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CONTACT: Laura Capps/Melissa Wagoner
(202) 224-2633

**KENNEDY AND COLLEAGUES CALL FOR RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE IN THE
TRUE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS**

Washington, DC- Today, Senator Kennedy and Congressmen Hoyer and Miller stood before the Capitol Christmas tree to discuss the true meaning of Christmas: hope, generosity, and goodwill toward others. In this spirit, the lawmakers called upon Congress to raise the national minimum wage so that the millions of working families struggling to survive on the minimum wage will find hope. Twice this year, Senator Kennedy has brought to a vote a measure to raise the current level of 5.15 to a new level of \$7.25. The Republican leadership has blocked it even though the last time the minimum wage was increased was in 1997.

“There are those in America who urge the return of the word ‘Christmas’ to this holiday season,” Senator Kennedy said. “I believe that while it is an important one, Christmas is more than a word. It is a belief in a power far greater than ourselves. It is a belief in the possibility of lives full of hope and fulfillment. It is a belief that each of us has a sacred obligation to care for one another and to help those in need – to lend a hand to the least of those in our midst. Raising the minimum wage would make a real difference, and a brighter Christmas, in the lives of millions of working families. In the wealthiest nation on earth, no one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.”

Kennedy, Hoyer and Miller were joined by Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches who is part of the “Let Justice Roll/Living Wage Campaign” involving religious leaders across the country. They also heard from Heather Boushey, economist from the Center for Economic and Policy Research on their report detailing the difficulty that families living on the minimum wage have in making ends meet.

Below are Senator Kennedy’s remarks, a fact sheet on the minimum wage, and a list of the grassroots activity across the country to fight for a living wage.

**Statement of Senator Edward M. Kennedy on the Minimum Wage
December 14, 2005**

There are those in America who urge the return of the word “Christmas” to this holiday season. And while it is an important one, Christmas is more than a word – it represents new hope and the transforming power of faith. That’s what we should remember as we celebrate the birth of Christ, and the glad tidings of great joy that came to us that day.

But for millions of hard-working Americans struggling to survive on the minimum wage, hope is hard to find, and celebration is very difficult, because it is so hard to make ends meet.

A minimum wage worker who works 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, earns \$10,700 a year. For a single parent with two children, that’s \$4,500 below the poverty line.

In this time of skyrocketing prices, a minimum wage worker’s budget doesn’t even allow them to pay the rent and meet basic needs such as clothing, heat, food, and gas for the car if they even have one, because the daily cost of these essentials exceeds their daily paycheck. There are simply no funds left over for a turkey dinner, a trip to visit family, or a stocking filled with toys.

In this the wealthiest nation on earth, no one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

How can any of us in good conscience enjoy our own high standard of living, when it is built on the

- Seven and a half million workers will directly benefit from the minimum wage increase.
- Raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour will mean an additional \$4,370 a year to help minimum wage earners support their families. It would be enough money for a low-income family of three to buy:
 - More than one year of groceries;
 - Over 9 months of rent;
 - A year and a half of heat and electricity; or
 - full tuition for a community college degree.
- This year, the Senate raised its pay \$3,100. It is shameful that Members of Congress receive our seventh pay increase in nine years, yet in those same nine years, we have not provided a single pay increase to the lowest paid workers.
- Salaries of lawmakers will have gone up by \$31,600 since 1997 while minimum wage workers continue to earn just \$10,700 a year.
 - History clearly shows that raising the minimum wage has not had any negative impact on jobs, employment, or inflation. In the four years after the last minimum wage increase passed, the economy experienced its strongest growth in over three decades. Nearly 11 million new jobs were added, at a pace of 232,000 per month. In contrast, since President Bush took office the minimum wage has held steady, but only 1.8 new million jobs have been created.
 - A fair increase is long overdue. Congress should act as quickly as possible to pass a minimum wage increase that reflects the losses suffered as the result of our shameful inaction in the past. No one who works for a living should have to live in poverty.

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 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.

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