Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, today we have a bill which the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) has brought to the floor, which we believe is a good bill, supported by the gentleman from Ohio (Chairman OXLEY). I urge my colleagues to support this rule, as well as the Oxley manager's amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 54, the Congressional Gold Medal Enhancement Act of 2005.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SESSIONS). Pursuant to House Resolution 42 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 54.

□ 1043

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 54) to amend title 31, United States Code, to provide reasonable standards for congressional gold medals, and for other purposes, with Mr. LAHOOD in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. OXLEY) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. OXLEY).

Mr. OXLEY. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Today, I rise in support of H.R. 54, the Congressional Gold Medal Enhancement Act of 2005, authored by the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE), and urge its immediate passage. The legislation is a commonsense effort to maintain the prestige of this award.

□ 1045

As the Members know, the gold medal is the highest civilian honor bestowed by Congress. It has been awarded to a long and distinguished line of individuals who have made significant contributions to this country, beginning with General George Washington even before the Declaration of Independence. Recipients have included civil rights leaders, cultural icons and leaders in science.

But a disturbing trend has emerged since the gentleman from Delaware (Mr. CASTLE) sensibly reformed the commemorative coin program a decade ago. Until that point, Congress approved the awarding of only a few, usually one or two, gold medals each Congress, but approved as many as a dozen commemorative coin programs, often at great cost to taxpayers. Chairman CASTLE's reforms eliminated the cost to the taxpayers, restoring the dignity to the commemorative coin program. He also instituted a requirement that two-thirds of the House should sponsor legislation for either commemorative coins or gold medals before consideration could take place so that support would be broad and bipartisan.

Those reforms have been successful, but denied the opportunity to enact numerous commemorative coin programs, Congress increasingly has turned to the gold medal program, and we now find ourselves in a situation of having fewer honorees for commemorative coins than we do from gold medals. During the last Congress, only three commemorative coins were struck, and we approved five medal programs honoring seven individuals. By comparison, in the first 123 years of the gold medal, only 45 people were so honored.

Mr. Chairman, all medal honorees to date have been good choices and well deserving of the honor. However, we could be faced with a quandary: Either approve a medal for an individual who has had some accomplishment, but probably is not at the same level as a General Washington or a Jonas Salk, or else decline to approve the legislation.

We should not let ourselves get into that situation, Mr. Chairman. Chairman CASTLE's common-sense limit of two gold medals a year, and limiting the recipients to individuals rather than groups, maintains the prestige and honor of receiving a Congressional Gold Medal. Combined with the requirement of a minimum cosponsorship level of two-thirds of the House is the best way to preserve the integrity of the gold medal.

At the appropriate time, I will offer a manager's amendment that seeks to change the effective date of this legislation from December 31 of this year to immediately upon enactment so that the rules for awarding medals would remain the same throughout this Congress and not change midsession.

Mr. Chairman, I urge immediate passage of this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CROWLEY. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my disappointment that this legislation is not being offered under an open rule. In fact, the chairman of the full Committee on Financial Services, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. OXLEY), who holds jurisdiction over this legislation, even requested during his Committee on Rules testimony last night a more open process for debate on this bill, and I thank the chairman for those comments.

I would also like to take a moment to specifically thank and welcome our new Committee on Rules ranking member, my friend and colleague, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), who will serve as a true and tireless fighter for Democrats and our rights in the minority on the Committee on Rules over the next 2 years.

Mr. Chairman, the bill we are debating today, H.R. 54, the Congressional Gold Medal Enhancement Act of 2005, while introduced in the previous Congress, was never debated in committee because no hearings were convened, and no markup was held. And given that the Committee on Financial Services has yet to even hold its organizational meeting for the 109th Congress, the committee has obviously not yet had an opportunity to consider this issue carefully. In my view, we are rushing to act on an issue that does not represent a problem.

Having said that, Democrats are open to debating and voting on this legislation. In the last several Congresses, Congressional Gold Medals have been considered in the House under a well-established and a bipartisan process that works well. Regular order for consideration of gold medals involves the need, under the rules of the Committee on Financial Services, to gain the cosponsorship of two-thirds of the House before the legislation is considered in committee, a full two-thirds sponsorship of the House before it is considered in committee.

The bar for consideration for gold medals is set relatively high for a reason: Gaining a two-thirds cosponsorship ensures that a solid bipartisan majority of the House is in full support of honoring a particularly noteworthy individual or individuals.

Under the rule today, I plan to offer two amendments. The first amendment would raise the number of gold medals from two per calendar year to six per Congress, or an overall increase of two medals per Congress. This is especially key, as in the 108th Congress we awarded five Congressional Gold Medals. They went to Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of Great Britain; Dr. Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women; Jackie Robinson, the first black player in Major League Baseball; the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, posthumously, and his widow Coretta Scott King, the civil rights icons; and the posthumous awarding to Reverend Joseph A. DeLaine, Harry and Eliza Briggs, and Levi Pearson, the leaders in our Nation's efforts to desegregate public