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ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Floor Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce Economic Recovery Package February 13, 2009

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased that we have moved expeditiously to get this conference report to the floor and to the President's desk. Our nation's economy is foundering 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 to set the nation on the proper course to rebound.

The House and Senate were able to move rapidly to resolve differences between two bills and answer the President's call to action. While the final product is a vital legislation that will get millions of Americans back to work quickly and will provide a critical safety net for families as they weather this storm.

The final conference agreement retains provisions that were passed out of the Committee on Energy and Commerce in January in three critical areas that will accelerate economic recovery and protect American families: broadband, energy, and health.

The first piece is an investment in expanding broadband internet access so businesses and households in rural and other underserved areas can link to the global economy.

Broadband networks are as important to the nation's economic success as the postal roads, canals, rail lines, and interstate highways of the past. Unfortunately, the United States has fallen behind other nations in terms of broadband deployment and adoption.

This legislation would authorize approximately \$4.7 billion for grants to be administered by the Commerce Department and another \$2.5 billion in grants to be administered by the Agriculture Department to put people to work building new broadband infrastructure.

The second piece we considered is a major investment in the nation's energy future. The conference agreement will accelerate deployment of smart grid technology throughout the country,

offer loan guarantees for renewable energy and transmission projects, and promote energy efficiency throughout the country.

I am pleased that we were able to work with the Senate to develop smart grid language that ensures that all parts of the country, including Indian lands, can take advantage of the law's smart grid provisions. We also modified the new loan guarantee program for renewable energy and transmission projects to ensure that the program will be available for broad participation by the commercial solar and wind industries.

These provisions will support economic recovery through the creation of thousands of jobs, especially for low and middle-income Americans, as the nation dramatically increases the efficiency with which it uses energy and relies upon renewable sources of energy.

The final and biggest piece involves investments in health, and there are three key sections.

First, the bill would help people who lose their jobs and have no health insurance. It provides temporary subsidies for COBRA premiums to enable workers who have been involuntarily terminated from their jobs to maintain the coverage they had through work. This would protect health insurance for an additional 7 million Americans. It also provides an 18 month extension of the health insurance program that helps families transitioning from welfare to work keep their Medicaid coverage, known as "TMA."

Second, the bill would provide \$19 billion in funding to accelerate the nationwide adoption of health information technology. It will expedite the development of a nationwide health information infrastructure that will enhance real-time communication between providers, improve the coordination of care, and empower patients in their medical decisionmaking. These changes will in turn reduce total spending on health care — including a savings of \$12 billion to federal health programs — by lowering the number of inappropriate tests and procedures, reducing paperwork and administrative overhead, and decreasing the number of adverse events resulting from medical errors.

Finally, the bill would provide \$87 billion in temporary funding to assist state Medicaid programs facing surges in caseloads and steep revenue shortfalls. The bill would provide a temporary increase in the federal Medicaid matching rate (FMAP). It balances an across-the-board increase of 6.2 percentage points with an additional increase targeted at those states with high unemployment. The bill would also extend a moratorium on certain Bush Administration regulations that would substantially reduce federal Medicaid matching payments to states.

Madam Speaker, this legislation is necessary to set the course to turn the economy around and deliver on our promise and duty to assist our constituents in this difficult time. I urge my colleagues to approve the conference report.