

\*\* Fact Sheets and Remarks Below\*\*

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**SENATOR KENNEDY SETS NATIONAL GOAL OF CUTTING CHILD POVERTY IN  
HALF WITHIN A DECADE**

***OFFERS ANTI-POVERTY AMENDMENT TO TAX BILL***

Washington, DC – Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy offered an amendment to the Tax Reconciliation bill that declares cutting child poverty in half is an attainable goal to achieve within this decade. The amendment will enact a one percent surtax to be paid by our wealthiest citizens in order to take care of the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. With the 3.5 billion dollars generated from the one percent tax, the Child Poverty Elimination Fund will be created in order to combat child poverty in America where it starts—in the homes of low-income Americans looking for a way to feed their hungry children.

“Poverty is a moral issue and we have a moral obligation to address it. We are the wealthiest country on earth. We are blessed with great abundance. And in the powerful words of Luke's Gospel, "To whom much is given, much is required," Senator Kennedy said in his remarks.

Today, nearly one child in six is living in poverty. Nearly 37 million men, women, and children in the United States now live below the poverty line—an increase of over 4 million since President Bush was first elected. The poverty rate for children in the United States is substantially higher – often two to three times higher – than that of most other major Western industrialized nations. And the number of Americans living in hunger and malnutrition has soared to almost 37 million.

The Senate is currently debating the Tax Reconciliation bill where America's wealthiest citizens are positioned to reap the most rewards. The House of Representatives has already slashed vital programs relied upon by our neediest citizens—food stamps, child support, and childcare budgets will see drastically reduced aid.

**STATEMENT BY SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON CHILD POVERTY  
AMENDMENT**

**(As prepared for delivery)**

Our debate today is about priorities, and this budget process reflects the wrong priorities. It's no secret that the goal of the Republican leadership is for this process to slash our commitment to low- and middle-income families to pay for more and more tax breaks for the wealthy – to cut Food Stamps and child support to pay for tax breaks on stock dividends and capital gains.

It's clear that Republican priorities cruelly ignore the needs of the poor. They refuse to open their eyes to the millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet, even as poverty and hunger continue to increase.

That's why I'm offering this amendment today, to try to right these capsized GOP priorities. It sets a national goal to reduce child poverty by 50 percent within a decade, and eliminate it entirely as soon as possible after that. To help meet this commitment, we should enact a one percent surtax on joint income over one million dollars.

Is one percent too much to ask our wealthiest citizens to contribute to this goal? It will raise 3.5 billion dollars this year, and more in subsequent years, to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.

The bill will create a Child Poverty Elimination Fund, with a board to oversee the fund and design the Child Poverty Elimination Plan. It's a down payment, a realistic first step toward achieving the goal of lifting children out of poverty.

In the 1960's President Johnson declared a "War on Poverty" that we're still fighting, but fighting far from well. Clearly we've made progress over the past four decades, through Medicaid, Head Start, Food Stamps, and other measures we've enacted. The poverty rate for all Americans reached a low of 11 percent in 1973, compared to 19 percent in 1964.

We continued the battle in the Reagan Administration with the enactment of LIHEAP in 1981 and Welfare Reform in the Clinton Administration in 1996.

Sadly, the Bush Administration and the Republican Congress have stopped fighting the "War on Poverty." Instead, they've declared a "War on the Poor."

As a result, the gap between rich and poor has widened in recent years. 37 million Americans now live in poverty, up 19 percent during the Bush Administration. More than 13 million of that number are children, an increase of over 1.4 million, or 12 percent, since the year 2000.

A five year-old child named Connor from Massachusetts is one example of what's happening to the most vulnerable in our society. Some days, Connor pretends to be a Power Ranger fighting intergalactic evil. Other days, he's just fighting hunger. Pretending to be a superhero takes a lot of energy. But some days, Connor doesn't feel like playing. That's when his hunger pangs become his worst enemy.

It's shameful that in the richest and most powerful nation on earth, nearly one in five children go to bed hungry at night.

Now because of Hurricane Katrina, the silent slavery of poverty is not so silent anymore. The devastation caused by the storm suddenly focused the nation's attention on the immense hardships that low-income Americans face each day. We saw the desperate plight of innocent children who were born poor and forced to bare the impossible burden of poverty.

In fact, the child poverty rates in the states hit hardest by Hurricane Katrina were all above the national average. In Louisiana 29 percent of children live in poverty. 30 percent of children in Mississippi live in poverty, and 23 percent in Alabama.

Hurricane Katrina highlighted the struggle of poor families in those three states, but every state in this country is home to children and families who live in poverty. In Massachusetts, 182,000 children—12.5 percent—live in poverty.

Children in the United States are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group. They make up a disproportionate share of the poor in the United States—25 percent of the total population, but 35 percent of the population living in poverty.

Here in the richest country in the world, we allow children to suffer, without money, without a home, without food. That's unacceptable. It's immoral, and our failure to address it more effectively is unconscionable.

Children in poverty typically have parents who work hard and play by the rules. But their lives are harsh, and they can't escape the clutches of poverty. Seven out of ten children in poverty live in a working family. One poor child in three lives with a parent who works full-time year-round. Often their parents don't eat well, so they'll have enough food for their children. The rich have their tax breaks, but the poor have little hope, because Congress again and again ignores their plight.

We are telling them to forget the American dream--hard work doesn't pay. We are telling them that they're on their own—welcome to the ownership society of President George Bush.

It wasn't always like this. Once, the elderly were the poorest in society. But in 1935, we made a commitment as a nation that growing old shouldn't mean growing poor. We enacted Social Security and later Medicare, and now the elderly in America are significantly better off. The poverty rate today for senior citizens is less than 10 percent – lower than the national poverty rate of 12.7 percent, and much lower than the 17.8 percent rate for children. Why can't we make that kind of commitment to help the nation's children too?

The consequences of poverty are widespread and lasting, particularly for children. Poverty is a health issue. Children in poverty are often malnourished. They have weaker immune systems and are more susceptible to infections and illness.

Poverty is also an education issue. Poor children often lack the basic nutrition vital to healthy brain development. They have difficulty focusing their attention and concentrating in school. As a result, they often drop out. Some end up in trouble with the law, or even in prison.

Poverty is also a civil rights issue. Minorities are disproportionately poor. Thirty-three percent of African American children and twenty-eight percent of Latino children live in poverty—triple the rate of white children.

How can we possibly keep turning our back on these children? We should all feel a greater, not a lesser, responsibility to them. Where are our compassionate conservatives? Don't they understand that when Jesus said "suffer the little children to come unto me," he didn't mean "let the little children suffer?"

Don't they believe children are included, when he said, "In as much as you have done it unto the

least of these my brother, you have done it unto me?"

We know how to lift children out of poverty. In this wealthy land of ours, all it requires is the will to do it, and the leadership to make it happen.

The words of Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral, have never rung more true:

We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer "Tomorrow." His name is "Today."

It's time for Congress to bring true hope, honest opportunity and genuine fairness to children mired in poverty in communities in all parts of our country. This amendment will put us back on the right track, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

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## **Poverty in the United States**

### **Massachusetts**

- 570,000 people (9.2 percent) live below the poverty line in Massachusetts.
- 182,000 children (12.5 percent) live in poverty.
- 93,000 children (6 percent) live in extreme poverty—they live below 50 percent of the poverty line.

### **National**

- The official poverty rate in 2004 was 12.7 percent, up from 12.5 percent in 2003. The poverty rate has risen for four consecutive years—the rate was 11.3 percent in 2000.

- In 2004, 37 million people were in poverty, an increase of 5.4 million people since 2000.
- Poverty rates remain unchanged for Blacks (24.7 percent) and Hispanics (21.9 percent), rose for non-Hispanic Whites (8.6 percent in 2004, up from 8.2 percent in 2003), and decreased for Asians (9.8 percent in 2004, down from 11.8 percent in 2003).
- 13 million children (17.8 percent) live in poverty—an increase of 1.4 million since 2000. Children in the United States are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group.
- In 2004, more than one in five children under the age of five years (20.5%) in the U.S. lived in poverty.
- African-American children and Latino Children are much more likely to live in poverty than white children. One third of African-American children are low-income, as are nearly a third of Latino children.
- 7 out of 10 poor children live in a working family, and 1 poor child in 3 lives with a full-time year-round worker.
- Over 8 million children under 18 in the U.S. lack health insurance. With a 2004 uninsured rate of almost 19 percent, poor children are more likely to be uninsured than children generally.
- Both the poverty rate and number in poverty increased for people 18 to 64 years old (11.3 percent and 20.5 million in 2004, up from 10.8 percent and 19.4 million in 2003).
- The poverty rate decreased for seniors aged 65 and over, 9.8 percent in 2004, down from 10.2 percent in 2003. The number in poverty in 2004 (3.5 million) remained unchanged.

- The increase in poverty under President Bush can be contrasted with the Clinton years – between 1993 and 2000, more than 8 million families, including four million kids – moved out of poverty, and the total poverty rate fell 25%, from 15.1% to 11.3%, the lowest level since 1974.

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## **Hunger in the United States**

### **Massachusetts**

- In Massachusetts, over 7 percent of households (179,000 households) are food insecure—an increase of 6 percent since the period between 1999 and 2001. Almost 3 percent of all households (66,000 households) are food insecure with hunger—a 35 percent increase since the period between 1999 and 2001.
- Hungry households, for the most part, live in pockets of poverty in the state. Among families with children in low-income communities the prevalence of hunger is four times greater than it is statewide.
- Project Bread supports over 400 emergency food programs in 136 different communities across Massachusetts. This statewide network reported serving 40 million meals to people in need in 2004, representing a 29 percent increase since 2001.
- Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline answered over 35,000 calls between October 2004 and September 2005. Calls have increased by 59 percent in the last three years.

- Of all those served by emergency food programs funded by Project Bread, 33 percent were children (even though children make up only 24 percent of the population in Massachusetts).

## **National**

- Over 38 million Americans (13.2 percent) now live in hungry and food-insecure households. This represents an increase of 5 million since 2000. Almost 11 million Americans are food insecure with hunger.
- 13.5 million households are food insecure. 4 million households are food insecure with hunger—a 43 percent increase over the past 5 years (1999-2004).
- Over 36 percent of the individuals living in food insecure households are children. Almost 14 million children under the age of 18 are food insecure—an increase of 972,000 since 2000. 3.3 million children are food insecure with hunger.
- Households with children have double the rate of food insecurity when compared to households without children (17.6 percent v. 8.9 percent).
- Households with income below the official poverty line have a higher rate of food insecurity (36.8 percent), as do single female-headed households with children (33 percent), black non-Hispanic households (23.7 percent), single male-headed households with children (22.2 percent), and Hispanic households (21.7 percent).
- Over 47 percent of all food-insecure households have incomes above 130 percent of poverty, which in most cases would make these houses *ineligible* for food stamps.

NOTE: Food insecurity refers to the lack of access to enough food to fully meet basic needs at all times due to lack of financial resources. There are different levels of food insecurity. Food insecure with hunger is the highest level.

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## **THE UNITED STATES MUST SET A GOAL OF ENDING CHILD POVERTY**

*Senator Kennedy's amendment sets a national goal of cutting child poverty in half within a decade, and to eliminate it entirely as soon as possible thereafter. It enacts a one percent surtax to be paid by our wealthiest citizens in order to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens.*

- America's children are more likely to live in poverty than Americans in any other age group.
- One in six children lives in poverty in the United States.
- The poverty rate for children in the United States is substantially higher than that of most other major Western industrialized nations. Denmark and Finland have a child poverty rate of less than 3 percent compared to 17.8 percent in the United States.
- African American and Latino children are much more likely to live in poverty than white children. One third of African-American children are low income, as are nearly a third of Latino children.
- A growing number of poor children are the children of immigrants. Children of immigrants comprise more than 26 percent of all low-income children in the United States.
- Reducing child poverty is one of the best investments that Americans can make in their nation's future. Fewer children in poverty will mean:

- more children entering school ready to learn;
  - more successful schools and fewer school dropouts;
  - better child health and less strain on hospitals;
  - less stress on the juvenile justice system; and
  - less child hunger and malnutrition
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- We must commit to ending child poverty. They've done it in Great Britain, with great success. It is possible. No child in this country should have to live in poverty.

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