

**Floor Statement for Senator Whitehouse  
Honoring Henry Shelton  
April 29, 2010**

Mr./Madam President, I rise today to honor a Rhode Islander who has devoted his life to improving the lot of others. For decades now, the name Henry Shelton has rung out as a clarion for social justice and equality in our Ocean State. He is and has always been a voice for the little guy – the homeless veteran, the hungry child, or the underpaid laborer.

Most folks in Rhode Island know Henry as the founder and coordinator of the George Wiley Center, a non-profit anti-poverty organization based in Pawtucket. But before that, Henry was a Catholic priest for 16 years, during which he began organizing needy Rhode Islanders in Providence to elect leaders responsive to their needs. In 1973 he left the church to marry his beloved Carol, a former nun who shared his passion for advocacy.

Ever since then, Henry has been “raising hell,” as he might say, and fighting for Rhode Island’s overlooked and underpaid. In 1974 he started the Coalition for Consumer Justice and in 1981 founded the George Wiley Center. Over the years Henry has organized sit-ins, battled budget cuts, fasted to get clothes for children on welfare, advocated to keep electricity rates down for low income residents, and even been arrested for disorderly conduct...a fact which may amuse those who know Henry as a peaceful and gentle man.

And last year, Henry fought through his toughest battle yet. Just before the New Year, Henry suffered a serious stroke which landed him in the hospital. Anyone with a friend or family member who has experienced a stroke knows that the recovery is often a slow and painful process, but none of this stopped Henry. In fact, the headline in the Providence Journal following his hospitalization read: “Advocate for the poor, Henry Shelton, suffers stroke — but continues work from hospital.” The paper went on to report that Henry organized a State House rally from his hospital bed.

This is the Henry I know, and who we in Rhode Island have known and loved for many years. This Monday in Rhode Island, the Fund for Community Progress will present Henry with its Profile in Change Award, which the organization describes as a “distinctive honor for those who have dedicated their lives to creating positive change in the community.” Henry Shelton has generated enough positive change in his life to satisfy that requirement many times over.

And so today Mr./Madam President, I would like to thank Henry Shelton for a lifetime of selflessness and courage, and for always being a voice for those who needed one most. I thank the chair, and I yield the floor.