Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 1591.

The bill is a bonanza for numerous factions of the majority party and

many special interest groups. You want an increase in the minimum wage?

If you pass this bill, it is done. You want agricultural disaster

relief that occurred more than 2 years ago? You pass this bill, it gets

done. You want billions of dollars for homeland security initiatives

without going through the regular process? Pass this bill, and it is

done.

Let me be clear, I supported an increase in the minimum wage, and I

supported it in the appropriations committee last year. I have voted to

support relief for our farmers, and I do believe we have to increase

our ability to secure airports and our ports, but not through this

bill.

I do want to say a word of support and thanks to Chairman Murtha and

Chairman Obey for highlighting Walter Reed and sending a message that

we are not going to close the hospital. We are going to keep it open.

We are going to fix it up. We are going to provide the money. That was

an important provision in this bill.

I have constituents who are leaving Illinois shortly and will soon be

back in harm's way. I have never voted against legislation that

provided funding for them to safely execute their missions. I trust

they recognize what is happening here tonight. They know that we will

always work to give them the resources they need, but we will not

undercut their efforts by telling our enemies that the United States

does not have the fortitude nor the political will to continue our

support for the Iraqi people and their government.

What is the benefit to giving our enemies a troop withdrawal date

that they can circle on their calendar? Why would we give them the aid

and comfort of knowing that if they continue their attacks for just 11

more months, the U.S. military will leave Iraq, and it will be under

their control?

We must pass a clean supplemental that is focused on meeting military

needs. We must quit. We must quit being 435 Commanders in Chief and

allowing our military leaders on the ground in Iraq to continue to use

their skills and expertise to prosecute the war free of political

interference. We must acknowledge that the needs of our men and women

in uniform are more important than deals made here, campaign sound

bites and political grandstanding. We must remember those who

sacrificed so much for this war effort and allow their fellow soldiers

to continue the mission.

We have a job to do here. I urge my colleagues to vote against this

bloated, misguided bill and return our focus to where it should have

been all along, the needs of our troops.

Even with $25 billion in extraneous, non-emergency spending added to

sweeten the pot, a big problem remains. You can dress it up all you

want, but Members, regardless of party affiliation, know a bad bill

when they see it. Leadership may be able to lard up this bill to gain

votes, but apparently it hasn't been enough because they still don't

have the votes.

I am very disappointed, but not surprised, that really surprised,

that we are operating here today under a closed rule. I know Members of

both parties would like to be able to offer amendments to try to

salvage this legislation, but too many arms have been twisted and too

many promises have been made to allow any changes now. One amendment

passes, and the whole bill unravels. Apparently, one vote, up or down,

is all you get when you consider a $125 billion package.

Let me be clear. I support an increase in the minimum wage. I support

providing relief to farmers when disaster strikes. I support increased

funding to improve the airport security process. However, none of these

things is worth my supporting a bill that I truly believe will put the

lives of our troops in danger.

During the Appropriations Committee markup of this bill last week,

Chairman Murtha included in his Manager's amendment the text of my

amendment that prohibits the use of funds to close the Walter Reed Army

Medical Center. I am grateful for his assistance about this issue that

I consider to be vital to the care of our returning wounded military

personnel. But even the inclusion of my own amendment in this bill is

not enough to make me hold our troops in combat hostage to political

grandstanding.

It is unconscionable to me that this House assumes that we can manage

the war better than our military leaders. We cannot stand here in the

protected environment of the House Chamber and tie the hands of our

President and our combatant commanders on the ground in Iraq. We cannot

promise our troops the operational money they need to safely do their

jobs while announcing their withdrawal date to our enemies. Congress

cannot and must not micromanage the war effort.

I have constituents who are leaving Illinois shortly and will soon be

back in harm's way. I have never voted against any legislation that

provided funding for them to safely execute their missions. I trust

that they recognize what is happening here today. They know that I will

always work to give them the resources they need, but I will not

undercut their efforts by telling our enemies that the United States

does not have the fortitude or political will to continue our support

for the Iraqi people and their new government.

What is the benefit to giving our enemies a troop withdrawal date

that they can circle on a calendar? Why would we give them the aid and

comfort of knowing that if they continue their attacks for just 11 more

months, the U.S. military will leave and Iraq will be theirs to

control?

If enough votes are gained and enough arms are twisted and this

legislation reaches the President's desk, he will veto it, with my

strong support. Our troops will suffer while the majority continues to

try to unite their deeply divided caucus. Our troops will continue

their missions as best they can, but how long do you plan on making

them wait for the funding they need?

We must pass a clean supplemental that focuses on meeting military

needs. We must quit trying to be 435 Commanders-in-Chief and allow our

military leaders on the ground in Iraq to continue to use their skill

and expertise to prosecute the war, free of political interference. We

must acknowledge that the needs of our men and women in uniform are

more important than backroom deals, campaign sound bites, and political

grandstanding. We must remember those who sacrificed so much for this

war effort and allow their fellow soldiers to continue their mission.

We have a job to do here. I urge my colleagues to vote against this

bloated, misguided bill and return our focus to where it should have

been all along: the needs of our troops.