

KENNEDY: REPUBLICANS DELAY WHILE WORKING FAMILIES WAIT FOR A RAISE

***10% OF MILITARY SPOUSES -- 50,000 MILITARY FAMILIES – WOULD BENEFIT FROM
MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE***

(AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY ON SENATE FLOOR)

We have now reached Day 8 of the minimum wage debate. In the countless hours that we have spend debating this bill on the Senate floor, minimum wage workers across the country have served thousands of meals, cleaned thousands of hotel rooms, and changed thousands of diapers. Unfortunately, we have not been nearly as productive.

Yesterday, we finally took a step forward. 87 Senators voted to bring debate on this bill to a close and do what's right for working Americans. It was a strong vote, and I commend my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their overwhelming support of this important bill. This vote sends a clear statement that the United States Senate is finally listening to the voice of the American people.

88% of Americans support an increase in the minimum wage. Three quarters of the House of Representatives voted for a raise, including more than 80 Republican Members. Now 87 Senators have voted to close debate on an unrelated amendment. And yet, somehow, we just can't get this done. We are still not voting on an increase in the minimum wage!

There is just no excuse for further delay. We have voted on more than a dozen amendments, and negotiated many more. Republicans have added tax giveaways and goodies to this simple bill. We've debated everything from immigration to health savings accounts. When are we going to say enough is enough?

The only reason we can't have a vote right now – right this very minute – is that the Republican leadership is playing procedural tricks and standing in the way of what the American people clearly want.

The United States Senate is a unique institution that has strong protections for dissenting voices. At times, that is a very good thing. We all have visions of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, where one lone Senator stands against all odds to support a noble goal. But the situation today is far different. These obstructionist Republicans have no noble goal in mind – quite the contrary. They're needlessly delaying a vote on the minimum wage because they don't want to move on and talk about Iraq. That's not noble or brave. It's cowardly, and it's unfair to the 13 million working Americans who shouldn't have to wait another day for the raise they so clearly deserve.

Let's talk about the people who are left waiting. They are men and women of dignity, who perform some of the most difficult and important jobs in our society. They care for out children in day care centers. They care for our elderly in nursing homes. They clean our hotel rooms and buildings of commerce. They are our friends and neighbors. They are even our nation's military families.

That's right – our men and women sacrificing in Iraq, Afghanistan, and countries around the world often have spouses here at home who work in low-wage jobs and struggle to get by on their meager earnings when their loved ones are called away to serve their country. 10% of military spouses – that's 50,000 military families – would benefit from our bill to increase in the minimum wage. That's a shocking statistic. While our fighting men and women are promoting security around the world, we can't even provide their families with financial security here at home.

I'm deeply saddened that we can't act more quickly to help these families – and all the other families across the country – that are struggling to survive on the minimum wage.

After 10 years of waiting – 10 long years of procedural trickery and political game-playing – there is no more reason – not even the flimsiest excuse – for delay. It's time to put a stop to this once and for all and do what is right for the American people. It's time vote to raise the minimum wage.