

Deal (GA)	Hinchey	Rangel
Doggett	Janklow	Regula
Emerson	Johnson (CT)	Rush
Engel	Johnson, E. B.	Scott (GA)
Filner	Lantos	Tierney
Fletcher	Larson (CT)	Waters
Galleghy	Lynch	Waxman
Gephardt	Markey	Wexler
Goodlatte	Meehan	Young (AK)
Hastings (FL)	Miller, George	
Herger	Nadler	

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (during the vote). Members are reminded that 2 minutes remain in this vote.

□ 1230

So the resolution was agreed to.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

Stated against:

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 673, due to urgent constituent support commitments in my congressional district, I missed the vote. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I would like to submit this statement for the RECORD and regret that I was unavoidably detained on Monday, December 8, 2003, during rollcall vote Nos. 672 and 673 on H. Res. 493, a resolution waiving a requirement of clause 6(a) of rule XIII with respect to consideration of certain resolutions reported from the Committee on Rules. Had I been present, I would have voted "nay" on rollcall vote No. 672 and "nay" on rollcall vote No. 673.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I was unavoidably detained and missed two recorded votes on the House floor.

I ask unanimous consent that my statement appear in the RECORD that had I not been unavoidably detained earlier this morning, I would have voted "no" on rollcall vote No. 672 (Previous Question) and "no" on rollcall vote No. 673 (Passage of Martial Law Rule).

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

HONORING CONGRESSMAN JOE SKEEN

(Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, it is my sad duty to inform my colleagues and Members of this House that last evening Congressman Joe Skeen of New Mexico passed away from complications associated with Parkinson's disease. His funeral will be held on Thursday, December 12, at 2 p.m. in Roswell, New Mexico. I know

that many Members of this House were close personal friends of Joe, enjoyed his company and his sense of humor and his deep commitment to this country. After the final business of today, there will be a 1-hour special order on the House floor to allow Members to honor their friend.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. I yield to the gentleman from Maryland.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for rising and for yielding as well. I had not heard of Joe's passing.

When I came to the Congress of the United States in 1981, my office was two doors from Joe Skeen's. As we all do, we had the opportunity to walk down the fifth floor corridor of the Longworth building to vote and we talk and get to know one another. And Suzanne, his chief of staff, and I became good friends, and Joe became an extraordinarily good friend. Joe chaired a subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations.

Mr. Speaker, Joe Skeen was one of those Members who added greatly to the comity of this body. He had deep convictions, but he also had a deep respect for those with whom he served. Joe Skeen will be missed by New Mexico, by his family, but he will also be missed by this House and by the American people. At a time when the relations between the parties is not what really it ought to be in this House, and perhaps in this country, Joe Skeen was one of those who demonstrated that differences on policy did not need to be accompanied by enmity between the Members of this House. He will be sorely missed. And I thank the gentlewoman for giving me this opportunity to say how loved Joe Skeen was by all who knew him.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. I yield to the gentleman from Washington.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to make a comment. I served with Joe Skeen on the Interior Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations. He was our chairman, did an outstanding job. We worked together on a very bipartisan basis. And even though he was struggling somewhat, he was there every day, worked hard, did a great job on the Interior bill. Every member of the committee on both sides of the aisle, all the staff, loved Joe Skeen because he was such a decent warm human being, and he will be missed. But his work will be remembered, and he did a lot of great things for our country as chairman of the Interior Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations. We will miss Joe Skeen.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. I yield to the gentleman from New Mexico.

MR. UDALL of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, the tenor here of the Mem-

bers, I think, is very appropriate to the man that Joe Skeen was. And I had the opportunity, as the gentlewoman knows, to serve with him here for the 5 years that he was here, and I always felt that he was a good friend. He was very serious about New Mexico. And whenever I had any question about New Mexico issues or any other issues, for that matter, he was somebody that I could go to the other side of the aisle and sit down with and talk with and visit with. So it is with great sadness, I think, that all New Mexicans feel his passing away. And I think all Members of Congress that have served here with him know that he was of the old school. He cared very much about bipartisanship. He cared about this institution. He was somebody that, I think many years hence, we will remember him and regret his passing.

So I thank the gentlewoman for yielding and look forward to participating with her later in the day in the special order.

Mrs. WILSON of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from New Mexico for his comments. Again, there will be an opportunity for Members to remember Joe and his contributions to this House and to this Nation later on this afternoon.

REMOVAL OF NAME OF MEMBER AS COSPONSOR OF H.R. 1078

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to have my name removed as a cosponsor of H.R. 1078.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. THORNBERRY). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida? There was no objection.

WAIVING POINTS OF ORDER AGAINST CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2673, CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 473 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 473

Resolved, That upon adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider the conference report to accompany the bill (H.R. 2673) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes. All points of order against the conference report and against its consideration are waived. The conference report shall be considered as read.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Washington (Mr. HASTINGS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. FROST), pending which I yield myself

such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 473 is a rule waiving all points of order against the conference report to accompany H.R. 2673, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2004, and against its consideration. The rule provides that the conference report shall be considered as read.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2004 fully complies with the fiscal parameters of the budget resolution and contains \$328.1 billion in discretionary spending and \$820 billion in total spending including mandatory funds.

Mr. Speaker, the bill also includes an across-the-board reduction of .59 percent in all programs, projects and activities, except for Defense and Military Construction funds.

The Committee on Appropriations is to be commended for moving with dispatch to make this conference report available so that the House can complete its work on funding measures before the conclusion of the First Session. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker I urge my colleagues to support both the rule and the underlying conference report.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. FROST asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, for months the Republicans who control the Federal Government have held hostage some of the foremost priorities of the American people. Key national needs like education, veterans' health care, law enforcement have all been relegated to the back burner while Republican leaders fought amongst themselves over how best to privatize Medicare and reward big drug companies.

But today, my Republican friends undoubtedly will come down to the floor and proclaim that this giant \$820 billion spending bill finishes their work for the year. In response, millions of Americans still struggling through the aftermath of the last Republican recession will respond "What about us?"

It is a fair question, Mr. Speaker. What about the 2.4 million American jobs that have been lost since the Republican Party first took over the government 3 years ago? What about the 90,000 Americans who will lose their unemployment insurance eligibility just 3 days after Christmas or the 2.1 million unemployed workers who will lose access to extended insurance over the first 6 months of next year?

In my home State of Texas, over 130,000 people will lose unemployment insurance if this Republican Congress does not act to help them, according to the Joint Economic Committee's analysis of the data from the Labor Department. Republican leaders often try to spin away statistics like this, but the

truth is the Bush Presidency has seen this Nation suffer through the longest job slump since the Great Depression, and the picture is still grim for millions of Americans trying to find good jobs to support their families.

While the number of jobs in America has shrunk by 2.4 million, the working-age population in America has grown by 4.5 million. As a result, America's "jobs deficit" has shot up to 6.9 million on the Republican watch. That has put American workers in a huge hole and left three unemployed workers for every one job that becomes available.

Despite these facts, Mr. Speaker, Republican leaders are, once again, planning to adjourn for the holidays without extending unemployment insurance, just like they did last year. Mr. Speaker, there is no reason to treat the American people with such callousness. It would be only fair to provide them with the help that they need before Congress goes home for the holidays. Even the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOUNG), chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, supports doing it, as he said this morning in the Committee on Rules. After all, the Republican Congress has already done huge favors for their biggest supporters. Over the last 3 years, they have squandered trillions of dollars on tax breaks for the wealthiest few, driving the national deficit above \$500 billion on an annual basis and raising the debt tax on all Americans. And today, President Bush will sign the Republican "wither-on-the-vine" Medicare bill. This monstrosity spends billions to subsidize HMOs and drug companies, but it actually reduces seniors' choices and it makes it illegal for them to reduce the huge out-of-pocket cost that the Republican bill does not cover. It will not let retirees cover these drug costs with the employer-provided drug coverage that they already have, even though the Republican bill may only cover selected medicines, regardless of what their doctor says they need. And it will not let seniors buy Medigap policies to cover their \$3,600 in out-of-pocket expenses either.

Mr. Speaker, that is an outrage, and it comes on top of a \$12 billion slush fund for HMOs and \$139 billion in wind-fall profits for big drug companies. So why, Mr. Speaker, will Republicans not spend just a tiny fraction of that to help Americans still suffering from the latest Republican recession? Why will they not use their legislation on the floor today, an \$820 billion collection of several different spending bills, to provide desperately-needed relief over the holidays to Americans who still cannot find a job?

□ 1245

After all, the omnibus spending bill provides plenty of assistance to others. For the big drug companies, Republican leaders have dropped drug reimportation language passed by the House and Senate, meaning that drug prices will still be astronomically high-

er for America's seniors than for people in other countries.

For some of the Bush administration's biggest corporate backers, Republicans have dropped overtime protection for workers, meaning that millions of Americans will get paid less, even as they are forced to work more. And they are spending \$13 million on vouchers to subsidize private schools for a few, taking desperately needed resources from the public schools that serve all American children.

Despite all this, Mr. Speaker, there are still many worthwhile parts to this massive spending bill. For instance, Democrats and veterans groups have finally forced Republicans to increase funding for veterans medical care that would still fall short of what they need. And to help communities protect children against abduction, this bill includes \$24 million for the national Amber Alert Program that I first introduced earlier this year. It also includes vital resources to address important transportation issues in north Texas.

So why can this Republican Congress not do just one more good deed before the holidays? Mr. Speaker, why not help the 1.4 million workers who cannot find work, who have already exhausted their extended benefits and have yet to find work?

Republican leaders may not care about helping them, but that does not have to stop this Congress from doing the right thing. If Republican Members will join Democrats in opposing the important parliamentary vote known as the previous question, then we can amend the rule and pass commonsense assistance for Americans still unable to find work in this jobless recovery. Otherwise, while Republicans are enjoying their vacations, hundreds of thousands of jobless Americans will spend the holidays preparing to lose the unemployment insurance they need to support their families.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I reserve my time.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON).

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, this morning's news talks about the elections in Russia. At the same time it speaks about elections, it talks about the steady erosion of democratic freedoms embodied in these elections, and it says there is mounting national and international criticism of those elections because of the denial of democracy as defined by free societies, which is because of the heavy hand of the Putin majority.

We are blind if we do not see analogous denials of democracy American-style wrapped up in this omnibus bill. Is it democracy when, for the first time, we hold open votes unconscionably long, pressure Members, it has been alleged illegally, with threats or

bribes until you win what the vote shows you had already lost? We have done that at least a half a dozen times, ranging from 25 minutes to 3 hours.

Is it democracy when you reverse the votes of the House, as we have done on the overtime provision?

Is it democracy when we have one-party conferences, locking out the other party?

Is it democracy when there are in this bill, a major bill, provisions for which there have been no votes at all? Like the D.C. voucher provision, there was no vote in the Senate because they had no votes. The ultimate abuse is they removed the few routine accountability provisions that by voice vote did get in the bill for D.C. vouchers. One was that teachers have to have a college degree.

Is it democracy when you lard the bill with Republican pork, defunding the No Child Left Behind bill while your own school districts are screaming because they have had to cut their own school funding?

I must say, if we pass this bill, it will be an appropriate way to end this session, because this entire session has been a monument, as this bill is, to the denial of democracy.

In this session, Mr. Speaker, we have crossed the line. We have crossed the line between the kind of contentiousness that has gone on for 200 years in this House to one-party rule in the people's House. The way to begin to remedy this, and we must remedy this now, we must not carry this procedure, this way of conducting business, into the next year; the way to remedy this outrage is to vote against this bill.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I reserve my time.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER).

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, today the leadership of this House breathes life back into the spirit of Ebenezer Scrooge and for the second year in a row ignores the plight of America's unemployed during the holiday season. The majority's failure to extend emergency unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed is not only unconscionable; it is cold-hearted.

In May, President Bush said, "My economic plan is summed up in one word: jobs." But the truth is, even after 4 straight months of anemic job growth, President Bush is on course to become the first President since Herbert Hoover to preside over a net jobs loss during his 4-year term.

Yes, the economy added 57,000 jobs in November, but here is what they do not say: the economy has to create 150,000 jobs a month just to keep pace with the new folks coming into the employment arena. Overall, there are 8.7 million unemployed Americans today; and nearly one-fourth of them, Mr. Speaker, some 2 million people, have been jobless for more than 26 weeks.

Mr. Speaker, that is the highest percentage of long-term unemployment since July of 1983, 20 years ago; and there are about 4.2 million other workers who want a job, but are not even counted among the unemployed.

The reality is this: if the President and Congressional Republicans refuse to extend Federal temporary unemployment benefits, which are scheduled to be phased out beginning December 21, an estimated 80,000 to 90,000 jobless workers who exhaust their State benefits every week will be completely cut off. That is 80,000 to 90,000 people per week.

That is not only callous; it is unnecessary. We have the funding to extend these benefits. That is right, there is \$20 billion in the Federal fund dedicated to unemployment benefits, which is financed by unemployment taxes deducted from workers' paychecks.

Mr. Speaker, I know the President and our Republican colleagues would like nothing more than to pronounce our economy healed and to unfurl the banner reading "Mission Accomplished," but it is plain that millions of Americans continue to be hurt. The least we can do is reach out a helping hand.

Mr. Speaker, we did this last year, and we left 800,000 people on December 31, 2002, falling off the unemployment roles. With the money in the pot to help them, why do we leave this day without addressing this problem? There is no explanation, Mr. Speaker. I predict to you that the President will, 2 weeks from now, say, oh, my goodness, we should have done that.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished ranking member for yielding me time.

I wish that we would donate our time and dedicate ourselves to the wishes of the American people.

Hubert Humphrey said that this Constitution was organized to create a more perfect Union, and the challenge of creating a more perfect Union is a continued agitation and criticism, not because we are disloyal to this country and to the American people, but because we care about a more perfect Union.

In the backdrop of a 4-hour vote before we left for the Thanksgiving work recess, I come to the floor of the House now. We have an omnibus appropriations bill that has barely been before the Members of Congress for any kind of review. For 4 hours a vote was left open, in complete disregard for the rules of this House and what the Madison Papers and our Founding Fathers wanted to establish, a Republic and also a democracy.

Today we come with a martial law that allows us on one day to just put on the floor of the House a huge and large and massive interpretation of the appropriations for 2004. And then we have a situation where issues that

clearly the American people are against, such as eliminating overtime opportunities for working men and women are sneaked into the appropriations bill, and then where thousands of petitions from around the country were brought to this government about not allowing large media conglomerates to buy up stations to the disregard of the first amendment. And lo and behold, there is a sneak provision in here that allows that to happen.

Then, of course, there is a provision that affects many seniors who were implementing lower-cost drugs by drug reimportation. Clearly those drugs were safe, because seniors have been doing it for a very long time. That has been sneaked into the bill, meaning that we have eliminated that opportunity so that seniors can again suffer. They suffer first with a Medicare bill that is going to implode and not be in business until 2006 and cost thousands of Texans to lose their benefits, and they will suffer.

Then if we talk about international efforts, I was in Ethiopia this past summer, and one of the things they were begging for is, they appreciated the famine relief, but they wanted to be able to be taught to fish. If you teach someone to fish they may not be hungry tomorrow, but if you give them a fish today, they may be hungry tomorrow. It takes very low dollars for what we call food security, teaching them agricultural skills and new technology.

Then, of course, I have been concerned with the Columbia 7 tragedy, that NASA focus its concepts on safety. In all of the NASA budget, I do not know if there is a line item that boosts the resources for making sure that NASA pays attention to safety issues.

We could have done this, Mr. Speaker, if we had deliberated on this appropriations bill. If we did not have the martial law, if we paid attention to the rules of the House, we might be able to do this. But, unfortunately, it seems we cannot.

So I ask my colleagues to vote against this rule so we can get back to work on behalf of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the rule on H.R. 2673, the Omnibus appropriations Conference report. While the Omnibus includes a significant amount for agriculture appropriations, the omnibus fails to include the House provisions to prohibit the FDA from spending funds to prevent individuals and pharmacists from importing FDA-approved prescription drugs. In addition, this portion of the bill delays for two years the mandatory country-of-origin labeling for all produce, meat or meat products except for farm-raised fish and wild fish.

In addition, the omnibus permanently limits the ability of the FCC to grant licenses for a commercial TV broadcast station if the granting of that license would result in such party having an aggregate national audience reach exceeding 39 percent (the House and Senate bills barred the FCC from increasing the share of the national market one broadcasting company can own, which currently is 35 percent.

The omnibus also includes provisions that prohibit the implementation of a background check system that does not include a requirement to destroy gun purchase records within 24 hours.

I am rather disturbed Mr. Speaker, by the portion appropriating \$139.8 billion for the Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies. While I am pleased that there is money for Texas Southern University, a predominantly black university in my district for their minority engineering program within the college of Science and Technology, I was rather disturbed that the Democratic members were shut out from receiving individual earmarks for their districts because they voted against the bill when it came to the House floor. This not only goes against fundamental fairness Mr. Speaker, but when you penalize individual members by not giving them much needed money for their districts, you hurt their constituents. This is bad for this institution, and bad for the country. The omnibus also falls \$7.8 billion short of the No Child Left Behind Authorization levels and provides \$55.7 billion for the Education Department (\$12.4 billion for the Title I program.

The omnibus fails to include the House and Senate adopted provisions to block the Department of Labor from issuing rules that would take away the rights of some white-collar workers to overtime pay.

The omnibus also fails to include House provisions that would have limited the Administration's ability to outsource some federal jobs and includes only some limitations to programs funded by the Transportation-Treasury bill.

I urge members to vote against this rule.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. INSLEE).

(Mr. INSLEE asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, last night while I was enjoying sumptuous airline fare on the red-eye to come out here to vote on this, the lady sitting next to me was reading a book called "Nickel and Dime." It is a book about people who are struggling; who are employed, but who are struggling to keep their souls and their families together in today's economically challenged times. And nobody, nobody who has read this book would vote for this rule.

The reason is that we can quote all the rosy statistics that we can, but the fact of the matter is if we leave this floor and go out to the food banks in our districts, in every district in America, the food banks are jammed, the lines are long, people are still having problems feeding their children.

As I was talking to a business owner the other day in Seattle, he says, I hear these statistics, but I do not see the customers. The fact of the matter is, we still have people in pain, and this rule keeps them in that economically devastated condition.

There are two reasons it does this: one, it guts the effort we had on a bipartisan basis in the Senate and at least a little bit here on this floor when, in a democratic process, we voted with the majority to stop the

President of the United States from stealing people's time with their families by gutting overtime protection.

Over 8 million Americans are going to lose the right to overtime, and, more importantly, lose the right to control their own time with their families if this rule passes. That is wrong. It is a violation of the democratic spirit for us to vote to stop the President from taking family time away from their families, with people going into a dark room and stripping that protection out. It is wrong, and we should fix it right here.

□ 1300

But second is the unemployment. We have heard that we have had some modestly encouraging news, that there has been some jobs created in the recent past, and that is great. But the fact of the matter is, there have been 2.4 million jobs lost during this administration's tenure. And the way I figure it, if we look at the jobs that have been created, we have only got about 2.3 million jobs to go to get our nose above dead even.

Now, the majority's approach to this is we sort of have the U.S. economy with 2.4 million jobs lost kind of down in a deep well. The majority is starting to look at that American worker down in that deep well, and we have winched them up about 6 inches off the floor and said, you are on your own now. We have a long ways to go before we can say that we are out of the woods economically.

This bill does not cut the mustard. This bill gives Scrooge a bad name. At least he had an epiphany.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN).

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring the body's attention to another provision in this omnibus appropriations bill. I know there are several that are objectionable, and this one may not get any further discussion, but I think it merits it.

There is a provision in this bill that says that all of the records of firearm purchases have to be destroyed within 24 hours.

Now, we know that there have been more than 3,500 firearms purchased by people who should not have purchased them, and that the FBI has been able to retrieve those guns because the records are currently kept for 90 days. They retrieve them if the person that purchased it is a fugitive, is a felon, has a history of serious mental illness, is an illegal alien, any number of reasons that they should not be purchasing guns, lawfully, in the United States. So 3,500 guns have been retrieved because we have kept the records available for 90 days. Now, they have to be destroyed within 24 hours.

Now, the National Rifle Association thinks this is a good thing, but our law enforcement organizations do not. FBI agents will tell us this is very serious,

what this bill would do. In fact, the al Qaeda training manual cites the fact that you can go in and buy a gun in the United States, and as long as you have not been a convicted felon in the past, you can buy that and the records will be destroyed. And, in fact, as the Washington Post said in an article last week, that is true, that if a person gets hold of a gun, their records have to be destroyed as a result of this bill. If they are denied, then the records can be pursued. But if they lawfully purchased it, the records are destroyed, which means that we are deliberately tying the hands of law enforcement agencies.

Now, is it not appropriate that we be able to consult the list of violent gang members and terrorists when they try to buy a gun? Absolutely, is the answer. Yet, this bill says, within 24 hours, even if it is a holiday, a weekend, even if it is in some rural area where they do not have the resources to check what they need to be able to check, it has to be destroyed within 24 hours.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to look back and find this provision as one of the most dangerous that this House has passed, and the most irresponsible and irrational. We should not be doing this. It was another one of these things snuck into the conference report. I strongly urge Members, unless we can take this out, this bill should not be supported in its present form.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE).

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time. I rise in reluctant opposition to this rule and to this bill.

We, in the House, have specific rules against approving spending that is not approved in either a House or Senate version and then comes to the floor in a bill like this, yet we routinely waive the rules and waive all points of order against this kind of spending. This is to our shame. I am ashamed that we are doing this today. This bill has about, at last count I believe about 7,000 earmarks within it for particular spending items. Under Republican control, we have gone, I believe, in 1994 from about 2,000 earmarks per year to over 10,000, and that is not the way that we ought to conduct business. I think that it is going to come back to bite us. It well ought to.

With that, I think that we ought to oppose this rule because it goes against procedures that we have established in the House, and we ought to vote against the bill as well.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN).

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas for yielding me this time. I would hope that we will defeat the previous question so that we can bring up the unemployment compensation extension.

Last year, Congress left town without extending unemployment benefits, but at least we came back and did it retroactively.

Now, some are saying that our unemployment is not as bad or not bad enough for us to extend the Federal unemployment benefits. They are saying it is time for the extended benefit program to end.

But let us look at the facts. Never before has Congress allowed the termination of this program when the unemployment rate is higher than when the program started; at least up until now. Congress has never terminated the program with the unemployment benefits when the economy still has 2.4 million fewer jobs today than when the recession began. Congress has never stopped the extension of the program where the long-term unemployment rates have tripled. Yet, there has been no offer to give any help. Congress has never allowed the extended benefit program to expire when the exhaustion rate for regular unemployment benefits is the highest since we have been keeping these records. Yet, we are talking about leaving town without extending unemployment benefits. Congress has never refused to extend unemployment benefits when there is \$20 billion in the Federal Unemployment Trust Account, enough money to pay for extended benefits without going into debt, yet we are talking about leaving town today without extending the Federal unemployment benefits.

The Washington Post got it right when it compared this to the last recession. It said, "But in 1993, employment had grown for 22 of the 23 previous months, and the overall number of jobs was above the prerecession level. This time around, employment has grown for only 4 months in a row, following 6 straight months of job losses. Overall, the number of jobs is down 2.4 million since the current downturn started in early 2001."

Mr. Speaker, it would be wrong for us to leave town without helping those people who do not have jobs through no fault of their own. Unemployment compensation is not a luxury. We need to do it now.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this is probably the House's final work day this year, but Republican leaders are, once again, callously turning their backs on the millions of unemployed Americans whose Federal unemployment insurance will expire just days after Christmas. The Republican leadership has found billions of dollars to extend tax breaks for corporations, but they keep refusing to help the jobless Americans who are still suffering from the last Republican recession.

To give Republicans one last chance to do the right thing, I will oppose the previous question on this rule so that we can immediately take up legislation to extend the expiring Federal unemployment benefits.

This commonsense legislation would continue the extended unemployment benefits program through the first 6 months of next year. It would increase to 26 weeks the amounts of benefits provided under the program, up from 13 weeks. It would provide new help to the 1.4 million workers who have already exhausted their extended benefits and have yet to find work.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is identical to the text of H.R. 3244, the Rangel-Cardin unemployment extension, and it also contains the text of H.R. 3554 by the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) which would fix a flaw in the current law that prevents those States with exceptionally high, long-term unemployment rates from continuing to receive the help their citizens need.

Mr. Speaker, Americans still face a difficult jobs market. Since President Bush took office, the economy has lost 2.4 million jobs. That is the worst jobs record for a President since Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression. The percentage of Americans exhausting their unemployment benefits without finding a job has reached its highest level on record. These Americans need relief and they need it immediately. If we do not extend unemployment benefits, then more than 2 million workers will lose benefits in the first 6 months of next year, including over 130,000 in my State of Texas alone.

I want to stress that this vote is not intended to stop the omnibus conference report from consideration in the House. Voting "no" on the previous question will still allow that bill to move forward today. But a "no" vote will allow the House to vote on legislation to help provide some much-needed relief to our Nation's unemployed workers, particularly during this holiday season. However, if Members vote "yes" on the previous question, they will kill any chance for extending unemployment assistance that is so desperately needed by millions of our constituents and their families.

Let us be clear. This vote will give the House the opportunity to vote today on extended Federal unemployment benefits and on giving relief to those hardest hit to the President's dismal economic record. I urge a "no" vote on the previous question.

Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the amendment be printed in the RECORD immediately before the vote on the previous question.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

This is a rule that provides for the consideration of the consolidated spending bill. It is something that we must do in this Congress to fund the government. That is what this rule is all about. I urge support of that.

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to vote "no" on the previous question so that this Congress can extend unemployment benefits to the millions of Americans who cannot find work in an economy with almost three unemployed workers for every job opening.

Because of previous inaction, it is now "zero hour" for American families who are set to exhaust their State unemployment benefits. If we do not extend the Federal unemployment insurance program today, roughly half a million people who would have been eligible for the Federal extension program will not be receiving a paycheck or an unemployment check in January.

These workers form the ranks of America's 2 million long-term unemployed workers. They have been out of work for at least half a year and they comprise almost a quarter of the unemployed, a larger share of those out of work than at any time since July 1983. A recent survey by the National Employment Law Project noted that over half of the long-term unemployed had cut back on food purchases for their families, borrowed money to pay basic bills, and postponed necessary medical treatment.

We can help these families today. The economic situation in this country has simply not improved enough to justify the end to the Federal unemployment extension program. Already, three of every four Federal unemployment recipients exhaust their benefits without finding a job.

We must not punish millions of American families simply for losing their jobs at the wrong time of year, in the wrong month of the Congressional calendar. Vote "no" on the previous question.

Ms. MILLENDER-McDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak today to object to consideration of the Omnibus Appropriations bill. I am specifically concerned with provisions in this legislation that would result in the removal of overtime pay protection for many American workers.

A few months ago, this House voted to instruct conferees to remove unfair provisions on overtime pay. Despite the will of a majority of Members, those provisions still remain in this bill. This does not reflect the true position of the House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker, I am speaking on what has been called "the Harkin amendment." This amendment to the FY2004 Labor-HHS appropriations bill would have prohibited the Department of Labor from issuing regulations that would disqualify overtime protection to workers protected under current law.

The opponents of overtime pay protection would require employees to work more than 40 hours weekly without being paid time and a half for their work. The Department of Labor claims that only 644,000 current workers will lose overtime pay benefits under the provisions of this legislation.

In sharp contrast, the Economic Policy Institute reports that over eight million eligible workers are earning overtime, and will be adversely affected by these regulations. This figure includes 5.5 million workers paid hourly and 2.5 million salaried employees. We all know that we live in a time of scarce resources and few job opportunities. Therefore, this drastic pay cut, especially during the holiday season, is fundamentally unfair and wrong for American workers.

Over 1.4 million Americans are also faced with the expiration of their unemployment benefits at the end of this month. We cannot in good conscience go home to celebrate the holidays with our families while unemployed Americans face a grim future and a bleak holiday season.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the Members of this body to take action today that will give hope to American workers, and protect the wages they earn and extend the benefits they deserve.

The amendment previously referred to by Mr. FROST is as follows:

PREVIOUS QUESTION FOR H. RES. 473, RULE FOR CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2673, AGRICULTURE/OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS FY04

At the end of the resolution add the following new section:

SEC. 2. "Immediately after disposition of the conference report on H.R. 2673, it shall be in order without intervention of any point of order to consider in the House the bill (H.R. 3568) to provide extended unemployment benefits to displaced workers, and to make other improvements in the unemployment insurance system. The bill shall be considered as read for amendment. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bills to final passage without intervening motion except: 1) one hour of debate equally divided and controlled by the Chairman and ranking Minority Member of the Committee on the Ways and Means; and 2) one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on ordering the previous question.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Evidently a quorum is not present.

The Sergeant at Arms will notify absent Members.

Pursuant to clause 9 of rule XX, the Chair will reduce to 5 minutes the minimum time for electronic voting, if ordered, on the question of adoption of the resolution.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 214, nays 189, not voting 31, as follows:

[Roll No. 674]

YEAS—214

Aderholt	Bono	Cole
Akin	Boozman	Collins
Bachus	Bradley (NH)	Cox
Baker	Brady (TX)	Crane
Ballenger	Brown (SC)	Crenshaw
Barrett (SC)	Brown-Waite,	Culberson
Bartlett (MD)	Ginny	Cunningham
Barton (TX)	Burgess	Davis, Jo Ann
Bass	Burns	Davis, Tom
Beauprez	Buyer	Deal (GA)
Bereuter	Calvert	DeLay
Biggert	Camp	DeMint
Bilirakis	Cannon	Diaz-Balart, L.
Bishop (UT)	Cantor	Diaz-Balart, M.
Blackburn	Capito	Doolittle
Blunt	Carter	Dreier
Boehlert	Castle	Duncan
Boehner	Chabot	Dunn
Bonilla	Chocola	Ehlers
Bonner	Coble	Emerson

English	Kline	Rehberg
Everett	Knollenberg	Renzi
Feeney	Kolbe	Reynolds
Ferguson	LaHood	Rogers (AL)
Flake	Latham	Rogers (KY)
Foley	LaTourette	Rogers (MI)
Forbes	Leach	Rohrabacher
Fossella	Lewis (CA)	Ros-Lehtinen
Franks (AZ)	Lewis (KY)	Royce
Frelinghuysen	Linder	Ryan (WI)
Garrett (NJ)	LoBiondo	Ryun (KS)
Gerlach	Lucas (OK)	Saxton
Gibbons	Manzullo	Schrock
Gilchrest	McCotter	Sensenbrenner
Gillmor	McCrery	Sessions
Gingrey	McHugh	Shadegg
Goode	McInnis	Shaw
Goodlatte	McKeon	Shays
Goss	Mica	Sherwood
Granger	Miller (FL)	Shimkus
Graves	Miller (MI)	Shuster
Green (WI)	Miller, Gary	Simmons
Greenwood	Moran (KS)	Simpson
Gutknecht	Murphy	Smith (MI)
Harris	Musgrave	Smith (NJ)
Hart	Myrick	Smith (TX)
Hastings (WA)	Nethercutt	Souder
Hayworth	Neugebauer	Stearns
Hefley	Ney	Tancredo
Hensarling	Northup	Tauzin
Herger	Norwood	Terry
Hobson	Nunes	Thomas
Hoekstra	Nussle	Thornberry
Hostettler	Osborne	Tiahrt
Hulshof	Ose	Tiberti
Hunter	Otter	Toomey
Hyde	Oxley	Turner (OH)
Isakson	Paul	Upton
Issa	Pearce	Vitter
Istook	Pence	Walden (OR)
Jenkins	Peterson (PA)	Walsh
Johnson (CT)	Petri	Wamp
Johnson (IL)	Pickering	Weldon (FL)
Johnson, Sam	Pitts	Weldon (PA)
Jones (NC)	Platts	Weller
Keller	Pombo	Whitfield
Kelly	Porter	Wicker
Kennedy (MN)	Pryce (OH)	Wilson (NM)
King (IA)	Putnam	Wilson (SC)
King (NY)	Quinn	Wolf
Kingston	Radanovich	Young (FL)
Kirk	Ramstad	

NAYS—189

Abercrombie	Deutsch	Kilpatrick
Ackerman	Dicks	Kind
Alexander	Dingell	Kleczka
Allen	Dooley (CA)	Lampson
Andrews	Doyle	Langevin
Baca	Edwards	Larsen (WA)
Baird	Emanuel	Larson (CT)
Baldwin	Engel	Lee
Ballance	Eshoo	Levin
Becerra	Etheridge	Lewis (GA)
Bell	Evans	Lipinski
Berkley	Farr	Lofgren
Berman	Fattah	Lowe
Berry	Ford	Lucas (KY)
Bishop (GA)	Frank (MA)	Majette
Bishop (NY)	Frost	Maloney
Blumenauer	Gonzalez	Markey
Boswell	Gordon	Marshall
Boucher	Green (TX)	Matheson
Boyd	Grijalva	Matsui
Brady (PA)	Gutierrez	McCarthy (MO)
Brown (OH)	Hall	McCarthy (NY)
Brown, Corrine	Harman	McCollum
Capps	Hastings (FL)	McDermott
Capuano	Hill	McGovern
Cardin	Hinche	McIntyre
Cardoza	Hinojosa	McNulty
Carson (IN)	Hoeffel	Meek (FL)
Case	Holden	Meeks (NY)
Clay	Holt	Menendez
Clyburn	Honda	Michaud
Cooper	Hooley (OR)	Millender-
Costello	Hoyer	McDonald
Cramer	Inslee	Miller (NC)
Crowley	Israel	Mollohan
Cummings	Jackson (IL)	Moore
Davis (AL)	Jackson-Lee	Moran (VA)
Davis (CA)	(TX)	Murtha
Davis (FL)	Jefferson	Napolitano
Davis (IL)	Johnson, E. B.	Neal (MA)
Davis (TN)	Jones (OH)	Oberstar
DeFazio	Kanjorski	Obey
DeGette	Kaptur	Olver
Delahunt	Kennedy (RI)	Ortiz
DeLauro	Kildee	Owens

Pallone	Sanchez, Loretta	Tauscher
Pascrell	Sandlin	Taylor (MS)
Pastor	Schakowsky	Thompson (CA)
Payne	Schiff	Thompson (MS)
Peterson (MN)	Scott (GA)	Tierney
Pomeroy	Scott (VA)	Towns
Price (NC)	Serrano	Turner (TX)
Rahall	Sherman	Udall (CO)
Rangel	Skelton	Udall (NM)
Reyes	Slaughter	Van Hollen
Rodriguez	Smith (WA)	Velazquez
Ross	Snyder	Visclosky
Rothman	Solis	Waters
Roybal-Allard	Spratt	Watson
Ruppersberger	Stark	Watt
Ryan (OH)	Stenholm	Weiner
Sabo	Strickland	Woolsey
Sanchez, Linda	Stupak	Wu
T.	Tanner	Wynn

NOT VOTING—31

Burr	Houghton	Regula
Burton (IN)	Janklow	Rush
Carson (OK)	John	Sanders
Conyers	Kucinich	Sullivan
Cubin	Lantos	Sweeney
Doggett	Lynch	Taylor (NC)
Filner	Meehan	Waxman
Fletcher	Miller, George	Wexler
Galleghy	Nadler	Young (AK)
Gephardt	Pelosi	
Hayes	Portman	

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATOURETTE) (during the vote). Members are advised there are 2 minutes remaining in this vote.

□ 1334

Mr. WYNN changed his vote from "yea" to "nay."

Mr. SAXTON changed his vote from "nay" to "yea."

So the previous question was ordered.

The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

Stated for:

Mr. HAYES. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 674, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea."

Mr. SWEENEY. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 674, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea."

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, on December 8, 2003, I was unavoidably detained at a meeting and missed the vote on rollcall No. 674, Ordering Previous Question on H. Res. 473, the Rule to accompany H.R. 2673, the Fiscal Year 2004 Agriculture Appropriations Act.

Had I been present, I would have voted "yea."

Stated against:

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 674, due to urgent constituent support commitments in my Congressional District, I missed the vote. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LATOURETTE). The question is on the resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the noes appeared to have it.

RECORDED VOTE

Mr. FROST. Mr. Speaker, I demand a recorded vote.

A recorded vote was ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. This will be a 5-minute vote.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—ayes 216, noes 189, not voting 29, as follows:

[Roll No. 675]

AYES—216

Aderholt Goode Oxley
 Bachus Goodlatte Paul
 Baker Goss Pearce
 Ballenger Granger Pence
 Barrett (SC) Graves Peterson (PA)
 Bartlett (MD) Green (WI) Petri
 Barton (TX) Greenwood Pickering
 Bass Gutknecht Pitts
 Beauprez Hall Platts
 Bereuter Harris Pombo
 Biggart Hart Porter
 Bilirakis Hastings (WA) Portman
 Bishop (UT) Hayes Pryce (OH)
 Blackburn Hayworth Putnam
 Blunt Hefley Quinn
 Boehlert Hensarling Radanovich
 Boehner Herger Ramstad
 Bonilla Hobson Regula
 Bonner Hoekstra Rehberg
 Bono Hostettler Renzi
 Boozman Hulshof Reynolds
 Bradley (NH) Hunter Rogers (AL)
 Brady (TX) Hyde Rogers (KY)
 Brown (SC) Isakson Rogers (MI)
 Brown-Waite, Issa Rohrabacher
 Ginny Istook Ros-Lehtinen
 Burgess Jenkins Royce
 Burns Johnson (CT) Ryan (WI)
 Buyer Johnson (IL) Ryan (KS)
 Calvert Johnson, Sam Saxton
 Camp Jones (NC) Schrock
 Cannon Keller Sensenbrenner
 Cantor Kelly Sessions
 Capito Kennedy (MN) Shadegg
 Carter King (IA) Shaw
 Castle King (NY) Shays
 Chabot Kingston Shermwood
 Chocola Kirk Shimkus
 Coble Kline Shuster
 Cole Knollenberg Simmons
 Collins Kolbe LaHood
 Cox Latham Simpson
 Crane Latham Smith (MI)
 Crenshaw LaTourrette Smith (NJ)
 Culberson Leach Smith (TX)
 Cunningham Lewis (CA) Souder
 Davis, Jo Ann Lewis (KY) Stearns
 Davis, Tom Linder Sullivan
 Deal (GA) LoBiondo Sweeney
 DeLay Lucas (OK) Tancredo
 DeMint Manzullo Tauzin
 Diaz-Balart, L. McCotter Terry
 Diaz-Balart, M. McCreery Thomas
 Doolittle McHugh Thornberry
 Dreier McLinnis Tiahrt
 Duncan McKeon Tiberi
 Dunn Mica Toomey
 Ehlers Miller (FL) Turner (OH)
 Emerson Miller (MI) Upton
 English Miller, Gary Vitter
 Everett Moran (KS) Walden (OR)
 Ferguson Murphy Walsh
 Foley Musgrave Wamp
 Forbes Myrick Weldon (FL)
 Fossella Nethercutt Weldon (PA)
 Franks (AZ) Neugebauer Weller
 Frelinghuysen Ney Whitfield
 Garrett (NJ) Norwood Wicker
 Gerlach Nunes Wilson (NM)
 Gibbons Nussle Wilson (SC)
 Gilchrest Osborne Wolf
 Gillmor Ose Young (FL)
 Gingrey Otter

NOES—189

Abercrombie Brown (OH) DeFazio
 Ackerman Brown, Corrine DeGette
 Alexander Capps Delahunt
 Allen Capuano DeLauro
 Andrews Cardin Deutsch
 Baca Cardoza Dicks
 Baird Carson (IN) Dingell
 Baldwin Case Dooley (CA)
 Ballance Clay Doyle
 Becerra Clyburn Edwards
 Bell Conyers Emanuel
 Berkley Cooper Engel
 Berman Costello Eshoo
 Berry Cramer Etheridge
 Bishop (GA) Crowley Evans
 Bishop (NY) Cummings Farr
 Blumenauer Davis (AL) Fattah
 Boswell Davis (CA) Flake
 Boucher Davis (FL) Ford
 Boyd Davis (IL) Frank (MA)
 Brady (PA) Davis (TN) Frost

Gonzalez Majette Ruppertsberger
 Gordon Maloney Ryan (OH)
 Green (TX) Markey Sabo
 Grijalva Marshall Sanchez, Linda
 Gutierrez Matheson T.
 Harman Matsui Sanchez, Loretta
 Hastings (FL) McCarthy (MO) Sandlin
 Hill McCarthy (NY) Schakowsky
 Hinchey McCollum Schiff
 Hinojosa McDermott Scott (GA)
 Hoeffel McGovern Scott (VA)
 Holden McIntyre Serrano
 Holt McNulty Sherman
 Honda Meek (FL) Skelton
 Hooley (OR) Menendez Slaughter
 Hoyer Michaud Smith (WA)
 Insee Millender Snyder
 Israel McDonald Solis
 Jackson (IL) Miller (NC) Spratt
 Jackson-Lee Mollohan Stark
 (TX) Moran (VA) Stenholm
 Jefferson Murtha Strickland
 Johnson, E. B. Napolitano Stupak
 Jones (OH) Neal (MA) Tanner
 Kanjorski Oberstar Tauscher
 Kaptur Obey Taylor (MS)
 Kennedy (RI) Oliver Thompson (CA)
 Kildee Ortiz Thompson (MS)
 Kilpatrick Owens Tierney
 Kind Pallone Towns
 Kleczka Pascrell Turner (TX)
 Kucinich Pastor Udall (CO)
 Lampson Payne Udall (NM)
 Langevin Peterson (MN) Van Hollen
 Larsen (WA) Pomeroy Velazquez
 Larson (CT) Price (NC) Visclosky
 Lee Rahall Waters
 Levin Rangel Watson
 Lewis (GA) Reyes Watt
 Lipinski Rodriguez Weiner
 Lofgren Ross Woolsey
 Lowey Rothman Wu
 Lucas (KY) Roybal-Allard Wynn

NOT VOTING—29

Akin Gephardt Nadler
 Burr Houghton Northup
 Burton (IN) Janklow Pelosi
 Carson (OK) John Rush
 Cubin Lantos Sanders
 Doggett Lynch Taylor (NC)
 Feeney Meehan Waxman
 Filner Meeks (NY) Wexler
 Fletcher Miller, George Young (AK)
 Gallegly Moore

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (during the vote). Members are advised there are 2 minutes remaining in this vote.

□ 1343

So the resolution was agreed to. The result of the vote was announced as above recorded.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

Stated against:
 Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 675, due to urgent constituent support commitments in my congressional district, I missed the vote. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the conference agreement accompanying H.R. 2673, and that I may include tabular and extraneous material.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2673, CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 473, I call up the conference report on the bill (H.R. 2673) making appropriations for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 473, the conference report is considered read.

(For conference report and statement, see proceedings of the House of November 25, 2003, Book II, at page H 12323.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOUNG) and the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOUNG).

□ 1345

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I call attention to the fact that this conference report was filed on November 25, nearly 2 weeks ago, so that every Member has had 2 weeks, if they wanted to, to review this bill to see what was in it and to see what was not in it.

Something that I always enjoy reporting to the House and reminding the House of, and they probably get tired of hearing me say it, is that we passed all of our bills in the House, all of our appropriation bills, before the August recess, except for two; and those last two we passed on September 9, the first week back after the August district work period. So the House has done its job. It has done a good job. What we are doing here today is we are passing an omnibus appropriation bill that includes seven bills that we have already passed in the House. I say that again: these seven bills that are in this package already passed the House once. So this is now the omnibus bill; this is the conference report on that omnibus bill.

I will not take a lot of time to say what the seven bills are that are included because I think everyone knows what those final seven bills are. But I want to say that there are some important items that need to be passed now, today, and not in January or February. Because if we were to operate under a continuing resolution until late January or sometime in February, there are some important funding issues that would not be resolved.

For example, the \$2.9 billion increase in medical care for veterans is a very important issue, and one that the House agreed to strongly. That increase will not take any effect whatsoever until such time as this bill passes. A CR will not provide for that 2.9 additional billions of dollars for veterans health care.