

**REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE GEORGE MILLER
CHAIRMAN-DESIGNATE, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
DECEMBER 12, 2006**

Good afternoon.

I am deeply honored that my colleagues in the Democratic Caucus have entrusted me with the Chairmanship of the Education and the Workforce Committee. This Committee has a great legacy of helping America's children and families, its students, its workers, its small businesses, and the overall national economy.

In recent years, though, this Committee and this Congress haven't met their responsibility to the American people. I am eager to get us back on solid footing and move forward with both my Democratic and Republican colleagues on the many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

For generations, America has been a leader in the global economy. We got there thanks to the drive and innovative spirit of America's workers. They came to form the first – and they remain the largest – middle class in the world.

Our challenge now is to preserve America's global economic leadership and grow and strengthen our middle class. We can meet that challenge, but it will take some hard work.

For the last five years, middle class families have been losing ground despite overall economic growth. Since 2001 – a period that economists call an economic recovery:

- The median household income has fallen by \$1,300.
- The number of Americans without any healthcare at all has gone up by 6.8 million, to 46.6 million – a record high.

Middle class Americans are increasingly squeezed between declining paychecks and rising bills for basic items like housing, healthcare, college tuition, and energy.

- Family healthcare premiums grew 73 percent between 2000 and 2005.
- Tuition at four-year public colleges grew 57 percent between 2000-2001 and 2005-2006.
- The price of regular gasoline grew 58 percent between 2000 and 2005.
- To put this in perspective: Over this same period, inflation grew by 13.4 percent.

And millions of Americans still do not have a real opportunity to join the middle class in the first place. More than 5 million Americans have joined the ranks of the poor since 2001.

On November 7, Americans voted for a new direction in America. I believe that they voted for three things more than anything else – an end to the tragic war in Iraq, an end to the rampant corruption in Congress, and an end to economic policies that overwhelmingly favor the wealthiest Americans to the exclusion and detriment of everyone else.

It is time to get going on a new direction for all Americans.

Starting this January, the mission of our committee will be simple: Strengthening America's middle class. Our Committee will be front and center in the first 100 hours of the new Congress to address two middle class : raising the minimum wage and making college more affordable.

In 2007, to carry out our overarching mission of strengthening the middle class, our committee will address these key concerns:

- **High quality public schools.** No matter what city or town they live in, all parents want to be able to send their children to a good public school. There is no issue more important to middle class families than this one.

Congress made a promise to parents five years ago that we would strengthen American public education, and we have made some progress. But we must give schools the resources they need and hold them to the highest standards as part of our commitment to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed in school regardless of race, class or special needs. We must also make a serious commitment to helping children reach kindergarten ready for school and able to succeed.

- **Affordable colleges.** The price of tuition should never stand between a qualified student and a college degree. Yet the Department of Education has estimated that roughly 200,000 people each year delay or forego a college degree because they can't afford one. This is unfair to them and, because college graduates open businesses and create jobs, it is bad for our economy and our country's future.
- **A competitive workforce.** Other countries are making aggressive investments in a competitive workforce. Time and again, this Congress and the Bush Administration shunned or directly undermined our ability and need to invest in high risk, high reward research and development, first class job training, and high quality education. America is still the number one economy in the world and we can keep that leadership – but we can only do so with a level of determination and commitment that we have not shown in almost half a century.
- **Fairness in the workplace.** Every American worker who wants one should be able to find a job that offers decent wages and benefits and a safe workplace. This is not asking too much. If we truly respect the value of work, then we have to fairly reward it. We have to raise the minimum wage, enable workers to have a strong voice at work, enforce the nation's labor laws, make healthcare affordable and accessible, and stop signing so-called "free trade" agreements unless they protect the rights of workers.
- **Retirement security.** After a lifetime of work, all Americans should be able to count on a secure retirement, where they can focus on family and friends in a dignified way without having to sacrifice their standard of living. Strengthening Social Security and our private pension system are two of the keys to achieving this goal.

- **Accountability and responsibility.** In everything we do, we must hold the Congress and the Administration to the highest standards of accountability and responsibility. If we can't spend taxpayer dollars wisely, we shouldn't spend them. Likewise, we also have to demand accountability and responsibility from each other – from parents, from schools, from employers, and from communities.

By focusing on these key concerns, everything we do in this Committee will be aimed at growing and strengthening America's middle class.

And we are going to take unprecedented steps to ensure that the voices of America's students, workers, and parents are heard on Capitol Hill.

For people who cannot come to Washington to make their voices heard, we will take Congress to them.

- We will use e-hearings to allow people across the country to submit testimony online about their concerns. In the minority, we held online forums in which we heard from thousands of people about their struggles when they lost their pensions or tried to pay for college. Now we will make that an official part of how the Committee operates.
- We will use videoconferencing technology so that a college student in Indiana, or an autoworker in Michigan, or a teacher in California can participate in an official Congressional hearing without traveling to Washington.
- We are going to plan a robust series of field hearings around the country.

No matter what method we use, we will always seek out a range of viewpoints and ensure a real debate about how to solve the biggest challenges facing America's middle class and our nation.

I look forward to working with all of the members of the Committee, Democratic and Republican, to accomplish important goals on behalf of the American people. And I look forward to working with Chairman McKeon, who has been designated the Senior Republican on the Committee for the next two years. I know that he will be a good leader for his Committee members.

Thank you very much for coming today. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have, both today and in the months ahead as we grapple with the very complicated, exciting and important policy challenges before this Committee.