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Rule for H.R. 2862, Science, State, Justice, Commerce and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006

Mr. Speaker, last night, the Committee on Rules considered H.R. 2862, the Science, State, Justice, Commerce and Related Agencies' appropriations bill for FY 2006. And while I am pleased that the committee reported an open rule, as is customary with appropriations bills, we all know the amendment process for these bills is very restrictive. This makes it easy for the majority to allow an open rule and still maintain tight control over what is debated and deliberated on the floor through the waiver process.

If we want to foster democracy in this body, we should take the time and thoughtfulness to debate all major legislation under an open rule, not just appropriations bills, which are already restricted. An open process should be the norm and not the exception.

That being said, I want to congratulate the chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Wolf), and the ranking member, the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. Mollohan), for working together to create a bill that seems to be a fair and responsible piece of legislation.

I have always said that budgets are moral documents. Where and how we decide to spend the taxpayers' money says more about our values as a society than any speech or political rhetoric possibly could. If any of my fellow Americans really want to know who and what each party cares about in this country, look at where the money goes and the truth will be what follows. That is exactly what an appropriations bill such as this does. It gives us a road map to see what is important to our elected leadership.

That is why I want to congratulate my friends across the aisle for having the courage to essentially reject the White House's inadequate budget request for this bill. Clearly, many Republican Members in this body do not share the same values as the President, and I congratulate you for having the courage to demonstrate this rare moment of independence and moderation to the American people. The bill clearly rebuffs the White House's agenda on spending issues, such as funding for the National Science Foundation, which is still inadequate, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Department of Justice, and the Drug Enforcement Agency by providing adequate, if not ideal, funding.

Also, I am pleased that Chairman WOLF and Ranking Member MOLLOHAN saw fit to prohibit the use of funds in this measure to support or justify the use of torture by the United States Government. Unfortunately, this language is both necessary and appropriate.

We also have language included today that will prohibit the White House from blocking the importation of discount prescription drugs through trade agreements. That means this body is acting to ensure that the White House does not try to subvert our authority and take further steps to prevent the American people from having access to life-saving, affordable prescription drugs. I strongly believe that access to affordable medication and health care should be a right in this country and not the fodder of a political power struggle.

Mr. Speaker, just when I saw the rays of hope sprinkled throughout the bill that this typically extreme leadership has finally begun to place the needs of everyday, hardworking Americans before their agenda, I was offered a reality check last night in the Committee on Rules. The moderation I had seen had merely been an illusion.

The gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. Obey), ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations, brought to the Committee on Rules a necessary, important, and reasonable amendment to this bill. The amendment would have increased funding by $410 million for local law enforcement agencies and for COPS grants, which is the most successful crime prevention program in our Nation's history; and we have decimated it. It would have put more police on the streets in America's neighborhoods.

Additionally, it would have increased funding for EDA grants by $53 million, which spur the public and private investment in order to create new jobs in our struggling communities.

The cost of his amendment would have been offset through a less than 1.5 percent reduction in tax benefits for only the wealthiest Americans, those with annual incomes in excess of $1 million, and would have meant about a $2,000 decrease in their refund. But the Republican majority opposed it on a party-line vote, choosing the rich over safer neighborhoods.

This issue, I believe, gives us a clear picture of exactly the difference between the Republicans and the Democrats in the House. If anyone had a doubt who was fighting for everyday Americans, they should not any more. If there was a question over which party is the champion for the middle class, the safe neighborhoods, and for job creation, that question has been answered because the majority was willing to sacrifice placing police officers on the streets in our neighborhoods in order to protect a small tax cut for only the richest Americans.

Since 2001, our police have been asked to do more with a billion dollars less in Federal funding so that the millionaires can keep their extra $2,053. Today, we will have another opportunity to stand with the vast majority of everyday Americans and families instead of millionaires, and I will be asking Members on both sides of the aisle to vote "no" on the previous question so we can try once again to allow the Obey amendment to be considered on the floor today.