

enough because we have given tax breaks to rich people and we have not prioritized education, and I have to address that briefly.

Public education in America is paid for in my State and in most States, about 67 percent of the property tax bill that is paid in my State goes to education. About two-thirds of every dime that taxpayers pay goes to public education. Our State's budget for public education is \$6 billion. The Federal Government in IDEA and title I puts about 7 percent in, and all those monies come from these taxpayers.

The fact that we gave a tax break to create jobs, growth and opportunity in this country inures itself to the benefit of education as much or more than what we are doing in this legislation because those taxpayers are school teachers. The tax break for a family of two or four making \$44,000 a year, which ends up being \$11,000 a year, can go to help pay that student loan off rather than send it to the government.

The corporation that takes benefits for expenses or takes benefits for advanced depreciation that is a partner in education is also somebody that is employing someone else who can buy a home and pay taxes to finance the schools. So I understand the argument, but to me it hurts that we take a bill that is quality and that is good and that everybody here would like to make a little better, and all of a sudden blame the very people who are funding education, who are paying for our teachers, who make it possible for us to have a nationwide public education system, end up being criticized that we cannot broaden the scope of the benefit we are offering in the forgiveness of the first \$17,500 of those who go into 40 percent title I schools and teach math or science or special education.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to come to the floor to say the American taxpayer is the reason we have quality public schools. America's school teachers are taxpayers, and the fact that our tax policy is for them to keep more of their money is just as much of an incentive to help them in the job that they perform to pay the taxes they pay as the forgiveness of a loan might have been. I enjoy working with every member of our committee, and I am proud to join with the other Members here today to see that we focus on our title I schools, we focus on quality teachers, and we focus on leaving no child behind.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. KILDEE) for managing both of these bills on the floor today and for his contributions to this legislation. I want to thank the gentleman from California (Mr. MCKEON), the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOEHNER), the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON), and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON) for all their cooperation on this legisla-

tion. I think these bills are consistent with what we have been saying about the importance of teachers in the classroom. I think they finally put some resources in place to help those individuals who want to become teachers and who want to remain teachers, and I would urge passage of this amendment.

Finally, I would say when we see a young child who can read and master these strokes, it is a wonderful feeling. I was very happy when I saw that my granddaughter was actually excited because Harry Potter was almost 800 pages. She was worried that it might be only 300 to 400 pages, but she was excited that the latest book was almost 800 pages so she could rip through it and read it. To see that kind of excitement on a child's face who is comfortable with reading is something that we hope for all of our Nation's children. Hopefully, this amendment will provide a little bit of help to do that.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). Pursuant to House Resolution 309, the previous question is ordered on the bill and on the amendment by the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER).

The question is on the amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER).

The amendment was agreed to.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on engrossment and third reading of the bill.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the passage of the bill.

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

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question are postponed.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2657, LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 311 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 311

Resolved, That upon the adoption of this resolution it shall be in order to consider in the House the bill (H.R. 2657) making appropriations for the Legislative Branch for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes. All points of order against the bill and against its consideration are waived. The bill shall be considered as read for amendment. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill to final passage without intervening motion except: (1) one hour of debate on the bill equally di-

vided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations; and (2) one motion to recommit.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), 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, H. Res. 311 is a closed rule providing for the consideration of H.R. 2657, the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act of 2004. H. Res. 311 provides 1 hour of debate in the House on the bill equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations. The resolution waives all points of order against the bill and against its consideration, and it provides one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by first noting the first-class work of the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee in bringing this legislation forward to the House floor. It was particularly refreshing to see the chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON), and the ranking minority member, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN), testifying in support of their work product before the House yesterday.

It is a fiscally responsible bill that will ultimately encourage greater productivity and meaningful savings, and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON) is to be commended for his management oversight that will certainly ensure that organizational changes are administered better within the legislative branch's agencies.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the largest appropriations bill and it is not the most important. However, this appropriations bill is important because it sets the tone for what the House leadership and the Republican House are working towards in terms of fiscal responsibility, effective organization, and result-focused management across the Federal Government.

In brief, this appropriations bill provides \$2.7 billion in funding for fiscal year 2004, including funding for the House, the Capitol Police, the Congressional Budget Office, the Architect of the Capitol, the Library of Congress, the Government Printing Office, and the General Accounting Office. It is important to note, however, that this \$2.7 billion figure is 1.2 percent less in total dollars than in the current fiscal year. This decrease represents a reduction in funding of almost \$34 million compared to the current fiscal year.

While Congress at times has demonstrated difficulty in restraining itself from spending money, it strikes me as a significant event that this bill before us today cuts the congressional

budget for fiscal year 2004. It is an indication that there is a continued commitment to make the government work more efficiently and that that commitment begins with ourselves in the legislative branch.

Mr. Speaker, this rule ensures the orderly consideration of the legislative branch funding legislation. I urge Members to support the rule so we may begin to debate this important legislation.

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

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

(Ms. SLAUGHTER asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) for yielding me the customary 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, each week in the Committee on Rules, I see my colleagues using procedure to kill substance and stifle debate. And again last night, the Committee on Rules passed a closed rule on the Legislative Branch Appropriations Act. This closed rule prohibits all amendments.

I am again concerned to see that our obligation to debate and deliberate is sacrificed in the name of efficiency. The legislative calendar for the month of July is very full. We have much work to do, but this does not diminish or negate our obligations as Members of this body.

The Committee on Rules rejected an amendment to transfer funds from the general administration account in order to carry out the Technology Assessments Act. The closed rule prevents offering that same amendment from the floor. We lose the opportunity to consider the amendment and to discuss the Office of Technology Assessment for the Congress and the office's mission to consider the impacts of technology.

The closed rule also bars an amendment that would apply the Buy American Act to procurement of manufactured goods by the House. Who could disagree that we should buy American-made products for our offices, especially when unemployment is at 6.4 percent, the highest it has been in 9 years, and the economy continues to limp along?

Should we have an opportunity to discuss whether or not the desks in our offices, paid for by the American taxpayers, should be made in America? Sure we should.

Other issues in this bill merit discussion. The funding level for the Capitol Police is lower than in the 2003 fiscal year, and the funding is almost \$80 million less than the Capitol Police requested. The closed rule provides only 1 hour of debate but will not allow this to be discussed. With the continual terrorist threats to the U.S., we should at least discuss the funding needs of the

Capitol Police. We ask them to put their lives at risk every day to protect our staff, our visitors, and us; yet we refuse to take the time to discuss their funding levels.

H.R. 2657 provides the Architect of the Capitol no additional funds for the Visitors Center. Today's Washington Post published an article on the delays and cost overruns on this project, which we are all concerned about. The Committee on Appropriations expressed serious concerns about the management of the project; and, indeed, there are certainly questions to be asked.

We still have to ask questions about the expatriate corporations benefiting from this massive construction project. All of these serious concerns warrant further deliberation on the funding levels for the Architect of the Capitol; but, unfortunately, the Committee on Rules continues to trample on the rights of the minority. This venerable institution warrants a fair, open, and deliberative process in considering legislation; and I regret this is another opportunity lost.

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

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

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 7 minutes to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), the ranking member of the Committee on Appropriations.

□ 1530

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I originally had intended to vote for this resolution and this bill, but then about an hour ago my staff brought it to my attention something which they discovered about this bill. Buried in the bill, in fact, not in the bill at all, but in the budget for the House Administrative Office, is a \$750,000 item that would begin to provide expanded dental care for Members of Congress and their staff July 4 of next year. No Member on this side of the aisle, to my knowledge, knew anything about it, and no member of our staff knew anything about it. I am only the senior Democrat on the Committee on Appropriations, and yet I did not know that that provision was at all tied into this bill.

So we called the majority staff and asked about it, and they told us that they did not know anything about it. I believe the person that my staff talked to on the majority side, but I do not know what that means in terms of who put that provision in the bill. I assume the tooth fairy. But somebody did. And until that provision is removed or until we have an assurance that it is going to be removed, and I understand that the majority is going to remove it, nobody on this side of the aisle intends to vote for this rule or the accompanying bill.

I happen not to have any objection to the idea that we provide dental coverage for every American in this country, but it was only 1 week ago when

this Congress chiseled on Medicare benefits and chiseled on prescription drug benefits for retired seniors in this country, and for us to then find out that somebody has the bright idea that while we are chiseling on benefits for everybody else in this society, we are going to have an expanded medical benefit for Members of Congress is more than I am going to swallow.

And I want to say something else. I am tired of people in Congress who want to provide benefits for themselves who will not provide those same benefits for the people we represent. I will never forget the experience I had last year when I went to a town named Antigo to open a small dental clinic for low-income people, and there I met a young woman whose husband had been sick for months. I think he had MS, but I am not sure. And she told me that there had been about 67 dentists in that four-county area. Only half of them would take Medicaid patients because of the low reimbursement rates. She told she went to every single one of those dentists trying to get some help to have the braces taken off of the teeth of her oldest child; could not find a single dentist to do it. So she finally held the kid down while the father took the braces off with a pair of pliers.

I have had a bellyful of Washington politicians who want to deny people like that the needed healthcare, and yet will countenance this kind of end run in this bill today. I do not know who knew about this, but, by God, somebody knew about it, and I do not believe it was anybody on our committee on either side of the aisle. But it is a disservice for whoever tried this. It is a disservice not just to the taxpayer, but to every single Member of this House on both sides of the aisle because those Members, after they voted for this bill, they would have found out that they had voted blindly for a bill which allowed this to happen, and the public would have been justifiably angry, and the Members would not have been to blame.

So I am glad that this is going to be taken out, but I am mad as hell that this ever happened. And I know the gentleman from Florida had nothing to do with it, and I know his staff had nothing to do with it, but I wish to God whoever did would fess up.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. OBEY. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I share the gentleman's concern about this, and we are going to fix it. It should not have happened. No Member knew about this, and I am not sure yet who was responsible for it, but we will find the person who was responsible, and they will be dealt with appropriately. That is not right. The Members should not have something snuck up on them that they were not aware of. So I share the gentleman's concern. We are going to fix it very quickly

here, and we will do our very best to find out just exactly how this happened and why.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his comments and his assurance. I know he is an honorable man, and I know that he would not have sneaked anything like this through. I want to know who did this, but I do not want it passed off to some low-ranking staffer in this place. Somebody got an order from somebody to do it, and every last Member of this House has a right to know who gave that order.

I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me this time.

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

I could not be more in agreement with the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY). We do have an amendment here we are going to ask unanimous consent to be added to the bill that would put limitation and delete that language so that no expansion of that service be available.

Let me just add this. This is not the first time I have seen this happen. Some years ago I was involved in the settlement of some final appropriations bills, and language was put into the bill to dramatically change the Native American health system, and it was found and stripped out, and it found its way back into the bill. When that happens at any level, the person who is responsible for it ought to be fired at that moment. I hope we can do that in this case.

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

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN).

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I was prepared to say as I did at the Committee on Rules that we do not really have a problem with this rule or this bill. It, in fact, is the first appropriations bill, at least that I am told, that is less than the previous year. That is because we are suspending some of the funding on the Capitol Visitors Center to make sure we have a full handle on all the additional expenditures, and we are not going forward quite as fast as the Capitol Police chief would like, but it does not imply necessarily any criticism in either respect. So this should have not been a problem. This should have been a rule that we could have probably voiced.

Not now. What we have is a serious affront to the institution. This was found by our appropriations staff person going through the bill. The majority staff was not even told about it. The Chair of the subcommittee was not even told about it. And it is just the kind of thing that makes the entire institution look bad.

We just had a bill yesterday that was not a bad bill. We wanted to make sure that current Federal employees were treated the same as Federal retirees, but it is a very sensitive issue given the fact that we just passed a prescrip-

tion drug program under Medicare that many of us feel is very inadequate. So when it is compared to the benefits that Federal employees get and the members of the legislative branch get, it looks even worse. But the proposal we have here to provide dental and vision benefits just for the legislative branch, the executive branch does not have them, is the kind of feather-bedding, of taking care of ourselves, of self-serving legislation that comes back to haunt us on both sides of the aisle. And I agree with the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY) and the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER), that this is serious stuff, and that we have got to find out where it happened and make sure it does not happen again.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
OFFERED BY MR. LINDER

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the pending resolution be amended by the form I have placed at the desk.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). The Clerk will report the amendment.

The Clerk read as follows:

Amendment in the nature of a substitute offered by Mr. LINDER:

Strike all after the resolved clause and insert:

That upon the adoption of this resolution it shall be in order without intervention of any point of order to consider in the House the bill (H.R. 2657) making appropriations for the Legislative Branch for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes. The bill shall be considered as read for amendment. The amendment specified in section 2 shall be considered as adopted. All points of order against the bill, as amended, are waived. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill, as amended, to final passage without intervening motion except: (1) one hour of debate on the bill, as amended, equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations; and (2) one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

SEC. 2. The amendment referred to in the first section of this resolution is as follows:
Page 6, after line 22, insert the following:

SEC. 102. None of the funds in this Act may be used to provide supplemental dental or vision health insurance benefits for Members and employees of the House of Representatives.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Georgia?

Mr. OBEY. Reserving the right to object, Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LINDER) to explain the impact of this amendment.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. OBEY. Further reserving the right to object, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, the impact of this amendment would just delete any possibility that any increases or expansions of dental care or vision care will be expanded.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, further reserving the right to object, I thank the gentleman for that explanation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear I do not oppose any member of this society being able to have dental coverage or vision coverage under their insurance program. I would be very happy if my employees had it. I think all employees ought to have that coverage. I think all Americans ought to have that coverage. So I do not want this language to be misinterpreted as meaning that we are opposed to the idea.

I think what we are all opposed to is the idea that this bill would slip this into law without having an open public debate about it so that it can be honestly dealt with and above-board in open-door sunlight fashion.

And I would like to yield to the gentleman again to comment on this. I would like him to explain to the House exactly what the process will be so that every Member can be confident that they know what they are doing when they vote on both the rule and the bill.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. OBEY. I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, as we have just learned in the last hour or so, and the chairman has just learned it here, someone somewhere slipped language into the leg branch bill that expands dental and vision health insurance benefits for Members and employees of the House. And I agree with the gentleman from Wisconsin. A fair and open discussion of expansion of these benefits for everyone is a legitimate course for this House to take and vote up or down, but to hide it in a bill and slide it in is simply inappropriate.

This language is eliminating language on the leg branch bill, and it says that none of the funds in this act may be used to provide that expansion of dental or vision benefits. It puts a limitation on those benefits where they are correct right now in the current form.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, further reserving the right to object, I would simply like to make one correction. My understanding is that it is not actually the language in the bill which provides this. My understanding is that the key language was contained in the budget of the Chief Administrative Officer, which is financed by this bill. So we actually have to go to that document in order to discover the offending language.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I believe the gentleman is correct, and if he would not mind yielding to the chairman of the subcommittee, he has something to say on it, too.

Mr. OBEY. Further reserving the right to object, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. KINGSTON).

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I want to say he is correct. There is no

specific language that just says funding in it. And I also want to say that as the chairman of the committee, it certainly would fall on me to know about this language. I have to confess I did not know about it, but I will certainly take responsibility and support the agreement to remove it.

□ 1545

I will also agree with the gentleman from Wisconsin that it may be a topic that at some point we should discuss. But, in the meantime, we should do it in open forum and not through the back door in this manner. This was put in as one of the administrative agency's budgets, but we do certainly agree to take it out.

Mr. LINDER. If the gentleman would yield further, I think we know where to start now.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, continuing my reservation, I thank the gentleman.

I just want to clear up one procedural question. I think Members need to know which action will adopt the language which strikes this from the bill. Will it be the adoption of the rule, or the passage of an amendment after the bill is under consideration?

Mr. LINDER. If the gentleman will yield further, it will be the adoption of the rule will strike the language.

Mr. OBEY. If Members want to assure this provision is not in the bill, and if they want to be on record voting against any possibility that this will happen under this bill, they will vote for the rule.

Mr. LINDER. That is correct. The adoption of the rule will put in place limiting language that will prevent any expansion of those benefits.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). Without objection, the amendment is adopted.

There was no objection.

Mr. LINDER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution, as amended.

The previous question was ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the resolution, as amended.

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

Ms. SLAUGHTER. 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. Pursuant to clause 6 of rule XVIII, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

LIMITING GENERAL DEBATE ON H.R. 2660, DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that any general debate in the Committee of the Whole on H.R. 2660 be limited to 3 hours, equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Appropriations.

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

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, could the gentleman provide us with the text of the motion? I think we know what he wants to do, but we do not have a copy. I would like to make certain that there is no inadvertent confusion.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. If the gentleman would yield, the purpose of the unanimous consent, since the rule is basically silent on the amount of time, is to guarantee, pursuant to our agreement, 3 hours in general debate, to be divided 1½ hours on your side and 1½ hours on our side. This is the unanimous consent request that would be required to accommodate that agreement.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, continuing my reservation, I presume that that will also allow us to reach a second agreement.

Mr. YOUNG of Florida. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, this does not address the other agreement on any time limit. We would have to propound that as well. This just guarantees that we would have 3 hours of general debate.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, I understand what the gentleman is doing.

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reservation of objection.

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

There was no objection.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2660, DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2004

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 312 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 312

Resolved, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (H.R. 2660) making appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related agencies for the fiscal year end-

ing September 30, 2004, and for other purposes. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived. General debate shall be confined to the bill. After general debate the bill shall be considered for amendment under the five-minute rule. All points of order against provisions in the bill are waived except section 217(b). Where points of order are waived against part of a section, points of order against a provision in another part of such section may be made only against such provision and not against the entire section. During consideration of the bill for amendment, the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole may accord priority in recognition on the basis of whether the Member offering an amendment has caused it to be printed in the portion of the Congressional Record designated for that purpose in clause 8 of rule XVIII. Amendments so printed shall be considered as read. At the conclusion of consideration of the bill for amendment the Committee shall rise and report the bill to the House with such amendments as may have been adopted. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Ohio (Ms. PRYCE) is recognized for 1 hour.

Ms. PRYCE of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), 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 312 is an open rule which provides for 1 hour of general debate, equally divided between the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. REGULA) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. OBEY), on H.R. 2660, the fiscal year 2004 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related agencies appropriations bill.

The rule waives all points of order against consideration of the bill and against provisions in the bill, except as specified in this resolution. After general debate, any Member wishing to offer an amendment may do so, as long as it complies with the regular rules of the House.

The bill shall be read for amendment by paragraph, and the rule authorizes the Chair to accord priority in recognition to Members who have preprinted their amendments in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

Finally, the rule permits the minority to offer a motion to recommit, with or without instructions.

Mr. Speaker, we have before us today the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations act for fiscal year 2004, a funding package that makes good on our promises to America's children, workers and families. Before I summarize the main components of this package, a larger context must be established so that Members of both sides of the aisle fully understand what we are debating here and what is at issue today.