

**Remarks of the Honorable George Miller
Chairman, House Education and Labor Committee
Opening Statement at Committee Markup of H.R. 2187
21st Century Green High-Performing School Facilities Act
Wednesday, May 6, 2009**

Good morning. Today our committee meets to consider H.R. 2187, the 21st Century Green High Performing School Facilities Act, legislation to improve school buildings across the country and inject jobs into our economy.

Last year, the House passed a similar measure with bipartisan support. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act allows districts to use resources they receive under the state fiscal stabilization fund for school modernization.

Our legislation builds on this effort.

School modernization is an economic stimulus. It creates jobs quickly while meeting critical public infrastructure needs.

This bill has an even greater potential than before to meet several of our most pressing challenges at once, while making smart long-term investments.

First, this bill will get us closer to our goal of providing every child with a world class education by giving more students and teachers a safe, healthy, environmentally-friendly learning environment.

Second, this bill will help revive our economy by creating hundreds of thousands of construction jobs and increasingly supply purchases. Many of these jobs will specialize in retro-fitting and greening classrooms, giving workers valuable skills for a green economy.

And third, by improving energy-efficiency in our schools, this bill will help us move toward a clean energy economy and generate savings for districts in the long run.

As our committee learned in hearings last year, too many of our schools are literally crumbling.

The conditions range from moderately bad to dangerous. In some cases, students attend schools with leaky roofs or no air conditioning in sweltering heat.

According to a recent report by the American Federation of Teachers, it would cost almost \$255 billion to fully renovate and repair all the schools in the country.

In 2005, the American Civil Society of Engineers gave U.S. schools a “D” on its national infrastructure report card.

This need has only intensified with the economic downturn. State education budgets are taking a harder hit, leaving schools with even fewer resources to make repairs.

This isn’t good for students’ health or their achievement. Lighting, noise reduction, air quality and other factors impact how well teachers teach and children learn.

School facilities can also affect teacher and principal retention. We can’t expect a teacher to want to stay in classrooms with exposed wires, cracked ceilings – or worse.

Asthma, which is the leading cause of school absence due to a chronic illness, is made worse by poor indoor air quality. According to the American Lung Association, asthma accounted for more than 14 million missed days in 2000 – or about eight days per student.

Greening schools can both reduce schools’ carbon footprints and improve students’ health and learning.

Green schools typically consume one-third less energy and one-third less water than conventional schools. The U.S. Green Building Council estimates this could save the average school about \$100,000 each year in energy and other costs.

And contrary to what some argue, it does not take any longer to install energy-efficient windows than your basic windows or doors or lighting.

In fact, one of the defining principals of green building is an integrated design process that provides seamless communication between all levels of the process. This actually saves time.

Repairing, renovating and modernizing schools will also spur job growth in industries, like construction, that are hurting badly.

The Department of Labor estimates the construction industry lost 126,000 jobs in March, and 1.3 million jobs over the last year and a half.

H.R. 2187 would make the critical investments needed to bring our public schools into the 21st century, while breathing new life into local economies. It authorizes \$6.4 billion for fiscal year 2010.

It ensures that school districts receive this funding quickly by allocating the same percentage of funding they receive under Part A of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, except it guarantees each district a minimum of \$5,000.

It requires that funds be used for projects in schools and early learning facilities that meet a widely recognized green building standard or equivalent state or local standards.

The legislation also requires that in 2015 – the final year of funding – districts use 100 percent of the funds they receive for green projects.

It also ensures fair wages and benefits for workers by applying Davis-Bacon protections to all the grants.

According to calculations by the Economic Policy Institute, this legislation's construction funding would support as many as 136,000 new construction jobs.

This legislation presents us with a vital opportunity to help boost student achievement, enhance teachers' effectiveness, generate savings for schools and create good jobs – all at once.

I'd like to thank Congressmen Ben Chandler, Dale Kildee, and Dave Loebsack for their leadership on this legislation.

I urge all my colleagues to support this important bill.