

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 13, 2007

CONTACT: Melissa Wagoner
(202) 224-2633

KENNEDY ON BUSH VETO OF LABOR HHS BILL

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Last week, Congress took bold action on behalf of American families by sending an appropriations bill to the President that has important new investments in the every day needs and hopes and dreams of the American people. It's the bill that funds our investments in education, in health care and in American jobs.

These are not optional investments. They're not just nice little programs that can be funded one year and cast aside the next.

These investments are about hope and opportunity for our children. They are about the dignity of middle class and working families all across America. They are about our national strength.

Unfortunately, it appears once again that the every day concerns of the American people have fallen on deaf ears in the White House. This morning, the President vetoed this pro-family, pro-child, pro-worker legislation.

In fact, the White House says this bill is "irresponsible and reckless."

Well I ask President Bush:

What is irresponsible and reckless about making sure our children receive the best education in the world?

What is irresponsible and reckless about finding a cure for cancer, so that families no longer see the disease claim their mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters before their time?

What is irresponsible and reckless about giving our workers the training and skills they need to get good jobs and support their families?

If anything is irresponsible and reckless, it's the President's choices.

The President insists on continuing to spend billions of dollars on failed policy in Iraq, but he refuses to deliver the relief that America's families need. This morning the President signed a Defense Appropriations bill that includes a 10 percent increase in funding compared to last year. But he vetoed a bill that includes an increase half that big that would fund cancer research, investments in our schools, job training, and protections for our workers.

Let's take a closer look at just what President Bush has vetoed.

The bill provides long-overdue funding for education. Year after year, the White House and the Republican leadership in Congress have failed to make needed new investments for better teachers and stronger schools. In fact, Under Republican control, commitment to the education of our children has continued to go down.

This bill finally reverses that course. It delivers the largest increase in Title I funding since we passed the No Child Left Behind Act. That's the funding that goes to the children who have fallen the farthest behind and need the most help. It pays for teachers, improved curriculums, tutors and a whole array of actions that can help children do well in school. It provides \$4.5 billion in additional funding for education compared to the President's budget.

How can the President of the United States say he will leave no child behind when he has vetoed the very bill that will enable us to do that?

We're working in Congress to renew the No Child Left Behind reforms and to make them work better. But we can't do that on a tin cup education budget. But this President seems to think that we can improve our schools on the cheap.

The President says \$4.5 billion more for students is too much. Yet he is proposing 35 times that much more for the war in Iraq. He wants us to say yes to \$158 billion for Iraq while he says no to \$4.5 billion for American school children.

In Iraq, anything goes. The sky is the limit. Billions and billions and billions of dollars for Iraq. But here in America – right here at home – a modest investment in our school children gets a veto.

The bill includes \$1 billion for high quality programs that help children after school.

Those funds will help 1.4 million needy children who need a place to go after the school day ends. Programs that help hard-working parents, improve students lives, and that keep communities safe by decreasing drug use and violence.

We can help these school children after school for the cost of two-and-a-half days in Iraq.

But the President says no.

The bill includes \$3 billion to improve the quality of our teachers.

Those funds will be used to hire 30,000 more teachers in order to reduce class sizes so that teachers can spend more time teaching individual students and less time on crowd control in the classroom. They will be used for mentoring for 100,000 beginning

teachers and professional development for an additional 200,000 teachers. We could do all that for the cost of a single week in Iraq.

But the President says no.

The bill includes \$500 million to help our struggling schools to turn around.

Improving our schools means supporting them. We can provide support to our neediest schools for about the cost of a day in Iraq.

But the President says no.

The bill includes \$7 billion to provide high quality early education through Head Start.

This week, Congress will pass a Head Start bill that will strengthen the program to make Head Start even better. Those funds will be used to ensure that nearly one million children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. These funds build a basic foundation for learning that will help these low-income and minority children for the rest of their lives. We can fund this for the cost of a little more than two weeks in Iraq.

But even as we work in Congress to improve this vital program, the President says no.

This same misguided rationale applies to the other investments in the bill as well. The President's veto means squandered opportunities for progress on the major health challenges the American people face.

I recently spoke to a gathering of leading cancer researchers who are making extraordinary progress against this deadly disease. They have helped cancer become, in many cases, a treatable illness instead of a death sentence. Every day, they are fighting to help Americans with cancer live longer, healthier lives.

The bill before us would provide nearly \$5 billion to fund more than 6,800 research grants to help win this fight. The President's veto tells Americans battling cancer that their fight for life is not a priority for the nation. It tells patients that they must wait a little longer, dream a little less, and hope a little more faintly for the breakthroughs that this research can bring.

On and on down the line, the President has vetoed urgently needed research in heart disease, diabetes, asthma, infectious disease, mental health, and many other areas. The President would rather squander billions in Iraq than invest in the research that could bring progress against these diseases and relief for millions of our fellow citizens.

But the damage does not stop with the impact of this veto on the cures of the future. Patients today will feel the bite of the President's veto.

Community Health Centers make quality health care possible for millions of Americans who cannot afford health insurance. A veto of the \$2 billion for community health centers included in this bill means that 15 million low-income people would be denied their opportunity for health care.

The Centers for Disease Control are on call to protect our health 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. When there's an outbreak or a disaster, CDC is there. The President's veto will mean that our nation's health readiness will be weakened and our progress against disease will be halted.

Training of new doctors and nurses, assistance to hospitals in rural and underserved communities, improving health information technology, immunization programs, and on and on. The President has the same response to each of them – veto, veto, veto.

The President's veto will also be devastating to American workers. With globalization and layoffs and corporations cutting benefits, Americans are worried enough about their jobs. The least we can do is make sure they're safe on the job and treated with dignity. This bill provides the funds needed to enforce the labor laws that keep our workers safe and give them a level playing field.

Just last week three workers were killed in an explosion at a power plant in Salem, Massachusetts. Terrible incidents like this are all too common. Every year, more than 5,700 workers are killed and over 4 million are injured or made ill on the job. Workers everywhere — at power plants, coal mines, hospitals, and construction sites — rely on our federal agencies to protect them and make sure they can return home to their families each night.

But the President's veto takes bad employers off the hook and puts American workers at risk. We won't have the needed funds this bill provides to inspect workplaces and enforce our safety laws. Millions of workers' safety and very lives will be at risk.

The veto of this bill is also devastating to veterans. We just observed Veterans' Day. Each year, nearly 320,000 brave service members return to civilian life, many coming from Iraq and Afghanistan. Sadly, our hearing in the Labor Committee last week showed they face daunting challenges.

Tens of thousands of Reservists and National Guard members have lost their benefits and even their jobs because they served their country. That's why this bill provides \$228 million to help our veterans find jobs, receive training—and protect their right to return to their former jobs. President Bush's veto takes away this modest welcome mat and slams the door shut in our veterans' faces.

And what about other American workers who want to upgrade their skills to compete and win in the global economy? This bill says we should not cast workers and their dreams aside. It rejects the President's cuts and includes \$2.9 billion for job training. But a presidential veto again leaves these hardworking Americans out in the cold.

This appropriations bill is about the strength and well-being of America's families. By vetoing the bill, the President is turning his back on the priorities of America's families – their hopes, their dreams, their opportunities. But we will not give up on providing the solutions that are so desperately needed. We will continue to work with our colleagues in the Senate and the House and chart a new course and fight for the real needs of all Americans.

###