



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

Statement on Senate Passage of Minimum Wage Bill

On February 1, the Senate voted 94-3 to raise the minimum wage. Once the increase is finally enacted, 5.6 million workers will directly benefit. In the 10 years since the federal minimum wage was last raised, inflation has shrunk its value to a 50-year low. By any standard of justice or even common decency, this action is long overdue.

But that does not mean we should not celebrate the Senate's vote, and the House's earlier one. People have noted that turning Congress towards the right priorities is like turning an ocean liner around. As the votes were cast, it was easy to imagine the straining engines and creaking frame as Congress slowly changes direction.

The Coalition on Human Needs greatly admires the hard work of many in making this happen. (Their work, and ours, is not yet done, because the House and Senate must agree upon the final bill and it must be signed by the President.) We are proud to have joined with the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, made up of faith and community leaders who vigorously promoted the increase. Many members of CHN played vital roles, including ACORN, the Economic Policy Institute, American Friends Service Committee, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Americans for Democratic Action, and others.

But we reserve a very special admiration for Senator Kennedy and his staff for their devotion to this righteous cause. Senator Kennedy's commitment has been passionate and unwavering. This is hardly the first concrete improvement in millions of lives he has achieved, but it is one of the most hard-won. We are grateful to Senator Kennedy and his staff for their creativity and dedication. There is much more to do to eradicate poverty and give all Americans a share in the nation's prosperity. We know you're up to the task – and we'll be there with you.

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