

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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CHAIRMAN MILLER STATEMENT AT COMMITTEE HEARING

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a full committee hearing on “Strengthening America’s Middle Class: Evaluating the Economic Squeeze on America’s Families.”*

Good morning. I welcome all of you to the first full Education and Labor Committee hearing of the 110th Congress.

We are here today to discuss the economic squeeze on America’s families, and to learn what we can do to strengthen and grow America’s middle class. This is the key priority for our committee this Congress, and that’s why it is the specific subject of our first and second full committee hearings.

I was pleased that two of this committee’s bills designed to help hard-working families passed the House with overwhelming bipartisan support as part of the First 100 Hours agenda. We acted to raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour, a long overdue increase necessary to help millions of workers pay for basic necessities and join the middle class. We also acted to cut in half the interest rate charged for subsidized federal student loans – a critical boost to those students trying to decide whether they can afford to go to college.

Decent wages and college affordability are the kind of middle class concerns that we intend to focus the nation’s attention on every week in this committee. We also intend to take action to address these concerns in a way that strengthens and expands the middle class.

While the business pages across America report that profits and productivity are up for many corporations, we know that’s only half of the economic story. The other half is the story of how middle class Americans are struggling to make ends meet.

I hear from workers who were laid off from a good-paying manufacturing job and wound up in a new job that pays far less than did the one they lost. I hear from workers whose company just dumped their pension plan, forcing them to scramble to find other ways to get by in retirement. I hear from workers whose basic expenses – for housing, food, education, transportation, and healthcare – keep going up, even while their paychecks stay about the same size.

Today, parents are concerned about their own children having a lower standard of living in adulthood than they have had. In a recent poll, 59 percent of American workers reported that they have to work harder to earn a decent living than did workers 20 or 30 years ago. Sadly, the American economy has grown more unequal than at any time since before Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.

We don't have to accept the middle class squeeze as a fact of life. We can promote policies that will make work pay, that will make healthcare stable and accessible; and that will ensure a secure retirement for everyone. I believe that we can have a strong, growing economy that benefits everyone, and not just the privileged few.

Today, we are going to hear from a panel of distinguished witnesses who will talk about what has made our economy so unbalanced, and what we can do to make it fair to workers and their families. I look forward to hearing from each of you on this issue of paramount importance. First, I'd like to ask Ranking Member McKeon if he has any opening remarks he'd like to make.

Thank you.

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