



*(December 21, 2015)*

In order to further improve the lines of communication and to respond to the concerns between the National VA Council and you our members, I have established a National VA Council Briefing. This NVAC Briefing will bring you the latest news and developments within DVA and provide you with the current status of issues this Council is currently addressing. I believe that this NVAC Briefing will greatly enhance the way in which we communicate and the way in which we share new information, keeping you better informed.

**Alma L. Lee**  
National VA Council, President

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**In This Briefing: Congress Passes \$1.15 Trillion Spending Bill**  
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Reported By: Medpage Today

## Congress passes massive spending bill and tax package, bill moves to the White House

WASHINGTON -- Congress passed a \$1.15 trillion spending bill and a \$620 billion "tax extender" bill on Friday morning that will determine how the government doles out its dollars through next September.

The package includes a \$2 billion spending increase for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), postpones implementation of a medical device tax and the controversial "Cadillac tax" — a tax on high-cost employer sponsored health plans — for 2 years, and delays the health insurer excise tax for 1 year.

The House passed the tax bill and the spending bill separately, after weeks of negotiation, between Thursday and Friday morning. Then the Senate lumped the two bills together approving them in a 65-33 vote on Friday morning.

The tax extender bill, one portion of the package, made several tax cuts permanent, including a provision that would eliminate \$113 billion in taxes on research and experimentation over 10 years.

Several "deal-breaker" riders, including a provision to defund Planned Parenthood, were not included in the final package.

The bill is a win for Republicans because it ramped up military spending and nullified a 4-decade ban on exporting U.S. oil. But far-right conservatives who pledged a full repeal and not a delay of some Obamacare provisions, such as the “Cadillac tax” and the medical device tax, may be disappointed.

Democrats also reaped important gains, winning concessions from Republicans in the form of tax cuts for low-income families and small businesses. Many center-leftists who were never thrilled with the tax on high-cost insurance plans will also view the Cadillac tax postponement as a victory.

“NIH really was the big winner here,” said [Loren Adler](#), research director at the Committee for a Responsible Budget.

Two things led to this giant payout for the agency: the sequester release deal, which gave Congress the flexibility to raise NIH’s budget; and the broadly popular 21st Century Cures Act — a bill that aims to hasten the development of new medical therapies, which relies heavily on NIH investment.

With regard to the Affordable Care Act, [G. William “Bill” Hoagland](#), senior vice president for the Bipartisan Policy Center, said he was disappointed by the two-year delay to the Cadillac tax.

While acknowledging that the design couldn’t have worked, Hoagland said, “If we’re really truly talking about controlling costs we have to have something like the Cadillac tax redesign going forward.”

But such delays “kick the can” down the road until the next election.