

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“Oversight of DOE Recovery Act Spending”
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
March 17, 2011

Two years ago, President Obama took office in the middle of one of the most significant economic crises this country has faced. After years of lax oversight, the financial industry had collapsed, and the recession it caused resulted in a loss of over 8 million jobs.

Within 60 days of his inauguration, the President signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This law was designed to create new jobs and save existing ones, spur economic growth, and foster accountability in government spending. Since then, the Act has saved millions of jobs and supported projects around the country that conserve energy, promote innovation, and save taxpayer dollars.

Today the Subcommittee is examining implementation of the Recovery Act within the Department of Energy. This is an important subject for oversight, and I commend the Chairman for holding this hearing. We need to ensure that the rigorous oversight mechanisms set in place by the law are operating consistent with the law’s design, and that the Recovery Act is implemented effectively.

I am concerned, however, about a pattern emerging on this Committee. What we have seen in the past couple of months on this Committee is a series of hearings in which my colleagues on the other side seem more focused on bluster than oversight. The Committee has become proficient at leveling complaints about government programs that have no foundation in fact. And we never seem to find time to figure out how to make government work more effectively or how to save the taxpayers money.

And the Committee has failed to move forward one single initiative to create jobs for the American people.

At this point in the last Congress, Congress had passed and the President had signed into law both the Recovery Act and legislation to expand the State Children’s Health Insurance

Program to address health insurance needs of children in low-income families. We were just months away from passing even more legislation, such as the Cash for Clunkers bill that boosted the American auto industry. Each of these initiatives provided critical economic support for families hard hit by the recession.

What have we done so far in this Congress? This Committee's top priority was a bill to restrict women's access to health insurance for abortion services. Earlier this week we approved a bill to cut off EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions that are contributing to climate change and threatening public health. Today we are voting on a bill to defund National Public Radio that would threaten to shut down local radio stations in communities across the country – legislation that my Republican colleagues have designated as an “emergency.” And the House passed a budget that would put hundreds of thousands of Americans out of work.

Not one of these bills creates jobs. In fact, with respect to DOE programs we are discussing at today's hearing, the Republican funding resolution, H.R. 1, threatens over 40,000 construction and permanent jobs, as well as billions of dollars in investments in major solar, wind, geothermal, and biofuels projects.

Republicans promised to govern by the “cut-go” rule. But the impact of their legislation has instead followed the “cut-jobs” principle: the major bills brought to the floor reduce employment and opportunity for growth.

This Committee has jurisdiction over many areas where we could be legislating to spur the economy. I would like to see the Committee resume its position as a leader in promoting economic growth and jobs.

Today's hearing could be a first step in that process. The DOE Inspector General and GAO have been conducting rigorous oversight to review implementation of the DOE Recovery Act. They are important witnesses.

But when we asked to invite as witnesses state officials who are implementing the legislation, we were told that we could not have them. Ms. DeGette put into the record a statement of a state official – who has many positive things to say about the programs – into the Committee record.

The failure to include witnesses like this makes me concerned that we are continuing down the same road we have been going down since this Congress began. We are not passing legislation that creates jobs and strengthens our economy. Instead, we are simply engaging in partisan sniping over programs that my Republican colleagues do not like.

I hope we can do better – and the American people need us to do better.