

- 570,000 people (9.2 percent) live below the poverty line in Massachusetts.
- 182,000 children (12.5 percent) live in poverty.

- 93,000 children (6 percent) live in extreme poverty—they live below 50 percent of the poverty line.

## **National**

- The official poverty rate in 2004 was 12.7 percent, up from 12.5 percent in 2003. The poverty rate has risen for four consecutive years—the rate was 11.3 percent in 2000.
- In 2004, 37 million people were in poverty, an increase of 5.4 million people since 2000.
- Poverty rates remain unchanged for Blacks (24.7 percent) and Hispanics (21.9 percent), rose for non-Hispanic Whites (8.6 percent in 2004, up from 8.2 percent in 2003), and decreased for Asians (9.8 percent in 2004, down from 11.8 percent in 2003).
- 13 million children (17.8 percent) live in poverty—an increase of 1.4 million since 2000. Children in the United States are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group.
- In 2004, more than one in five children under the age of five years (20.5%) in the U.S. lived in poverty.
- African-American children and Latino Children are much more likely to live in poverty than white children. One third of African-American children are low-income, as are nearly a third of Latino children.
- 7 out of 10 poor children live in a working family, and 1 poor child in 3 lives with a full-time year-round worker.
- Over 8 million children under 18 in the U.S. lack health insurance. With a 2004 uninsured rate of almost 19 percent, poor children are more likely to be uninsured than children generally.

- Both the poverty rate and number in poverty increased for people 18 to 64 years old (11.3 percent and 20.5 million in 2004, up from 10.8 percent and 19.4 million in 2003).
- The poverty rate decreased for seniors aged 65 and over, 9.8 percent in 2004, down from 10.2 percent in 2003. The number in poverty in 2004 (3.5 million) remained unchanged.
- The increase in poverty under President Bush can be contrasted with the Clinton years – between 1993 and 2000, more than 8 million families, including four million kids – moved out of poverty, and the total poverty rate fell 25%, from 15.1% to 11.3%, the lowest level since 1974.

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## **Hunger in the United States**

### **Massachusetts**

- In Massachusetts, over 7 percent of households (179,000 households) are food insecure—an increase of 6 percent since the period between 1999 and 2001. Almost 3 percent of all households (66,000 households) are food insecure with hunger—a 35 percent increase since the period between 1999 and 2001.
- Hungry households, for the most part, live in pockets of poverty in the state. Among families with children in low-income communities the prevalence of hunger is four times greater than it is statewide.
- Project Bread supports over 400 emergency food programs in 136 different communities across Massachusetts. This statewide network reported serving 40 million meals to people in need in 2004, representing a 29 percent increase since 2001.

- Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline answered over 35,000 calls between October 2004 and September 2005. Calls have increased by 59 percent in the last three years.
- Of all those served by emergency food programs funded by Project Bread, 33 percent were children (even though children make up only 24 percent of the population in Massachusetts).

## **National**

- Over 38 million Americans (13.2 percent) now live in hungry and food-insecure households. This represents an increase of 5 million since 2000. Almost 11 million Americans are food insecure with hunger.
- 13.5 million households are food insecure. 4 million households are food insecure with hunger—a 43 percent increase over the past 5 years (1999-2004).
- Over 36 percent of the individuals living in food insecure households are children. Almost 14 million children under the age of 18 are food insecure—an increase of 972,000 since 2000. 3.3 million children are food insecure with hunger.
- Households with children have double the rate of food insecurity when compared to households without children (17.6 percent v. 8.9 percent).
- Households with income below the official poverty line have a higher rate of food insecurity (36.8 percent), as do single female-headed households with children (33 percent), black non-Hispanic households (23.7 percent), single male-headed households with children (22.2 percent), and Hispanic households (21.7 percent).
- Over 47 percent of all food-insecure households have incomes above 130 percent of poverty, which in most cases would make these houses *ineligible* for food stamps.

NOTE: Food insecurity refers to the lack of access to enough food to fully meet basic needs at all times due to lack of financial resources. There are different levels of food insecurity. Food insecure with hunger is the highest level.

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## **THE UNITED STATES MUST SET A GOAL OF ENDING CHILD POVERTY**

*Senator Kennedy's amendment sets a national goal of cutting child poverty in half within a decade, and to eliminate it entirely as soon as possible thereafter. It enacts a one percent surtax to be paid by our wealthiest citizens in order to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.*

- America's children are more likely to live in poverty than Americans in any other age group.
- One in six children lives in poverty in the United States.
- The poverty rate for children in the United States is substantially higher than that of most other major Western industrialized nations. Denmark and Finland have a child poverty rate of less than 3 percent compared to 17.8 percent in the United States.
- African American and Latino children are much more likely to live in poverty than white children. One third of African-American children are low income, as are nearly a third of Latino children.
- A growing number of poor children are the children of immigrants. Children of immigrants comprise more than 26 percent of all low-income children in the United States.

- Reducing child poverty is one of the best investments that Americans can make in their nation's future. Fewer children in poverty will mean:
  - more children entering school ready to learn;
  - more successful schools and fewer school dropouts;
  - better child health and less strain on hospitals;
  - less stress on the juvenile justice system; and
  - less child hunger and malnutrition
  
- We must commit to ending child poverty. They've done it in Great Britain, with great success. It is possible. No child in this country should have to live in poverty.

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**Remarks of Senator Edward M. Kennedy in Acceptance of the 2006 Otis Social Justice Award  
November 28, 2005**

Thank you President Crutcher for that generous introduction and for your leadership at this wonderful college and on this beautiful campus.

And thank you Alexander Dewar – this year's Wheaton Rhodes Scholar. Alex is ably carrying on your strong tradition of leadership and scholarship as the third Rhodes Scholar from Wheaton in just five years. Well done, Alex. And well done to all of you here at Wheaton.

It's a great, great honor to be at Wheaton today. I don't need to tell you that Wheaton is a special place. You have recognized that in today's world – with global challenges that transcend borders – we must prepare students to think in new ways. And you're doing that every day, as you encourage students to look beyond the horizon and to think across disciplines to develop creative solutions to the issues of the day.

So it's a deep privilege to join you today. And it's a special honor to be awarded the 2005 Otis Social Justice Award today.

In my family, we were taught that a just society is measured by its commitment to the least of those in our midst – to the poor, the oppressed, to those who need hope.

And we were taught that to whom much has been given, much is expected and that each of us has an obligation to make a contribution to the best of our ability

If you look out over the past 50 years in American life, there's no doubt that we've experienced an extraordinary march of progress toward a more just society – and for that we can be most certainly grateful.

Institutionalized racism is rightly viewed as abhorrent. This was not the case when I entered the United States Senate. Today, Americans are protected by the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and other laws – and American society rejects calls for racial division.

Women are no longer barred from pursuing courses of study and the vocations they choose. Title Nine and laws against employment discrimination have enabled our nation to reap an enormous economic benefit because those shackles have been removed.

Our senior citizens no longer fall over a cliff of poverty just because they retire. You know, before Medicare passed some forty years ago, half of our seniors and the disabled lived in poverty. But today, over 40 million American seniors and disabled have a guaranteed right to quality care, and that deprivation is but a fraction.

And the Americans with Disabilities Act – now in its fifteenth year – represents our national commitment that the disabled must not be relegated to the shadows. Disabled does not mean unable, and those with disabilities are equal members of our society, too.

These are great and bold achievements. They have made us a better, fairer, and stronger America.

But our work is not over. Our march of progress must go on. America must always look forward and to lead our country to live up to its highest ideals – to make the American Dream a reality for all our citizens.

We think of the unspeakable poverty revealed by Katrina and wonder how can our fellow Americans live in such neglect.

We wonder how it can be that so many children and so many young people can be left behind with so little hope and so few opportunities.

We think of immigrants who work their fingers to the bone toiling in the hot sun – in restaurant kitchens – in meatpacking plants – with few real protections from injury or exploitation.

We think of the parents who work 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year and watch their children go to bed hungry because Congress has refused to increase the minimum wage for seven long years – even as they accept annual cost-of-living increases themselves that often amount to automatic \$6,000 raises.

That's right. A worker who works for the minimum wage in this country and works full-time

will earn \$10,700 a year. That's \$4,500 below the poverty line for a family of three. Surely we've reached a point in our nation's history where we can say that no one who works full-time should live in poverty.

Yet that's the sad truth for millions of our fellow citizens today. More than 37 million Americans live in poverty – 12 million of whom are children – and that number has increased every year for the past four years.

And today 7 out of every 10 poor children lives in a working family.

How can this be and how can we tolerate that 182,000 children in our own state of Massachusetts live in poverty?

And the price of poverty weighs heaviest on America's minorities. One-third of African-American children are low-income as are nearly one-third of Latino children.

We also think of the millions of American families without access to affordable health care. Today, more than 46 million Americans have no health insurance at all.

For these of our fellow citizens, a sick child not only worries a family, but can send it into bankruptcy.

Our work to fulfill the American dream must encompass not only the poor, but should open the doors of opportunity for all Americans, especially as we equip our citizens to rise to the challenges of the global economy.

We should rise to the global challenge not by lowering our wages, but by raising our skills, so that America continues to chart a path of progress, not only at home, but around the globe.

We should strengthen our public schools, so they are the envy of the world.

We should make college affordable to every single American who completes high school successfully.

We should expand opportunities in math and in the sciences, to enable the innovation that will improve lives at home and abroad.

We should once and for all end the inequity of health care in this country, by ensuring that all our citizens have access to the care they need.

And we should adopt enlightened policies that strengthen our cooperation with our allies, not policies that make our progress in the world more difficult.

Without question, the concern at the forefront of our mind during this holiday season is the War in Iraq and the enormous sacrifices being made by the families and loved ones of the brave men and women serving us overseas.

Today, there are over 150,000 US troops in Iraq, and more than 2,000 have made the ultimate sacrifice – in Massachusetts alone, we've lost more than 40 men and women.

Their service under the most difficult of circumstances requires all of us to demand a policy worthy of their sacrifice and not to rely on empty slogans such as “stay the course.”

They deserve a plan that does not make them a target of violence overseas, and that provides for their safe and timely return home.

They've done everything that's been asked of them – they've stayed true to the mission even when the rationale supporting it shifted -- and this Congress and the President owe them an equal commitment to bringing them home with the honor and dignity befitting their rightful status as heroes.

Beyond Iraq, we must now also redouble our efforts at finding real solutions to the world's great problems with our allies, because the task is too great for military solutions alone.

We're reminded that this December 10th marks the 57th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that recognizes that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

But as we look out into the wider world, we see that the goals of that declaration are not being met.

Freedom of the press is being undermined in Russia and other countries --- freedom of religion is under attack for religious minorities across the globe in countries like China, Eritrea, and Vietnam.

Poverty and disease run rampant through developing countries creating hopelessness among people and threatening the stability of nations across Africa and throughout the Middle East.

Today nearly, 30,000 children in the world still die before their fifth birthday -- and 400 million children lack access to safe drinking water.

140 million children have never been to school, and 90 million are severely food deprived.

The scourge of AIDS runs rampant through entire civilizations in large part because of a lack of education as to its causes and a lack of affordable medicines to keep it at bay.

When the human dignity of so many is undermined, we all suffer.

From the former Soviet Union to South Africa to Chile to Afghanistan and Tibet, Americans have given comfort to those struggling for the basic freedoms we enjoy each and every day, and it's time to take up the mantle of leadership again.

We cannot close our eyes to the seriousness of the problems that still haunt mankind across the globe.

As the world's remaining great power, America must take the lead on addressing these issues – we must be the one who pulls other nations together – who drives the United Nations' humanitarian agenda – and who pushes all nations to come together to solve these great challenges.

We can't continue to pretend that these are the responsibilities of others, because in this interconnected world they are our problems too.

There is no question both at home and abroad that we face enormous challenges in living up to our ideals and to creating a better – fairer – more just – more secure – and more hopeful -- planet.

In many ways, the obstacles can seem daunting – the problems unsolvable – the task too difficult -- for any one of us to address.

But then we remember a time in America where segregation was the law of this land, and a time in the not-to-distant past when Apartheid in South Africa seemed unshakeable.

And then we remember those individuals who stood up – Rosa Parks, who left us just recently – Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa – and Dr. Martin Luther King, who marched on Washington and to Selma to demand change.

We know from their example that change is possible, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, because it's happened before – and it will happen again.

All it requires of us is the will to stand determined and to force that change.

It was my brother Jack's belief that "each of us can make a difference, and all of us should try," and that principle guided his years in office.

Through my career in public service, those words have always sustained me, and it's my great hope that they can do the same for all of you because our nation, and our world need your commitment, energy, and idealism to build a better tomorrow.

I thank you all so very much for this great honor – and for allowing me to address you today – and I congratulate you for being part of this impressive Wheaton College family.

Thank you all so very much.

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