

**EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**

**Congressman George Miller, Chairman**

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Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On  
“Strengthening the Economy and Improving the Lives of American  
Workers”**

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 committee hearing on “Strengthening the Economy and Improving the Lives of American Workers”.*

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I am honored to welcome a former colleague and current Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis today to share the administration’s priorities for the upcoming year.

Secretary Solis joins us at a very trying time for America’s workers and families.

Our most important job is to get Americans back to work and rebuild our economy.

And Secretary Solis has been at the forefront in this effort.

The financial collapse has put more than seven million Americans out of work and left millions more wondering if they will be next.

In just one month, the same month that President Obama was inaugurated, 741,000 workers were laid off.

That was one heck of a welcome gift.

This Congress worked immediately with President Obama to create a recovery plan to save our economy from total devastation.

The impact of the Recovery Act has been undeniable: without decisive action, we would be dealing with greater deficits, at least one million more jobs lost and an economy on the brink.

Economists from left to right agree on this.

Since the Recovery Act, we have stemmed the tide of deep layoffs and even posted the first positive month of job growth in more than two years.

And on Friday, we got news that the economy grew by its fastest rate in more than six years.

While this is encouraging, much more work remains. We will not rest until the millions of Americans still out of work find a job.

In an especially difficult economy, a responsive Department of Labor is essential in assisting and standing up for workers.

Long before this crisis, America's middle class was already feeling squeezed by decades-long wage stagnation and benefit cuts.

The sad fact is that the average worker makes less today than they did in the 1970s.

At the same time, Americans saw the cost of housing, education, health care and energy skyrocket.

This path is unsustainable.

A vibrant and growing middle class is crucial for our future competitiveness.

Thanks to Secretary Solis, the Department of Labor is playing a central role in our nation's economic recovery and laying the groundwork for a stronger middle class.

The Obama administration has laid out an ambitious agenda to rebuild the middle class – to help create good jobs, train our workers for the careers of the future, protect those workers while on the job, and improve our nation's retirement security.

Their agenda must be this ambitious for two simple reasons.

First is the need for a sustainable recovery.

And second is the necessity to revamp the department after years of neglect.

For instance, one critical mission of the Department is to protect the health and safety of our nation's workers.

For too long, OSHA failed to respond to real dangers and put American workers in needless peril. Recent enforcement actions by the new administration have been a breath of fresh air.

Instead of looking the other way, this administration is holding reckless employers accountable for putting their workers in danger.

The new department has also made strides to protect families' paychecks from unscrupulous employers.

The Recovery Act helped to fund an additional 250 investigators to ensure compliance with our nation's wage and child labor laws.

The GAO identified several issues that resulted in the Wage and Hour Division in failing to address serious allegations of wage theft that left thousands of victims of wage theft with nowhere to turn.

Especially in this economy, every dollar an employer steals from a worker is a dollar a family loses to pay for basic necessities.

I am eager to hear from Secretary Solis about how she is reinvigorating wage and hour enforcement.

The Department of Labor also has been working to unwind a number of past initiatives that diminished workers' retirement security.

The department took a first step by beginning to scrap a special-interest rule threw the door wide open for financial services companies to provide investment advice to employees where they had a financial interest.

The Department is tasked to safeguard workers' retirement, not to push policies that pad Wall Street's bottom line.

By statute, the Department of Labor is tasked to "foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners of the United States, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment."

I see real progress in restoring this mission. This is partially the result of having a secretary who understands what it means to work for a living.

Madame Secretary, your department has had a very busy year and the new budget signals more hard work to come.

From implementing the Recovery Act and creating good jobs for workers, to enhancing the department's enforcement efforts and improving transparency, you certainly have your work cut out for you.

The committee looks forward to your testimony.

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