

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**STATEMENT BY SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY BEFORE MINIMUM WAGE  
CLOTURE VOTE**

***MINIMUM WAGE PRESS CONFERENCE AT APPROXIMATELY 12:30, FOLLOWING  
FLOOR VOTE***

***(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY ON SENATE FLOOR)***

I stand before you today on Day Seven of our debate on the Fair Minimum Wage Act. We've been debating this bill for more than a week. We've addressed 21 amendments, and still have 100 more. We've talked about education, we've talked about health care. We've talked about immigration, social security, and small business taxes. And we still can't vote on this very simple bill to raise the minimum wage.

A majority of this body has already spoken. Last week, 5 Republicans crossed party lines to say enough is enough – let's give minimum wage workers the raise they deserve. They joined 80 of their Republican colleagues in the House of Representatives that also supported a raise, in one of the most overwhelmingly bipartisan efforts of the new Congress.

Yet here in the Senate, we continue to debate. We continue to wait. The Republican leadership continues to use every trick in the book to prevent a vote on a fair increase in the minimum wage.

The time has come to put a stop to this nonsense. Thanks to the leadership of Senator Reid, today we're going to have a vote on that will stop this endless debate, and let us get to the important business of raising the minimum wage.

I understand that even if we win today's vote, we've still got more delay yet to come. The Republican leadership still has tricks up their sleeve – more amendments, more delays – that will stall a vote on final passage. If they're hoping we'll get tired, they're sorely mistaken.

I assure you we will not give up this fight. If I have to stay on the Senate floor every hour of every day, we will get this bill done. This fight is too important.

I truly believe that the fight for fair wages is one of the great battles of the 21st Century. No one can deny that our economy undergoing profound changes. Americans used to all prosper together – we all worked hard, our economy grew, and we all reaped the benefits. In the decades after World War II, America's increased productivity raised living standards for families across the economic spectrum. The rising tide of abundance really did lift all boats.

But lately the ties that bind America together are fraying. The link between productivity

and workers wages has severed. While we're producing more than ever, and corporations are earning record profits, working families aren't getting their fair share -- particularly those struggling at the lowest wages, who've seen their incomes decline dramatically. The gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening to levels we haven't seen since the Great Depression.

The test of our values -- the test of who we are as a nation -- will be how we respond to these challenges. Do we abandon the fundamental promise of the American dream -- that hard work can help you build a better life for your family -- or do we take bold action to recapture our vision of shared prosperity? Where everyone has a chance to succeed, and no one who works for a living has to live in poverty?

The essential first step in reclaiming that vision is stopping the economic free-fall of the poorest Americans. Our inexcusable refusal to raise the minimum wage has put downward pressure on wages for all low-income workers, perpetuating the plagues of poverty and inequality that have spread throughout our nation.

The minimum wage has lost more than 20% of its value since the last increase in 1997. To equal the purchasing power it had in 1968, the minimum wage would have to be more than \$9.37 an hour today, not \$5.15. While minimum wage workers have fallen further and further behind, prices for everyday essentials have skyrocketed. Since President Bush took office, gas prices are up 75 %. Health Insurance Costs are up 33%. College tuition costs are up 35%. Even the price of a gallon of milk has increased by 10%. But the minimum wage hasn't increased even a penny.

As a result, an increasing number of working Americans -- people who are doing everything right and playing by the rules -- are having trouble getting by. Since the late 1970s, the number of full-time workers in poverty has more than doubled -- from 1.3 million then to 2.9 million today. More than a third of adults who receive assistance from America's food banks have a job, but still can't feed their families. That shouldn't happen in the richest country on earth.

Raising the minimum wage is a key first step to help America's low-wage workers recapture the American dream. Our bill will raise the wages of more than 13 million Americans. 80% of those workers are adults. More than half are their families' sole source of support. More than six million children have parents that would receive a raise.

This increase will give a family with one minimum wage earner another \$4,400 a year to spend on education, child care, rent, or food on the table. It will make a real difference in the lives of working families across the country, giving millions of hardworking people real security for their families and their future.

Minimum wage workers have been waiting more than 10 years for a raise. They're still working hard every day, but every day they're falling further and further behind. The

time has come to turn the tide. The time has come to build an economy that works for Wall Street and for Main Street. The time has come to recapture the America we've left behind. The time has come to raise the minimum wage.