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LARSON: GOP OMNIBUS BILL BREAKS PROMISES; HURTS SENIORS, VETERANS, STUDENTS AND WORKERS

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today issued the following statement on the GOP fiscal year 2004 omnibus spending bill, H.R. 2673. The \$820 billion measure combines seven appropriations bills: Agriculture, Commerce-Justice-State, District of Columbia, Foreign Operations, Labor-Health and Human Services-Education, Transportation-Treasury, and Veterans-Housing and Urban Development. Larson voted against the bill, which passed the House 242-176.

"This massive omnibus spending bill is an incredibly irresponsible way to govern and is no way to conduct the appropriations process. The substance of this bill hurts seniors, veterans, and workers as well as shortchanges key priorities including education and manufacturing support.

The Majority again broke their promise to allow prescription drug reimportation by dropping this provision from the bill. Coupled with the ineffective provisions in the recently passed Medicare reform bill, the Republican Leadership has completely blocked any chance of reimportation and, once again, left seniors out in the cold.

"The bill badly shortchanges veterans healthcare, providing \$700 million less than the Republicans promised in their own budget resolution. Veterans will also continue to have to wait months for their benefit and compensation applications to be processed because of a \$6 million cut in funding needed to process applications more quickly. There are currently 448,000 claims pending with the average time to process a claim at 157 days, an outrageously long time to make our veterans wait.

"At a time when families are having to work harder and harder to make ends meet, the bill reverses previous Congressional votes and permits a Bush administration effort that will deny overtime pay to 8 million Americans. This bill paves the way for pay cuts millions of American workers including police officers, firefighters, and nurses. As part of the 11th hour backroom deal, the Republican Majority has also refused to extend unemployment benefits, meaning that 2.2 million Americans that have not found work will begin to lose their benefits shortly after Christmas.

"It leaves school children behind by providing \$7.8 billion less than was promised to fund the No Child Left Behind law. This legislation falls far short of lifting the financial burden off of states and municipalities when it comes to funding the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, providing 45 percent less for IDEA than was included in the reauthorization bill passed earlier this year.

"This legislation slashes funding levels for the Manufacturing Extension Partnership from \$108 million last year to just \$39 million this year, effectively gutting an effort to strengthen the American manufacturing industry. The initiative offered a range of services to small U.S. manufacturers including facility modernization and employee training as well

as helping them to adopt advanced manufacturing technologies to stay competitive."

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