I appreciate the Speaker's help in this

matter, but in the meantime, I appreciate my colleague yielding.

Mr. Speaker, the wheels have finally come off the appropriations

process. One need only to look at the sorry state of affairs in which

we find ourselves as we address these appropriations bills.

Earlier today, the House passed a Transportation-HUD appropriations

conference report that is $3 billion over the budget request. The

President has said he will veto this legislation.

Tomorrow the House will vote to sustain the President's veto on a

bloated Labor-HHS bill that is $10 billion over the budget request.

That will essentially send the bill back to the drawing board.

And if that is not enough, consider this. It is now 3 days after

Veterans Day and there is still no sign of the majority moving to

considered the MilCon-VA bill, a freestanding bill identical to the

MilCon-VA conference report that was removed from the Labor-HHS

conference report by a point of order in the Senate, by the way, in the

other body.

That bill was introduced by Congressman Wicker this week. This

legislation, which the President said he would sign, could be brought

to the House floor today. It now appears that a Democrat majority has

no intent of bringing this legislation to the floor before

Thanksgiving.

The appropriations process this year has been reduced to what

Shakespeare might refer to as ``a tale full of sound and fury,

signifying nothing.''

For all of the time and energy put into these bills this year by

Members and our overworked, highly professional staff, the end result

thus far is all sound and fury and very little to show for it.

That leads us to the legislation we are now considering, the so-

called bridge fund. Frankly, that legislation is so ill-conceived and

damaging to our troops, I hardly know where to begin.

First, let me say that we learned that this bill would be considered

by the Rules Committee while we were waiting for the Rules Committee

hearing on the THUD conference report to begin last night. I was given

no notice whatsoever, nor was I provided any opportunity to testify. It

is a sad state of affairs when the ranking member of the Appropriations

Committee isn't even given the courtesy of paper notice

to testify on legislation as important as this. I can't imagine the

wails and screaming I would have heard last year if the ranking member

had been put in that position.

The House is being asked to consider a funding bill that reflects the

priorities of Speaker Pelosi and a deeply divided, extremely left-

leaning Democratic Caucus. It attempts to bridge these widening

divisions over the war in Iraq through providing funding only on the

condition that troops are withdrawn beginning 30 days after the bill's

enactment.

Our troops are badly in need of funding to continue their mission,

but this legislation ties the hands of our Commander in Chief during a

time of war, places military decisions in the hands of the politicians,

and micromanages our combatant commanders in whom we place the ultimate

responsibility for prosecuting military actions.

If the majority's goal is to end the war or withdraw our troops, then

that should be addressed in separate legislation. The majority cannot

have it both ways, pretending on the one hand to support our troops

while on the other hand undercutting our ability to prosecute their

mission.

Men and women of good conscience can disagree about the war in Iraq,

but on one thing we must all agree: Our men and women in uniform must

continue to receive our unqualified support and the resources they need

to complete their mission successfully.

By appeasing the wishes of the Out of Iraq Caucus, the Democrat

majority has chosen to place partisan politics above the lives and

well-being of our troops in harm's way. This action is reckless and

irresponsible. There is absolutely no reason why a clean bridge fund

could not have been included within the DOD conference report which the

President signed yesterday. Again, the Democrat majority chose to place

politics ahead of our troops.

My colleagues, consider carefully the consequences of our actions

here today. Passage of the bridge fund legislation in its present form

will signal to the insurgents and terrorists that the United States

doesn't have the political will to continue supporting the fledgling

Iraqi democracy. Al Qaeda and other enemies of freedom will simply lay

in wait until our troops are withdrawn. And with the collapse of this

fragile democracy, our efforts, and the sacrifices of our troops, will

have been for nothing.

There is no question that the President will veto this bill. In the

meantime, our troops will face the uncertainty resulting from the

majority's mixed signals and lack of a clear commitment.

I urge my colleagues to support our troops and oppose this

legislation.