

FOR PLANNING PURPOSES
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**KENNEDY, RELIGIOUS LEADERS DENOUNCE \$5.15 MINIMUM WAGE AS
MORAL OUTRAGE**

IGNITE GRASS ROOT CAMPAIGN ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Washington, DC- Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy joined national religious leaders 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.

Kennedy has led the fight to increase the minimum wage 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 that would have helped nearly half a million people in the impacted states, but the measure was narrowly defeated.

“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.”

Across the country, both voters and state legislatures have recognized and addressed this dire need for a higher minimum wage. Since January of 2004, eleven states have raised their minimum wage either legislatively or through a ballot initiative. In all, 17 states and the District of Columbia now have minimum wages above the federal rate of \$5.15. And last November, voters in Nevada and Florida approved ballot initiatives to raise their state minimum wages by overwhelming margins – 71 percent of Floridians supported an increase, as did 68 percent of Nevadans.

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.

Below are Senator Kennedy's remarks as well as a minimum wage fact sheet:

**Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy in Support of
The Let Justice Roll Minimum Wage Campaign
November 7, 2005**

Today, we're acting on the words of the Prophet Amos that ring through the ages. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream."

Well we've got a dam to break, so the waters of justice can flow for America's working poor. America's low-wage workers deserve a raise, and Congress has stood in the way for far too long.

The waters of Katrina revealed the urgency of our cause. They exposed the consequences of indifference to poverty. America must increase the minimum wage.

This 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.

We are a nation of diverse faiths, but one tenet that underlies every religion is that the exploitation of the poor to profit the rich is wrong.

It is wrong that our productivity soars but hardworking people cannot afford to put food on the table or heat their homes. It is immoral to give tax cuts to the wealthy while ignoring the working families who are living in poverty and the 14 million children go to bed hungry each night.

A minimum wage worker who works 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, makes about \$10,700 each year. For a single parent with two children, that's \$4,500 below the poverty line. In our prosperous nation, no one who works hard should have to live in poverty. Americans understand fairness, and that is not fair. Americans understand right and wrong, and that is wrong.

Unfortunately, many of my fellow members of Congress are closing their eyes to the problem of poverty in this country. Over the last nine years, we have fought time and again to raise the minimum wage, and time and again my Republican colleagues have refused to give working people the raise they deserve.

But the American people know better. Last November, voters in Nevada and Florida approved ballot initiatives to raise their state minimum wages by overwhelming margins – 71 percent of Floridians supported an increase, as did 68 percent of Nevadans. New initiatives led by ACORN are now underway in Ohio, Michigan, Arizona, and Colorado. These campaigns are strong and successful testaments to the power of grassroots activism. These measures bring people to the polls because the people know it's the right thing to do.

I applaud the efforts of the Let Justice Roll campaign, and commend you for the important book you release today. It illustrates anew that fair wages are not just good policy – they are our moral obligation.

In my own faith, nothing is more clearly written in the scriptures. I was raised on the words of St. Matthew's Gospel, that "whatever you have done unto the least, you have done unto me."

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.

Today, I ask each of you to continue to fight – at the national level, at the state level, and at the local level – to create an economy that reflects our values – an economy that works for everyone. I promise that I will continue that fight along with you, and do everything within my power to raise the minimum wage and improve the lives of millions of American families.

STATE MINIMUM WAGE BALLOT INITIATIVES

Prior Minimum Wage Ballot Initiatives

- In November 2004, voters in the "red" states of Florida and Nevada overwhelmingly approved ballot initiatives to boost the minimum wage to \$6.15 and permanently index it to inflation. In Florida, the minimum wage passed with 71% of the vote, carrying every single county including those in the conservative panhandle. In Nevada the measure passed with 68% of the vote. These victories gave more than 50,000 workers in Nevada and 850,000 workers in Florida a long-overdue raise.
- In total, since 1960 there have been 10 attempts in 8 different states to raise the minimum wage by ballot initiative. Seven of these attempts have been successful.
- State minimum wage ballot initiatives facilitate unprecedented registration of low-income and immigrant voters and energize these constituents to participate in the political process. Turnout is consistently higher in states with minimum wage ballot initiatives. In Nevada, 24% of all voters were motivated by the minimum wage ballot question, including 35% of low-income voters. In Florida, 19% of all voters were motivated by the minimum wage ballot question, including 66% of all previously non-voting African-Americans.

Current Minimum Wage Ballot Initiatives

Arizona

Proposed wage:

- \$6.75 plus indexing to inflation

Signatures:

- 180,000 signatures will be collected in order to ensure that enough are valid
- Signature gathering will start by the first of year

Polling Support:

- According to a March, 2005 poll by Lake Research Partners, 76% of voters support a minimum wage increase (62% strongly).

Michigan

Likely wage proposal:

- \$6.85 plus indexing to inflation

Signatures:

- 450,000 signatures will be collected to ensure that enough are valid (330,000)
- Signature gathering will take place between January and June of 2006

Polling Support:

- According to September 2005 poll by Lake Research Partners, 68% of voters support a minimum wage increase (54% strongly).

Ohio

Proposed wage:

- \$6.85 plus indexing to inflation

Signatures:

500,000 to signatures will be collected to ensure that enough are valid (322,000)

Polling Support:

- According to a July, 2005 poll by Lake Research Partners, 74% of voters support a minimum wage increase (55% strongly).

Colorado

Likely wage proposal:

- \$6.75-\$7.00

Signatures:

- 71,641 valid signatures are required

Polling Support:

- According to a June 2006 poll, 79% of Colorado voters favor a ballot measure to raise the minimum wage.