

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Markup of the Economic Recovery Package
January 22, 2009

Today this Committee has a big job. Our nation's economy is floundering and we need to respond. We are in a deep and long recession. Our unemployment rate is over 7% and growing. We urgently need an economic recovery package — and we need it immediately.

Our Committee has jurisdiction over three of the major pieces of the economic recovery package, and that is what we will be considering today.

The first piece is an investment in expanding broadband internet access so that businesses and households in rural and other underserved areas can link to the global economy. Broadband investments are important because they have a tremendous multiplier effect on our economy.

The second piece involves investments in clean energy technologies. These investments in renewable energy, smart transmission grids, and energy efficiency put people to work, clean our environment, and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

The final and biggest piece involves investments in health. We need to create new jobs by investing in health information technology. We need to help workers hurt by the recession by providing health insurance. And we need to strengthen a key safety net by increasing the federal contribution to Medicaid. Taking these steps — especially raising the federal Medicaid contribution — will increase state spending and help their economies recover.

This is a lot to do but it is essential. As people lose their jobs, they lose their access to health insurance. And without a regular income, they cannot afford to buy their own coverage. If we don't act now, the recession will accelerate. Over six million Americans will lose their health insurance; states will cut Medicaid; and sick, chronically ill, and disabled Americans will be badly hurt.

In total, over 50 million Americans could end up without any kind of health insurance at all.

Given the magnitude of the economic problems our nation faces, our task today will not be easy. That is why I am asking for members' cooperation and assistance in moving this legislation forward. We have been given only a short window to consider this package, so we must report this bill by the end of the day. Like many members on both sides of the aisle, I wish that we could have taken more time but that is not an option.

I have discussed this situation with Mr. Barton. I have told him that my intention is to allot two hours to consideration of the broadband provisions, two hours to consideration of the energy provisions, and up to six hours for consideration of the health provisions. I hope we can move faster than this. But I am committed within the time we have available to allow members the chance to offer and debate the most important amendments.

In the interests of the Committee, the Congress, the uninsured, the economy, and the American people, I urge us all to act pragmatically, quickly, and with mutual resolve to pass this legislation and start our nation on the path to economic recovery.