

**Obey Statement:**  
**LEGISLATIVE BRANCH APPROPRIATIONS**  
**ACT, 2006**  
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Mr. Chairman, I know this seems a strange thing to say on a bill as small as the bill to fund the congressional budget, but I honestly believe, because of the attachment of the proposal for the continuity of Congress, that this bill is by far the worst bill to come to the floor in this session of Congress.

I believe that that continuity of representation provision attached to this bill is an assault on constitutional government. I believe it is an assault on checks and balances. It is an assault on the rule of law. It is an invitation to one-man rule and dictatorship. I think it is profoundly misguided, profoundly misgotten, and I think a profound disservice is done in not having months and months of hearings with constitutional scholars before such a drastic proposal is brought before the House.

I think there is a very good reason that the Senate has not taken it up. It is because it is a turkey of a proposal. It could leave us literally with 75 and 80 percent of the congressional districts in this country unrepresented in a time of crisis, at a time of terrorist attack, and unrepresented in the halls of Congress, and I think that is a bad way to do business.

What I would like to do now is to talk about another problem in this bill. That is the Congressional Visitors Center. I really believe that the Congressional Visitors Center has been mismanaged in such spectacular fashion that it is really sort of a metaphor for the way that the entire Federal budget deficit has been mismanaged, and let me explain what I mean.

This project originally started as a \$95 million project to have a modest expansion of the Capitol, to give tourists an opportunity to come in and see a movie about what the Congress was all about before they visited the Capitol. But the security assault on this Capitol and 9/11 has, in my view, been used as an excuse to expand this operation. We have also had other efforts from the Library of Congress and other institutions to further expand this proposition; and so as a result, today, this project is a \$500 million-plus project. It is more than a year behind schedule, and I think it is wasting taxpayers' money and wasting an opportunity that we had to provide much-needed usable space for the Congress at the same time.

What is happening out on the East Front is that over 2 acres of underground space is being added to the Capitol. Some of that is being added for purposes of a visitors center and some of the other space is being added for the purpose of expanding space under control of the Senate and the House to do their work.

We all know that this Congress needs more working space. In my view, the number one need of the Congress for working space is the need for additional rooms for conference committees between the Senate and the House because most of our hearings, especially on the Committee on Appropriations. When I came here, they were held behind closed doors. The press was not in, the public was not in. So there was plenty of room for a few people to get behind closed doors and work out deals and that is not the way government is supposed to work today.

Today, when we have a conference committee, the press has a right to be there. We need our staffs there, and the public has the right to be there, too. We have no real room in the Capitol for that kind of facility.

This is an opportunity to create that kind of room. Instead, what has happened? Instead, the only appreciable room of any quality in the new House space is what is called the House hearing room, but in plain language, that room is really a media center. That is going to be where the press focuses whenever there is a hearing in that room because it will have all of the creature comforts for the press. That room will have ample room for one hearing, one presentation, and whoever runs the Congress will be able to decide what subject it is that gets that attention. If you are trying to hold another public hearing on another subject in the Capitol, you are going to be stuck in tiny rooms that are worthless in terms of public access.

When I visited the visitors center, I asked the Architect why, with these vaulted ceilings that you have set aside for this hearing room, why could you not simply reduce the height of those rooms and at least provide two rooms of approximately the same size so that we had enough overflow room for the committees to do our work and to have conference committees? I have yet to get an answer from the Architect's office.

That is my problem. My problem is that with all of this space being created, much of it is not usable for the purpose that we need it used for.

Then we come to the other portion of the add-on, which is the portion devoted to the visitors center. Originally, that visitors center was supposed to have two media theaters so that the public could come in, see a short film about the Congress, and then be on its way.

Here is the problem. We have those two small orientation theaters, but in addition to that, we have this huge congressional auditorium, which is going to seat 450-plus people. I asked the Architect, and this is a vaulted theater, I asked why do we need another theater in the Capitol? What I was told by the Architect is, "Well, you can bring in large constituency groups." I would like to know how many Members of the House have ever brought 500 people into the Capitol. I do not think there are going to be many people would raise their hands.

The second thing the Architect told me is that, "Well, we need a place for where the House of Representatives can meet when the House Chamber is being remodeled."

That I found a might strange, because we have just redecorated the Committee on Ways and Means room in the Longworth Building. That room was originally created to serve as an alternative meeting place for the House of Representatives when we had to repair this Chamber. So we have already got a spare room.

In addition, we have another spare room I cannot talk about because it is classified, but it is being built off campus somewhere. So in essence we will have three spare rooms. I do not know how much the off-campus room is costing the taxpayers or how much the Committee on Ways and Means room cost the taxpayers, but this room is going to cost a bundle.

I keep asking ``What is the real purpose for this room?" You finally go back 10 years and look at the original plans, what do we find out. We find out that this was originally included in the plans at the request of the Library of Congress because they wanted another theater to show movies and give presentations. That might be nice for them to have, but this project is already 400 percent over original cost. I do not think it makes any sense. I think this is the last chance that we are going to have to reconfigure this center so we have some additional working space instead of the Taj Mahal show space we are going to have.

Another thing I do not like, we have been told we are likely to have three congressional seals in the new visitors center. Those seals, I have been told, will cost up to a million bucks. Does any Member really want to take the political heat when taxpayers find out that somebody is talking about spending \$1 million on three congressional seals? Do Members remember the Cain that was raised when marble floors were put in four of our elevators in the Capitol? Does anybody have any memory? I would like to think so, but I guess not.

Mr. Chairman, I consider myself to be an institutional man. I usually support this piece of legislation; but out of frustration, I am not going to support it today because I think this Capitol Visitors Center, when it is finally built, is going to draw flies in terms of bad stories about waste of taxpayer money, misuse of space, and we are going to wind up not having enough room for the principal function of government. If this is, indeed, supposed to be a working Capitol, then we ought to be able to do better than this floor plan.

I really believe this package has been brought to us by staff who do not really understand how committees work and do not really understand the principal needs of this institution. This is the last time we are going to have a chance to repair this package and make it more usable for the 100 years at least that it will be used. I urge Members to vote against this bill so we can start over.

The text of H.R. 2985 with regard to the Capitol Visitor Center is as follows:  
Capitol Visitor Center

For an additional amount for the Capitol Visitor Center project, \$36,900,000, to remain available until expended: Provided, That the Architect of the Capitol may not obligate any of the funds which are made available for the Capitol Visitor Center project without an obligation plan approved by the Committees on Appropriations of the Senate and House of Representatives.