

**EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

---

*Strengthening America's Middle Class*

Monday, March 26, 2007  
Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing On “How Effective Are Existing Programs in Helping Workers Impacted by International Trade”**

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 “How Effective Are Existing Programs in Helping Workers Impacted by International Trade.”*

\*\*\*

Good afternoon.

Today the Committee will begin its examination of U.S. trade policy and how it is affecting American workers.

Trade policy is a controversial subject, with strong points of view on both sides. When free trade agreements were being proposed in the early 1990s, proponents argued that they would produce a net economic benefit for the United States and its trading partners.

It is true that there have been many winners from free trade. In the U.S., the average consumer can buy a wide range of goods at more affordable prices. And in some developing countries – like China and India – a middle class is emerging.

Yet it is becoming ever clearer that the free trade process is at a standstill. More countries are objecting to signing broad agreements. Citizen opposition to free trade is widespread around the world. And there is growing evidence that wage and wealth inequality is growing, rather than shrinking, internationally.

In the United States – as we will hear today – too many workers are being hurt by international outsourcing and its resulting plant shutdowns.

The effects are most severe for older workers, who have greater financial obligations and more limited opportunities to start or train for new careers. Tens of thousands of laid-off workers have lost their homes, their livelihoods, and their standard of living when the bottom fell out from under them at work.

American workers who are harmed by trade agreements are the reason we’re holding this hearing. We are going to hear today about what happens to workers when their jobs go overseas.

We are going to discuss the effectiveness of federal programs that are intended to assist dislocated workers, like unemployment insurance, trade adjustment assistance, COBRA health benefits, and the health care tax credit.

Everyone knows these programs are too small and lack sufficient funding to provide adequate assistance to all the workers who need it. The weekly unemployment benefit averages slightly more than \$200 a week. The TAA program helped just 70,000 workers last year – but had a waiting list of approximately 50,000. The Health Care Tax credit, enacted during the last round of trade negotiations, has only benefited about 28,000 workers – just 11 percent of the potentially 250,000 who are eligible.

When international trade agreements cause American workers to lose their jobs through no fault of their own, we have a responsibility to make sure that they can make ends meet while they find a new job or, in the case of older workers, until they get to retirement.

If programs like Trade Adjustment Assistance aren't getting the job done, then we either need to improve them or come up with new ways to support workers harmed by international trade.

And we have to do it fast. American workers and their families are already losing ground in this economy. They cannot wait around another decade for Congress to act.

We all understand that the economy has undergone dramatic changes since the early 1990s. And for America to retain its leadership in the global economy, we know we must establish new public-private partnerships to create the industries and jobs of the future.

We must invest in educating a new generation of scientists and engineers; we must invest in cutting-edge research and development; and we must make broadband access universal – among other things.

If we do all of these things, then we can keep America's economy strong for generations to come. But even as we do all these things, we must also help American workers who inevitably will be harmed by trade.

The status quo won't cut it. If we want to preserve and strengthen America's middle class, then we have got to act quickly and aggressively.

Thank you.

<http://edlabor.house.gov>