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President Obama

Just one day after celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. we witnessed the swearing in of Barak Obama as the 44th President of the United States.

Forty five years ago, Dr. King stood on the steps of Lincoln Memorial and delivered his powerful speech about a dream of an America where all people were equals. We took another important step toward realizing that dream with the inauguration of President Obama.

The ceremony was about far more than one man. It was about the millions of people who helped power this new movement of change, and about the millions more who will answer the call to public service.

Future generations will surely remember the history that has already been made by President Obama and the movement he inspired. But as our President, he will be judged by his success in meeting the huge challenges facing our country, including two wars overseas and an economic crisis here at home.

Despite the great and many challenges, I have enormous confidence in our new President and his seasoned team of advisors. Congress stands ready to work with the Administration to rebuild our economy, create jobs and restore American leadership in the world.

Rising to meet these challenges will require a dedicated spirit of cooperation. It is my sincerest wish that with this the election's clear mandate for change in Washington, the era of partisanship has finally

come to an end. Only by working together can we all live up to the promise of this moment.

Economic Recovery Legislation

The House Committee on Energy and Commerce approved portions of an economic recovery package that will invest in clean energy technology, advance broadband internet access, increase health care coverage to Americans and provide critical assistance to states.

A larger, more comprehensive legislative package is expected to be debated by the full House next week, and it represents an important step toward getting our economy back on track.

The bill includes a strong focus on healthcare. It would provide states with increased Medicaid funds and help workers who have lost their jobs maintain health insurance.

Some of the key provisions to the legislative sections passed by the Energy and Commerce Committee include:

Health Benefits and Improvements

The package would provide temporary subsidies to help workers who have lost their jobs maintain their health care coverage through COBRA, and create a temporary option for states to extend healthcare to displaced workers through their Medicaid programs. The package will also provide additional federal matching funds to help states maintain their Medicaid programs in the face of recession-drive revenue declines and caseload increases.

The package would also provide payment incentives to encourage the widespread adoption of Health Information Technology and establish standards for interoperability and privacy.

Investment in Broadband Internet Access

The broadband package authorizes the National Telecommunications Information Administration to distribute \$2.825 billion for wireless and wired broadband expansion through a grant program.

Investment in Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency

The energy package will accelerate deployment of smart grid technology; provide energy efficiency funds for the nation's schools and hospitals; offer support for the nation's governors and mayors to tackle their energy challenges; and, establish a new loan guarantee program to keep renewable energy on track during the economic crisis.

Refocusing on Families and Small Businesses

The House approved a bill that would impose new rules on the \$700 billion federal financial bailout program.

While the bill may not win approval in the Senate, President Obama's administration has already agreed to essentially adhere to the House bill's provisions. The House bill was approved by a vote of 260 to 166.

Known as the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), the bailout is being managed by the Treasury Department as a means of combating a severe credit crisis and deepening recession. It was launched in October by the Bush administration, which committed most the program's money to helping large banks.

The bill calls for devoting more TARP money to preventing home foreclosures; giving small banks more TARP access; forcing more disclosure by TARP participants; limiting use of TARP funds in bank buyouts; and standardizing restrictions on the pay of executives employed by TARP recipients.

I am pleased that President Obama understands the need to refocus the TARP to help families and small businesses.

Named to Congressional Posts

I have been appointed to the House ethics committee and named Vice Chairman of the Energy Subcommittee.

While the ethics post is one of the most difficult assignments in the House, it is also one of the most important. Americans depend on the panel to hold Members of Congress to the highest ethical standard.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi appointed me to the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct. It is the only House committee with an equal number of Democrats and Republicans. The committee investigates all alleged violations of the Code of Official Conduct, including ethical and criminal complaints made against fellow members.

The committee also reviews proposed changes to the Code of Conduct and oversees ethics training for congressional staff. Additionally, the committee renders advisory opinions regarding the propriety of current or proposed conduct of members and congressional staff.

As a former state Supreme Court Justice and state Superior Court Judge, I look forward to working in a non-partisan and judicial manner.

I have also been named vice chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and Environment.

Most of Congress' work is done at the subcommittee level. So a subcommittee leadership role is significant, particularly with an issue as important as energy. This assignment is especially important at a time when Congress will be tackling the issues of energy independence and investing in creating a "green collar" economy.

The subcommittee also has jurisdiction over national energy policy, energy conservation and energy regulation.