

**Opening Statement, Committee Organizing
Chairman George Miller (D-CA)
Education and Labor Committee
January 21, 2009**

Let me welcome all returning members of this Committee.

I'd also like to welcome Buck McKeon, our ranking member. I greatly appreciated his partnership and leadership in the last Congress. We've been able to spark a spirited debate when we've disagreed, and made some remarkable progress when we've agreed.

In fact, in the last Congress, this Committee compiled an impressive record of accomplishments. As I said during this same meeting two years ago, some of my most important legislative victories have been bipartisan, and that remains true for the work we've done since.

I am extremely pleased that we worked together to make college more affordable for millions of students, to strengthen our competitiveness by investing in STEM fields, to improve our Head Start program, and to increase the minimum wage.

We've passed key bills to make our workplaces more fair and safe for workers, to help them earn decent wages and benefits and to make their 401(k) retirement plans more transparent.

And our Committee showed great prudence last spring by working with the administration to safeguard federal student loans from the financial crisis – one of the few success stories to emerge during the economic downturn. Because of our efforts, to date no student or family has had trouble getting the federal loans they need to pay for college.

I think we're all aware that we're about to enter a historic new era – both because of the enormous challenges facing our country and because of the opportunities we have to rebuild our economy and our country.

President Obama understands the possibilities that lie ahead and just how high the stakes are. He's made it clear that he will work in a bipartisan way and seek input from all ends of the political spectrum.

He's made it clear that he will measure an idea by whether or not it's good – not which side of the aisle it came from. And I think this approach will help him – and us – break through the political gridlock of the past.

As we get to work, we will continue the strong bipartisan tradition of this committee. We will continue to be respectful of others and to explore alternatives for problem solving.

I know we all share a common commitment to the mission of this committee – to serve America's children, students, workers and families.

Given the unprecedented economic challenges we face, this mission is more important than ever.

A sustainable long-term economic recovery that meets the demands of the global marketplace will require world-class public schools and the best-trained workforce in our history.

In this Congress, our committee will focus policies to get our economy moving forward again by rebuilding and strengthening our middle class. Together, I hope that we can:

- Strengthen early education opportunities so that every child gets the tools they need to succeed from their earliest years on.

- Build on the groundwork we laid in the last Congress to significantly improve the No Child Left Behind Act and transform our schools so that every child has access to an excellent teacher and education that prepares them for 21st century jobs.
- Continue our efforts to make college more affordable and accessible.
- Make our workplaces safe, healthy, and fair so that every American can benefit from the economic opportunities we create.
- Create the innovative, cutting edge workforce needed to bolster our competitiveness and fuel discovery for generations to come. With so many Americans looking for work, we've got to make sure workers have the training and skills needed for the jobs and the industries of the future.
- Preserve and strengthen 401(k)s, pensions, and other retirement plans so that every American can enjoy a secure retirement after a lifetime of hard work.

I'd like to thank all of you for your hard work and during this last Congress.

I'd also like to congratulate our subcommittee chairs who were re-elected last week: Mr. Kildee, Mr. Andrews, Ms. Woolsey, Mr. Hinojosa and Ms. McCarthy, along with the senior Republicans on these subcommittees, who Mr. McKeon will be introducing shortly.

I look forward to working with each of you, this Congress and the Obama administration, on the important work that lies ahead.