

APPROPRIATIONS: 'No point' for spending markups in current climate, Obey says (07/17/2008)

Allison Winter, *E&E Daily* reporter

House Appropriations Chairman David Obey (D-Wis.) does not intend to comply with GOP requests to hold markups this month on environment and other spending bills.

The fiery chairman told reporters yesterday that he is still inclined to hold off on further markups, despite recent requests from Republicans to proceed on the measures overseeing fiscal 2009 spending for the federal government.

As Obey sees it, Republicans are still holding up the bills in three different ways: a spate of amendments, requests to change the markup schedule and President Bush's threats to veto any bill that exceeds his budget request. With those factors in place, committee markups and floor action are not worthwhile, he said.

"At some point you realize you've got a filibuster on, no matter what you want to call it," Obey told reporters yesterday. "There is no point in putting the House through that."

The appropriations markup process, already behind schedule, ground to a halt last month after Republicans attempted to replace the Labor, Health and Education spending bill with the Interior bill at a committee markup. Infuriated, Obey called off that markup and said he would not hold further meetings as long as Republicans persisted with such maneuvers.

Republicans want to force consideration of the Interior bill so they can offer amendments on oil and gas leasing. Appropriations Committee ranking member Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.) attempted to make amends earlier this week with a letter that said Republicans would not impede other pending appropriations bills, as long as Obey would pledge to hold a markup on the Interior bill ([E&E Daily](#), July 16).

But Obey characterized the letter as a political stunt, not a move toward a compromise.

"Look, if somebody's serious, they don't have to send letters -- they can pick up the phone and sit down and talk," Obey said.

"These fellows, they've strung us out 12 separate times and they have every intention of doing that again," Obey said. "They are certainly entitled to take some political shots, but they are not entitled to make a political playpen out of this, and that is what they have done."

The remarks came after a subcommittee markup on the foreign operations bill, where Republicans and Democrats danced around the issue of the eventual fate of the measure. Republicans offered a number of amendments -- all of which failed on party lines -- saying they wanted to make their concerns heard at the subcommittee level, since a full committee markup was uncertain.

Despite his frustration, Obey said he still wants to complete work on at least some of the spending bills -- those the White House would raise the biggest objections to if they did not finish them. He declined to give any details on his plans but said there is no way they could include final passage of each of the spending bills.

"We are kidding ourselves if we think there is enough time in this session to put everything through committee and the House," Obey said. "We're simply realizing the reality of what we can do in the next two weeks; that is determined by the White House and the attitude and conduct of the minority."

Five of the House's 12 spending bills have cleared the full committee, and none of those have made it to House floor, making it the first time in 23 years that the House has failed to pass at least one regular appropriations bill by mid-July.