

Mr. Speaker, investigations and impeachment proceedings have dominated news of the 105th Congress. The disappointing reality is that, by scheduling less legislative business than any Congress in a generation, the Republican leadership has provided little else for the press to cover. People on both sides of the aisle will admit as much with little or no prompting.

This year we have not even passed a budget resolution, the first time in 24 years that Congress has failed to provide this framework. When division and confusion arose in the Republican caucus, they chose to abdicate their responsibility rather than work with the Democrats to put together a budget compromise.

Over what issues did the Republicans allow the budget process to be held hostage? Conservative extremists brought fiscal planning to a halt for days to fight over such policies as whether federal health insurance recipients should be guaranteed contraception coverage. Somewhat ironic for people who claim to be against abortion.

Because of all the delays and infighting, I am now being asked to vote on one spending bill that encompasses a third of the entire federal budget. While we are still in the process of learning what is in the bill, what is known is alarming. This bill provides \$7 billion in excess of last year's budget agreement and adds an additional \$21 billion in so-called emergency spending, stretching the definition of 'emergency' to the breaking point. It also increases military spending by nearly \$9 billion--too much, and for the wrong items. The Republicans chose to provide questionable funds for the 'star wars' program, while ignoring the need for adequate compensation and retirement for military personnel.

I must reluctantly vote against this omnibus bill. I say 'reluctantly' because there are a few very positive provisions in the bill. Democrats have managed to win additional funds for new teachers and a number of environmental programs and these gains should not be minimized. However, I cannot condone the process by which this legislation was created or its misplaced priorities.

I have searched for any rationale to justify this fundamental breakdown of Congress. There was, however, no national emergency, there was no physical crisis, and there was no attempt at bipartisan cooperation. Instead, inaction, special interest pressure, and members' desires to go home have allowed us to accept this unusual process.

Hopefully, something positive will come from this episode. Perhaps the American public will

Speaking about the Omnibus Spending Bill

Monday, 19 October 1998 15:00

pay more attention to how their tax dollars are managed. Perhaps these issues will become an object of attention during the election process. Perhaps these developments will even inspire future fiscal cooperation, similar to the cooperation which has successfully fended off environmental attacks and continues to attempt to restore some degree of civility to congressional operations.

Every Member of Congress should be motivated to prevent a repeat of this failed budget process in the 106th Congress, regardless of which party is in charge. I am inspired to begin this conversation now, while the memories are still fresh. This bill be one of my highest priorities of the new year.