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Major Foundation Initiative to Shine Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity in America

*New Study Shows Growing Number of Voters Concerned
About Hunger and Poverty*

*Presidential Candidates Weighing In with their
Perspectives and Proposals*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 30, 2007)—A major foundation initiative, *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity*, was launched today at the National Press Club to move the issues of poverty and opportunity to center stage during the 2008 presidential campaign. The initiative, supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Eos Foundation and other major foundations, will seek to engage presidential, congressional and local candidates in substantive discussions about poverty and keep these issues in the forefront as a new administration sets its agenda.

New polling* released at the launch event shows that increasing numbers of likely voters, both Republicans and Democrats, are concerned about hunger and poverty. The research found that one-half (50 percent) of likely voters believe that “the hunger problem in the United States is getting worse,” an increase from 38 percent in 2002. Between May 2003 and June 2007, the percentage of likely voters who said that “a candidate’s position on reducing the hunger problem” was very important when deciding their vote for Congress nearly doubled from 23 percent to 44 percent. A majority of those polled, 54 percent, do not believe that “political candidates have spent an adequate amount of time discussing hunger and poverty issues.”

The launch event introduced the new *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity* initiative as a three-tiered program, including:

- A website, www.spotlightonpoverty.org, that includes information on candidates’ statements and proposals on poverty and filmed responses of several presidential

candidates answering foundation-posed questions on poverty in America. The website also will provide daily news updates, opinion, research and census data, and links to blogs on poverty and hunger.

- Forums and opportunities for national and local candidates and elected officials to discuss their ideas and views on poverty and solutions that can create opportunity.
- A continuing post-2008 election effort to ensure that poverty and opportunity issues are prominent on the national policy agenda and to press elected officials to fulfill their campaign promises.

“More and more Americans understand how important this issue is to our country,” said Douglas W. Nelson, president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. “The effects of poverty go far beyond the short-term hardship for millions of families, to its tragic, long-term consequences for children. Nearly 13 million children in America are living in poverty, and it negatively affects their health, lowers their educational attainment, increases their risk of future arrest and incarceration, and robs them of hope for a successful future,” he said.

“At this important time reducing poverty should be moved from the back burner of policy discussions,” he added. “The *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity* initiative will help to make sure that happens.”

Numerous national organizations have announced new poverty initiatives or campaigns recently, including the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National League of Cities, Catholic Charities, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, and others. Local and state governments from New York City and Los Angeles to Maine, Alabama and Oregon are developing task forces, commissions and poverty councils to set benchmarks and promote policies to reduce poverty.

“The need to address poverty is being discussed today in a way that it hasn’t been in decades,” says Andrea Silbert, president of the Eos Foundation. “The new polling confirms that it’s not just advocacy organizations and foundations that are focusing on these issues, but individual voters as well. Voters are clearly frustrated with government progress and want practical, innovative, bi-partisan solutions that involve governments, non-profits and the private sector.”

The *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity* launch event included a panel discussion moderated by Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne. Panelists included former U.S. Representative Harold Ford, chair of the Democratic Leadership Council; Jack Kemp, founder and chairman of Kemp Partners and former Republican presidential candidate and secretary of U.S. Housing and Urban Development; U.S. Representative James McGovern, co-chair of the Congressional Hunger Center and key sponsor of the bipartisan Food Stamp Challenge; and Jim McLaughlin, founder of McLaughlin and Associates and nationally recognized public opinion expert and political consultant.

Other speakers included political consultant Thomas Freedman, a former senior advisor to President Clinton; David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World and the Alliance to End Hunger; John Bridgeland, president and CEO of Civic Enterprises and former director of the White House Domestic Policy Council; and Nelson and Silbert.

After the panel discussion, attendees viewed displays by national organizations on a range of approaches to address poverty in America.

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* Polling was conducted by Thomas Z. Freedman and Jim McLaughlin as part of their multi-year surveys for the Alliance to End Hunger and Bread for the World. The purpose of the surveys is to better understand American attitudes about issues of poverty and hunger and how best to communicate with voters. This report, available at www.spotlightonpoverty.org, provides a comprehensive account of key public opinion trends that the Hunger Message Project has identified over the past five years, and to describe what those trends mean for politics in 2007 and 2008.

Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity is an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Eos Foundation, and other major national foundations.

The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

The **Eos Foundation** - Founded in 1999, the **Eos Foundation** is a private philanthropic foundation with offices in Boston and Harwich Port, Massachusetts. Its mission is to break the cycle of poverty by investing in children's futures. Specifically, the foundation supports nonprofit organizations, public policies and systemic solutions aimed at nourishing children's bodies, nurturing their minds, and building family economic security.