



*(December 17, 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 reaches \$1.1 trillion spending deal plus billions in tax cuts**

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Paul Singer, USA Today 3:36 p.m. EST December 16, 2015

WASHINGTON — Congressional leaders unveiled a massive \$1.1 trillion federal spending package that will keep government funded through September, abandoning most of the controversial provisions Republicans wanted to add to block President Obama's policies on topics ranging from immigration to armor-piercing bullets. But it includes a major Republican goal of lifting a 40-year ban on exports of domestic crude oil. The 2,009-page bill released early Wednesday morning will be paired with legislation to extend dozens of expiring tax breaks worth hundreds of billions of dollars to corporations and individuals. The 233-page measure will permanently extend the enhanced child tax credit and earned income tax credit that were boosted by the 2009 stimulus bill, and extend through 2019 a popular corporate tax break that allows companies to more quickly depreciate the value of new equipment. The two bills also delay for two years unpopular taxes that were part of Obama's signature health care law. Despite the fact that the massive bills were released in the middle of the night, Congress still expects to pass it over the next few days. The federal government is operating on a short-term spending measure that runs out Wednesday. To prevent a government shutdown, the House and Senate will move another short-term bill providing funding through Dec. 22, providing enough time for both chambers to vote on the

spending and tax measures. The House is expected to vote on the tax legislation Thursday, the spending bill on Friday. The Senate would then take up the bills together.

In the House, it is most likely that the spending bill will pass with few Republican votes and the tax bill will pass with few Democratic votes. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Wednesday morning "Republicans' tax extender bill provides hundreds of billions of dollars in special interest tax breaks that are permanent and unpaid for. These massive giveaways to the special interests and big corporations are deeply destructive to our future."

The combined legislation covers everything government does, and, as usual, contains scores of provisions limiting how federal money can be spent. For example the legislation again bars Obama from closing the Guantanamo Bay detention facility where terror suspects are held or spending money to build a new facility to house them and bar the U.S. from implementing the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty. But Democrats noted that it does not include provisions barring implementation of Obama's plan to defer deportations for children brought to the U.S. illegally and some of their family members.

The bill bars the government from listing the sage-grouse as an endangered species, but does not include Republican-backed provisions to prohibit the Environment Protection Agency from regulating air emissions related to global climate change.

The bill does not prohibit the administration from resettling Syrian refugees in the U.S., as many Republicans and some Democrats hoped, but it [does include](#) new anti-terrorism limits on visitors from 38 countries who can travel to the U.S. without a visa. While the legislation extends existing prohibitions on abortion-related spending, it does not include a ban on federal funding for Planned Parenthood, which has been a key goal of Republicans for much of the fall.

"This bill provides responsible funding for nearly all of the federal government, while helping to stop wasteful and unnecessary spending and reining in regulatory overreach that hinders growth and job creation," said House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers, R-Ky. "But it also represents a compromise that Members on both sides of the aisle can and should get behind."

Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said Wednesday "in divided government, no one gets exactly what they want," but he said there are major policy victories in the bill that Republicans can be proud of. The long-term extension of tax cuts achieves something he has sought for years: "Certainty in the tax code so we can create more jobs. This is one of the biggest steps for the rewrite of our tax code that we have made in many years."

Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., a leader of the conservative Freedom Caucus that helped bring down former speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said he was still uncertain how many conservatives would vote for the package. "I think there is a real appreciation for the tough hand Speaker Ryan was dealt, and the lack of leverage that he had," Meadows said. Coming out of a Republican conference meeting, Meadows said the tax provisions and lifting the ban on oil exports were well received, but "probably the biggest concern was the Syrian refugee issue."

Ryan told reporters that he has a commitment from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., to bring to the Senate floor early next year a bill that passed the House with a broad bipartisan majority to establish strict new security screening procedures for Syrian refugees. Ryan said he expects both the spending bill and the tax package to pass the House with bipartisan support.

"It's a good compromise," said Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada. "In spite of Republican majorities in the Senate and House, we Democrats were able to ensure that this legislation creates and saves middle class jobs, protects the environment, and invests in renewable energy sources." He said the bills came over from the House with about 200 policy riders intended to weaken clean air and water regulations, undermine consumer protections, and lift campaign contribution limits.

