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**REMARKS AND BILL SUMMARY ATTACHED

**KENNEDY DISCUSSES CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF EARLY EDUCATION AND THE
NEED FOR CONGRESS TO ACT**

***KENNEDY DELIVERS KEYNOTE ADDRESS CELEBRATING THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE HEAD START PROGRAM***

BRAINTREE, MASSACHUSETTS- Senator Edward M. Kennedy discussed the importance of early education to a child's health and development at the New England Head Start Association's regional conference at the Sheraton Hotel. Kennedy delivered the keynote address marking the 40th Anniversary of the Head Start program and discussed his reauthorization legislation in the United States Senate to improve the program and ensure that all children arrive at school ready and able to learn.

"Forty years ago, we opened the door of opportunity by giving many of America's neediest children a Head Start toward the American Dream," said Senator Kennedy. "Since then, Head Start has been a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of young children in New England. As we've done in past reauthorizations, we support the best available practices, and at the same time we acknowledge we have to do better. There's no question how important it is for Congress to protect and preserve Head Start for the future."

Head Start, founded in 1965, provides education, health - including physical, dental and mental health, nutrition, parent involvement and family support services. The goal of the program is to help low-income children develop school readiness skills so they enter kindergarten ready to learn and to help low-income families achieve self-sufficiency.

The Head Start program currently faces reauthorization in Congress. This past spring, Senator Kennedy's *Head Start Improvements for School Readiness Act* passed the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and now awaits final Senate action. In particular, this bill would expand access to Early Head Start for infants and toddlers, expand eligibility to serve more of the working poor and raise Head Start teacher's skills.

Currently, nearly 15,000 students are served by Head Start programs in Massachusetts, but the participation rate of eligible children in the program remains near 50 percent. Senator Kennedy, who was instrumental in Head Start's inception, is committed to addressing the critical need to improve on the success of the program in fighting poverty and increasing the educational attainment of children.

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**Remarks by Senator Edward M. Kennedy
"Celebrating Head Start's Fortieth Anniversary"
New England Head Start Association Annual Conference
Braintree, MA, December 7, 2005**

Thank you, Janis, for that warm welcome. It's an honor to be here with all of you to celebrate 40 great years of New England Head Start in improving the lives of New England children and families. We're especially proud of Janis's many contributions to that mission here in Massachusetts.

She's made a special difference in Western Massachusetts. She started off years ago as a Head Start teacher, and today, her leadership reaches over a thousand children and families in your programs. Congratulations, Janis, on your outstanding service to Head Start.

I also commend Linda Dickinson and Nancy Topping-Taleby for all they've done to organize this conference and strengthen Head Start in our Commonwealth and across New England. Their tireless efforts are keeping Head Start at the forefront of discussions about the future of children and their communities, and they make an impressive difference every day.

In fact, I thank all of you – directors, parents, teachers, staff – for all you do so well in bringing real help and hope to children and families.

When Head Start was created 40 years ago, we obviously didn't know all there was to know about early childhood education and development, but we knew how important it was to get it right for young children in poverty. The year before, with passage of the Economic Opportunity Act, LBJ and Congress had launched the War on Poverty.

That's the kind of war we ought to be fighting.

At the time, the nation's poor numbered 36 million, and nearly half were children under the age of 12. Clearly, we needed an effective national strategy to overcome the destructive and lifelong effects of poverty on children, especially in their very early years. So in the fall of that year, our multi-tasking Kennedy-in-law, Sarge Shriver, who was the Director of the Peace Corps at the time, put on a second hat and became Director of the newly created Office of Economic Opportunity.

One of the first things he did was convene a panel of experts in child development, education, health care, and social work to lay the foundation for a special front in the war for children in poverty. Sarge saw the immense possibility of a targeted commitment to prepare the nation's neediest pre-school-age children for kindergarten and first grade. He talked with experts such as Ed Zigler, the director of a pioneering child development program at Yale, and agreed that a broad approach was essential. Preschool learning would be the centerpiece of that plan, with emphasis on health and parental involvement as well.

Head Start was launched as a summer program the next year, and LBJ himself announced the first round of grants. Today, it's still going strong, serving 900,000 children a year in

communities across America.

Since those early days, though, the face of poverty has changed. The workplace has changed, and so has education, which is struggling today to adapt to the serious challenges of the new global economy.

Thanks to its effective continuing leaders, Head Start has adapted well over the years, finding new ways to respond to the needs of low-income families. But its idealistic mission has never wavered – to help America’s most vulnerable children as much as possible to succeed in school and in life.

Today, when parents are asked what they most want to accomplish in their lives, their answers always include education – opening the doors of opportunities for their children to graduate from high school, go on to college, and try to achieve the American dream. In a sense, Head Start is the key to the golden door to unlock that dream.

It’s a dream that should not be impossible for any child to reach anywhere in America. Yet in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, too many children are locked out. Families find decent jobs with decent pay out of reach. They struggle to put food on the table, buy clothes for their children, pay the monthly rent, and see the doctor when they need to.

One out of every six children in America grows up in poverty, and often in hunger, too. In 1965, it was one in 5, so we’ve lost ground by 20 percent in the past 40 years. I shudder to think what it would be without Head Start.

Poverty as we know it today has many dimensions. It’s a labor issue, because pay is so low and workers are so often exploited, even by Wal-Mart – and even by Congress. Incredible as it may seem, we’ve let the minimum wage lose 42 percent of its purchasing power since 1968.

Poverty is a civil rights issue too, because so many African American and Latino families are so often the ones left behind. It’s a health care issue, because the care that families in poverty receive is so inadequate. Sadly, we have an Administration in power that couldn’t care less about the minimum wage or affirmative action, and that even wants to cut back on Medicaid to help offset the cost of greater tax breaks for the well-off. To all of us, priorities like that are unacceptable.

Most of all, though poverty’s a children’s issue. The sons and daughters of the poor have done nothing wrong, but they still bear the pain of poverty all their lives.

It’s our responsibility to do more to help. There’s no better way to do that than Head Start. Every day here in New England, all of you are helping the American dream come true for thousands of children. You’re often the child’s biggest daily starting point,

with a healthy meal each morning. You make it possible for parents at work, many with two jobs, to see that their children get to the doctor or dentist, and receive the basic immunizations, and be safe for several hours a day.

You do your best to see that children develop the foundation they need to enter school ready to learn. You give them the social and emotional skills they need to get along with others and pay attention in the classroom. You help them build their vocabulary, become excited about books, learn how to count. You reach and teach parents how to make good decisions about their children. Sometimes, you even help them find a roof over their heads.

That's why Head Start is so special to all of us. We're proud of the resolve and the spirit of our New England programs and the sense of community and new hopefulness that exists in Head Start families in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Your optimism, strength, courage, and values shine through in your work, and you instill them in the parents and children you serve so well.

We still haven't won the war on poverty in America, but thanks to your work, we're getting closer. Day by day, one child at a time. But there's new light at the end of the tunnel. The whole country was jolted by the brutal close-up images of poverty we all saw in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. If there's still a conscience in America, we'll treat it as the wake-up call America needed to get serious about children in poverty.

We know we've had to weather some storms over Head Start in recent years. Critics say it doesn't do well enough in achieving the learning needed for kindergarten and first grade. They say its positive effects fade away over time. Others try to impose their own ideological agenda on us. The debate over whether Head Start is a success rages on today.

Those voices don't care about the evidence. The federally-mandated study of Head Start clearly found it expands vocabularies. It improves writing skills. It develops good social skills and good behavior. The difference it makes is greatest for those in greatest need.

Here's something specific to brag about – Head Start children score close to the national average in their early reading, writing, math, and vocabulary skills by the time they finish kindergarten. The skills may not be spectacular – but they're far, far ahead of where they'd be without you.

There's no question how important it is for Congress to protect and preserve Head Start for the future. It's grossly unfair that in the current partisan atmosphere, we face what is probably the most difficult reauthorization debate in the program's history.

Past reauthorizations have been genuinely bipartisan. But President Bush chose a different course. His proposal to overhaul the program and give control to the states provoked a strong reaction on both sides of the aisle.

I couldn't disagree more with his plan to block-grant Head Start. House Republicans tried to slip that proposal through Congress two years ago, but we stopped them then, and we'll do our best to stop them again. We'll fight to preserve Head Start as a community-based program that puts the needs of local neighborhoods and children first. If there's any justice, any plan to dismantle Head Start should be "dead on arrival," in Congress.

On this 40th Anniversary celebration, it's more important than ever to look forward and build on the program's strengths and successes. Head Start is still evolving. We're still learning from new research and more years of experience. As we've done in past reauthorizations, we support the best available practices, and at the same time we acknowledge we have to do better. That's what this reauthorization is all about.

We've already made progress. Last spring, our Senate Committee approved a Head Start bill that continues its high standards and extraordinary services. Some issues still need to be worked out, but we've taken some significant positive steps.

We've upgraded the educational aspects of Head Start. We've guaranteed it will continue its broad range of services and its focus on the whole child through the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.

We've increased accountability and invested additional funds in teaching excellence. Most important, we've kept our promise to provide the training and technical assistance dollars that grantees need to meet their individual challenges and make improvements at the local level.

We've upgraded the PRISM process with fair and balanced reviews to document the strengths and weaknesses in the programs. Head Start reviews are among the most extensive in the field. They produce constructive feedback, and should be used to improve the programs, not assault them.

In the Senate, we also fought to assure fair and reasonable terms for re-competition if grantees are deficient. When particular programs have serious problems, we need timely action – and reasonable re-competition – to see that children receive the best quality services. Anything less is unfair to Head Start and its children.

We've also granted additional flexibility for grantees to serve the working poor, raising eligibility to 130 percent of poverty from 100 percent today to reach a greater number of families and children. Those living at or below the federal poverty level should always be eligible for Head Start services. But so should those living in New England and earning less than what they need to earn in order to get by and support their families. That's what Head Start's all about, and it's the right thing to do.

We've also agreed to expand Early Head Start. Since its creation in 1994, results have proven it one of the most effective programs of the Department of Health and Human

Services. Our proposal will nearly double its size over the next 5 years, and serve an additional 56,000 infants and toddlers – nearly double the 62,000 now served.

We've also set an unprecedented goal to raise skills and qualifications of teachers in every Head Start program. At the heart of Head Start's success are its teachers and staff. It works because its teachers are committed, dedicated, and know the communities they serve.

Our new goal is to enable all Head Start teachers to earn their Associate's Degree over the next 5 years, and at least half to earn their Bachelors Degree over the next 6 years.

Those are ambitious goals – but we know that learning and development for young children depends on good teachers.

It's not enough though, just to set goals. If we mean it, we must supply the funds to reach the goals. Not every local program will do that, and our bill imposes no penalties on programs that can't do so. But all Head Start teachers who want to return to school and continue their education should have the chance to do it.

If we're serious, we also have a responsibility to provide enough resources to give Head Start teachers the long overdue pay raise they deserve. It's a disgrace that teachers in Head Start earn only half what kindergarten teachers earn in public schools. We have to do better than that.

We recognize that educational background of teachers isn't enough. We're also committed to seeing that all Head Start teachers receive training each year, and that all staff members have their own professional development plan – teachers, assistant teachers, family service workers, and curriculum coordinators – all of them.

We're committed to preserving the role of parents. Head Start's basic strength is the way it motivates families and helps them succeed. That's not possible without involving parents in the operation and design of the programs.

In the Senate, we've already begun a strong bipartisan effort to maintain the Parent Policy Councils and involve parents actively in decisions on the design, management, staffing, and operations of the programs.

Our bill does more to see that Head Start Boards are in touch with their programs, and we can't afford to ignore parents in these critical decisions.

On all of these issues, we're obviously not out of the woods yet. Two years ago, the Head Start Bureau began developing an assessment for all four and five year-olds in the program. The Bureau claimed it was necessary to “document the effectiveness of Head Start nationally.”

Over the objections of nearly a hundred child development and testing experts, the

Administration established so-called National Reporting tests. Today, the tests are used widely in many of your programs, often taking valuable time away from teaching and learning.

In May, the Government Accountability Office confirmed many of our long-standing concerns with such controversial reporting. They found the tests invalid and flawed, without real consistency or nationally-recognized testing standards, and unclear in purpose.

We've agreed in the Senate to refer the test to the National Academy of Sciences for their expert advice and guidance on its development and implementation. But until the review is complete, the current National Reporting System should be put on hold in its current form. Any assessment of Head Start needs to be valid, reliable, fair to children of all backgrounds, and measure the whole child. Head Start children and their families deserve no less.

In the end, the level of appropriations may be the ultimate issue we face. Half of all children eligible for Head Start have no access to it today. Early Head Start serves only 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers – a shameful 97 percent are left behind. In the 1990's, we tripled the federal investment in Head Start and expanded its services by 52 percent. This year, the President's budget barely covers inflation, and fails to reach a single new child.

We know what needs to be done. It's time to invest more – not less – in the nation's youngest children.

The idiocy of the ideologues who fulminate against any such increase is beyond belief.

Don't they think a stitch in time saves nine? Think how many billions of dollars more we have to spend every year, desperately trying to rescue children who are far down the wrong track in our public schools. Prevention works in health care, and it will work in education too.

Forty years ago, we opened the door of opportunity by giving many of America's neediest children a Head Start toward the American Dream. Since then, Head Start has been a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of young children in New England. I'm confident that with your help, hundreds of thousands more will have their chance at the American Dream too. And I'm committed to working hand in hand with each of you, every step of the way, to reach that great goal.

Thank you all so much.

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