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Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

**Taking Action to End Poverty**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Members of Congress in States with Highest Poverty Least Likely  
to Support Anti-Poverty Measures**  
***Sen. John Edwards Endorses Poverty Scorecard***

(CHICAGO)- Sen. John Edwards endorsed the Shriver Center's Poverty Scorecard, the only national analysis that ranks Members of Congress solely on their performance in fighting poverty, in a teleconference release yesterday.

“Poverty is everywhere in America, but it is interesting that in the states with the highest concentrations of poverty, the Congressional delegations seem least interested in supporting initiatives to fight poverty,” said John Bouman, president of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, which released the study. “This appears deeper than simply opposing spending. A member could have opposed any of the measures we analyzed that called for new spending and still could have voted to support half of the poverty-fighting measures on our list.”

The *2007 Poverty Scorecard: Rating Members of Congress* assigns letter grades to each member of the United States Senate and House of Representatives according to their voting records on the most important poverty-related issues that came to a vote in 2007, including legislation on affordable housing, health care, education, labor, tax policy and immigrants’ rights. With the help of a national advisory board and other anti-poverty experts, the Shriver Center identified and analyzed fourteen critical Senate votes and fifteen critical House votes.

“This Scorecard is important because it looks at a whole range of critical issues, all of which will have to be addressed by the country in order to deal with millions of Americans, more than the population of California, who live in poverty every single day,” said Edwards. “We can get the Congressional leadership that we need, but it’s absolutely crucial that voters be educated, that they know who’s doing the right thing and who’s not.”

Edwards said that many of the bills, such as increasing the minimum wage and making it easier for workers to unionize, that failed in Congress last year would have easily helped pull Americans out of poverty. These policy changes reflect the belief that if you are working full-time, you shouldn’t be struggling to pay the bills, Edwards said.

“People who are working ought to be able to provide for their family,” he said. “People who are working full-time should not be in poverty.”

In general, states whose Congressional delegations generally opposed anti-poverty measures are clustered in the south and western part of the country. States whose delegations had the worst voting records and highest poverty rates were South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona.

“Thirty-seven million Americans live in the State of Poverty, the largest state in the nation,” said John Bouman, president of the Shriver Center. “This number can only be substantially reduced if our nation’s political leadership – the President and Congress – take aggressive action to address the complex, structural causes of poverty.

“While about 2/3 of the members got good grades on the Scorecard, their votes were not enough to pass most of the measures. Moreover, the votes recorded in the Scorecard would suggest that a significant number of legislators do not believe in taking aggressive action to address poverty. Given the high rates of poverty in many of their states, we are not convinced that they are paying attention to poverty, or that they have an effective, alternative strategy.”

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*The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, a national resource, champions law and policy promoting equal opportunity and support for low-income individuals, families, and communities so that they can escape poverty permanently.*