

Mr. Chair, I cannot support this bill in its current form.

It's telling that every domestic program in this year's budget is taking a hit--in some cases, a huge hit. The House majority seems perfectly fine with cutting grant funding for our firefighters, our cops, and other first responders. The House majority thinks it's good public policy to cut programs designed to help the most vulnerable in our society, but any suggestion that we need fewer defense contractors provokes howls of protest. Any suggestion that national security-related corporate welfare should be ended--and I'm referring to the over-budget F-35 program as a prime example--evinces the most hysterical rhetoric about "weakening America's defenses."

Let's deal with the facts. We spend more on defense than most of the rest of the world combined. We won the Cold War over 20 years ago, yet this budget continues to fund unnecessary and radically over-cost Cold War legacy weapons programs that we don't need, can't afford and won't help us deal with the kind of terrorist threat we face now and into the future. The House majority is throwing the poor under the bus even as it throws a kiss to the military-industrial complex.

The bill also continues funding a war that should have been over long ago. As I've said since 2009, our continued presence in Afghanistan is prolonging the conflict, not helping end it. The President's ill-considered assassination-by-drone policy in Pakistan, which now features Vietnam war-style "signature strikes" against groups of individuals without verification of their status as terrorists, has led to the deaths of an increasing number of innocent civilians. Indeed, the escalation of the drone strikes and the loosening of the intelligence standards under which they operate comes even after Osama bin Laden was killed last year.

The original rationale for invading Afghanistan--getting bin Laden and his associates--no longer exists, yet this bill continues to fund a war whose purpose has clearly been achieved. There is perhaps no greater example of a policy on autopilot than our war in Afghanistan, which is one of the many reasons I do not support this bill.