



Will Congress Pass Spending Bill Before Deadline?

Congress is hoping to close out its session and depart for the holidays, but two major items remaining on its agenda are standing in the way: the omnibus bill and a tax break extenders package.

The current government spending bill is set to expire on December 11, but congressional leaders have already indicated that its highly unlikely a budget agreement will be reached before then, setting the stage for yet another potential shutdown.



Lawmakers have stated that a stopgap spending bill will be passed to keep the federal government open after Friday, and will serve to buy more time for talks on the omnibus. But according to White House spokesman Josh Earnest, President Obama will not sign a short-term bill to allow lawmakers time to negotiate and would only agree to sign a stopgap measure if an agreement is reached and time is required only to finish procedural work.

Negotiations on the omnibus spending bill have reached a standstill as Republicans are remaining steadfast on a number of key riders, including increased screening for Syrian and Iraqi refugees, empowering states to deny federal funds to abortion providers, and reduced environmental and financial regulations, the *Washington Post* reports.

The environmental regulations have been difficult to negotiate, with Republicans endeavoring to fulfill promises made by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) to undo President Obama's executive actions on air and water pollution and Democrats, of course, refusing such measures.

The refugee crisis is also a highly contentious issue in the budget debate. The House passed a bill last month that aims to toughen standards for admitting Syrian and Iraqi refugees, but the Senate has not taken up the bill. And conservative lawmakers seek to take it a step further and cut funds for refugee relocation, a move protested by House Democrats.

"We should all agree that inserting wholesale changes to refugee admission policies into a year-end spending bill — where they cannot be properly debated or amended — is not the appropriate way to consider these issues," states a letter sent by House Democrats.

But Republicans view a spending bill rider as the best hope to revise the refugee resettlement standards. Representative Brian Babin (R-Texas), told Breitbart News:

Islamic terrorists have pledged to kill more Americans — and our current refugee program has vulnerabilities that invite ISIS sympathizers to exploit these loopholes to enter the U.S. With the support of 74 of my colleagues, we've made it clear that a provision needs to be included in the upcoming spending bill that would defund and suspend Obama's insane Syrian refugee plan.

In the face of Obama's inaction, Congress must lead and force him to take these steps that put the safety and security of American citizens first. The upcoming spending bill presents the best opportunity to ensure this happens. As we are learning more details about the recent terrorist acts,



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we can see vulnerabilities in our refugee, visa and immigration programs. Unfortunately, many of the “solutions” being proposed — while are positive steps to take — fall short of what is needed to prioritize the security of the American people.

Meanwhile, the Democrats offered a rider calling for stricter gun control in light of the San Bernardino shooting, another issue believed to be hampering negotiations. And Democrats have stated that they will not accept riders aimed at abortion rights or immigration.

Additionally, lawmakers have reached a snag on the tax break extenders package, as they cannot agree on how long to extend the tax breaks for lawmakers and individuals and are concerned about the overall cost of the package.

“We thought we had an agreement, and were moving very substantially but then complications with the tax extenders have been a bit of a setback,” said Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), the ranking member on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

According to the *Washington Post*, Republicans seek to make permanent several business tax breaks in exchange for permanently extending the Child Tax Credit and expanding the Earned Income tax credit. If both parties agreed to that deal, the other tax breaks would be extended for two years.

However, lawmakers in both parties have cited concerns about the cost of continuing the extensions, estimated at \$700 billion to \$800 billion. But it is disingenuous to claim any tax breaks amount to a “cost” for the government. Tax breaks do not cost money, government programs do. A tax break simply allows workers and businesses to keep the money that they’ve earned, and that requires no expenditure. What costs money is government spending, and the omnibus bill seems to make no strides at reducing that.

There have been talks to add the tax break extenders package to the omnibus bill to make passage of the entire package easier, but there has been opposition to that as well.

“Following our Caucus and Whip meetings last week, it was clear that Democrats cannot support an omnibus that includes the poison pill riders inserted by the Republican leadership. Furthermore, there is very little support for the tax extenders bill as written. There is also strong opposition to any thought of combining these bills,” House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) wrote in a letter to fellow Democrats.

“On the omnibus bill, House Democrats accepted the Republican budget number. We accepted how they decided to distribute the funds from the budget agreement. In order for us to support the omnibus bill, the poison pill riders must go,” she added.

According to Politico, Republicans are in a better position to negotiate than the Democrats, since they could simply pass a “clean” funding bill that maintains operations at the previously agreed upon levels. In this case, they would only need to rely on votes from fellow Republicans and a small group of Democrats. Politico surmises that Obama would likely sign the measure to avoid a shutdown.

Not everyone views a shutdown as a detriment, however. Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.), a Republican presidential contender, stated earlier this year that a shutdown would allow Congress to properly revisit its current spending levels. “I am advocating that all the spending expires, that we have a serious discussion of every program to see what’s working, what isn’t working, what is wasteful and what is duplicative,” he said.

“We should no longer continue to spend money at the same rate we are spending money, so yes, we



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should let all spending expire and then we should renew those programs that are working,” Paul added. “It should require a supermajority to get the new programs started.”



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