



Wednesday, January 26, 2011

Press Office, 202-226-0853

Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) Opening Statement at Hearing on ‘The State of the American Workforce’

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), the ranking member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce for the committee’s hearing on ‘The State of the American Workforce.’

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

Today’s hearing on where our nation’s workers stand is a timely and important topic to explore.

For most of the 20th century, America’s working families and middle class made our democracy strong. The promise was that if you work hard, play by the rules, you could save something for your kids’ education and have enough left over to save for a comfortable retirement.

Unfortunately, this promise is being broken for working families. For thirty years, workers have been hit by stagnant pay, skyrocketing health costs, rising tuition and loss of retirement security. In lieu of fair pay increases, Americans turned to credit to maintain their middle class standard of living.

With certain federal policies making income inequality worse, wealth chased after the next bubble, leading to the Wall Street scandals. The economy became over-leveraged. Debt exploded to levels not seen since just before the Great Depression.

The bill came due in the fall of 2007. Since then, more than 8 million Americans lost their jobs, further fueling the foreclosure and debt crisis. Swift and decisive action was needed to avoid total economic catastrophe.

Congress and the Obama administration came together and made immediate investments to save the economy. The Recovery Act was the first step and we see the results today.

Over 4.7 million jobs have been created and saved according to the CBO as the direct result of the Recovery Act.

A broad range of experts agree – including private economists across the political spectrum, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, and official government statistics – our actions saved the economy from slipping into a deeper crisis.

While there is much more work to be done to dig our country out of this mess, private sector job growth has increased by 1.3 million jobs last year. That means that the Obama policies created more jobs in less than two years than the entire eight years of the Bush administration.

Even the manufacturing sector has seen growth for the first time since 1997. Private economists are predicting a gain this year of 330,000 manufacturing jobs – a dramatic change from every year in recent memory.

Ford announced that it planned to add 7,000 jobs over the next two years. Whirlpool, Dow Chemicals and Caterpillar all have announced that they are going to keep jobs in America and even expand operations.

Also, corporate profits are back to their highest point since before the recession began, and the stock market is up. The nonfarm, nonfinancial business sector is holding more than \$1.9 trillion in cash, the highest level since 1959.

Policies to stimulate the economy are not, by themselves, enough. We must also begin to rebuild the foundations of a strong middle class. By doing so, we ensure that the recovery is fair and sustainable.

On that front, Democrats in Congress working with the Obama Administration took critical actions to grow and strengthen our nation's middle class.

- Today, all Americans will have access to quality, affordable health coverage no matter if their employer provides it, or if they change jobs
- Today, college students have access to critical financial assistance they need to go to college, and stay in college – and earn the critical skills to keep America competitive.
- Today, businesses have powerful new tax incentives for businesses to hire unemployed Americans and expand their businesses
- Today, workers have a Department of Labor that puts worker safety first – all which helps reduce workplace injuries and makes business more efficient.
- Today, workers have a fairer minimum wage rate – a rate that was increased by Democrats after Republicans blocked an increase for a decade – shamefully allowing the value of the rate to drop to a 50 year low.
- Today, small businesses have more access to credit necessary to start, continue , or expand their business

- And today, we have a revitalized supervision of our nation's financial institutions to avoid another meltdown of our financial system.

There is more to be done to heal our economy. We need to move forward on key investments to help unleash our nation's competitiveness and innovation.

One area this committee can work on is to rewrite the Elementary and Secondary Education Act so that nation's schoolchildren can be successful in the classroom and beyond.

Every initiative that goes through this committee must be judged on whether it will help to grow and strengthen the middle class. We cannot double-down on go-go bubble economics and trickle down tax policy.

All across the nation, communities are confronting a lack of highly skilled workers, even as unemployment is high. In my own communities, business, labor, and community colleges have come together with a new urgency to tackle this problem.

We must support these local efforts to create jobs, stay competitive, and act decisively nationally to build and maintain a highly skilled workforce. Falling behind is not in America's DNA – it never has, and never will be.

We have the hardest working people in the world and I hope we can look forward to solutions to help grow and strengthen America's middle class.

I yield back.

###