

LARSON OPPOSES DEEP CUTS TO JOB TRAINING, EDUCATION AND HEALTH AND UNDERFUNDING OF ENERGY ASSISTANCE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) on Wednesday rejected the revised conference report on the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Act for FY 2006 (H.R. 3010), calling it a virtual reread of the bill that moderate Republicans joined Democrats in defeating a month ago. It passed Wednesday by a vote of 215 to 213.

The package cuts \$1.6 billion for essential education, health care and jobs programs on top of an additional \$1.4 billion from an anticipated 1 percent across-the board cut for a total of \$3 billion. It freezes the woefully under-funded Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Enforcement of child support payments by scofflaw parents are another of the legislation's casualties. College loans have stayed flat for the past four years, while tuition and board has escalated 34 percent.

The Republican-led Congress is literally leaving fellow Americans in the cold to fend for themselves, Larson said. Heating prices are up 25 to 45 percent this winter while millions are out of work or have had to replace good-paying jobs that have gone overseas with minimum wage work and no health insurance. In New England and the Midwest, early winter temperatures have already plunged to the single digits. What is the 85-year-old widow, the single-mother with an infant or the family of four whose weekly income just covers the hike in rent and food prices supposed to do for heat? Congress's answer is bundle up next to the oven because the help went to record-profiting oil companies who needed more break tax breaks and subsidies.

The reductions are part of \$50 billion in cuts House Republicans want to help offset more than \$70 billion in cuts that will largely benefit the wealthy, including a measure by the House leadership to extend the yet-unexpired 15 percent tax rate for capital gains and dividends. The tax cuts will still exceed the spending cuts, increasing the gargantuan deficit by billions of dollars.

This revised conference report is no more than a cynical attempt to placate the minimum number of members to push ahead cuts that put the poor, the struggling and the forgotten further behind. These cuts to education, health care, food programs, job training are a recipe for despair. They further widen the lopsided income gulf. They push the destitute further into poverty and deny the educational and training opportunities that will help them get out. It is unconscionable to take food out of the mouths of children, to take away health care from pregnant women, to refuse job training to those who have been laid off in order to make the very richest richer.

In education, the spending bill further shortchanges funding of federally-mandated testing standards for teachers, tutoring and instruction. It decreases support to schools for special education students and technology. It cuts head starts and freezes for the fourth year in a row after-school programs, both of which serve only a fraction of the children eligible.

Health care freezes and cuts extend to clinics, training for health care workers, nutritional programs for the elderly, medical care for pregnant women and inoculations for young children.

Reductions also fall on job readiness programs, skills retraining and employment service offices that help the unemployed find new jobs and obtain benefits while they are looking.

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