



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 30, 2015

## Congressional Agenda Packed as Deadlines Approach

Congress has returned to Capitol Hill with yet another packed agenda, including votes on the budget, highway funding, and tax break extensions. The current government funding bill is set to expire December 11, giving Congress less than two weeks to pass a spending bill that would avoid a holiday government shutdown. But reaching an agreement could prove difficult.



According to Fox News, the omnibus spending bill is particularly challenging for newly elected House Speaker Representative Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), who took over for John Boehner (R-Ohio) last month. The same conservatives that opposed weak legislation under Speaker Boehner could make passage of the spending bill difficult if it fails to uphold GOP promises to voters.

But one Tea Party favorite, Representative Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), has already exonerated Ryan from any guilt if the omnibus does not include GOP priorities such as defunding Planned Parenthood. “I think it’s unfair to hold Paul Ryan accountable for this particular omnibus,” asserted Massie. “The Dec. 11 crisis that our leadership created is one of the reasons we got rid of our leadership. It’s not of his making, and I personally would not write him off if something doesn’t happen on this omnibus, whether it’s Planned Parenthood ... or something else.”

Still, Republicans are hopeful that they can use the \$1.15-trillion spending bill to achieve high priority goals, which include rollbacks to President Obama’s environmental and financial regulations, as well as changes to the Syrian resettlement program.

*Politico* reports that congressional conservatives are insisting that the spending bill include provisions to improve the vetting process for Syrian refugees. Others have taken it a step further. Representative Brian Babin (R-Texas) sent a letter to House Speaker Ryan with 73 GOP co-signers, urging the leadership to stop funds for the refugee program unless the Obama administration puts in place a system for monitoring the refugees.

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Republicans also seek to cut funding to the UN’s Green Climate Fund, which redistributes wealth to developing countries to deal with the alleged effects of climate change. *Politico* reports that Republicans are also eyeing the omnibus to block the Waters of the United States rule and dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency’s clean power plan.

According to a senior Democratic aide, such policy riders are the “poison pills” that Democrats have warned against. “There is concern Republicans are not going to back off of them,” the aide asserted. “Democrats are trying to be constructive, but we have said from the beginning we will not accept



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poison pill ideological riders and we mean that.”

Meanwhile, Democrats have voiced concerns that key government agencies such as the IRS are getting shortchanged.

In addition to the omnibus bill, both the House and the Senate have been negotiating a long-term measure that would fund highway and transit programs and have agreed to an “offset” that would help pay for the measure by moving money from the Federal Reserve to the Treasury. However, Fox News reports that “budget watchdogs” have opposed the measure as nothing more than smoke and mirrors, since it will actually serve to increase the federal debt by at least \$59 billion over the next decade. Still, the measure is likely to stay as is after a 354-72 House vote in support of it.

As for the tax breaks, a bill that has already passed the Senate Finance Committee would maintain tax breaks for businesses, as well as homeowners and individuals who live in states without state income tax. Over 50 tax credits would be extended under the \$95-billion package. Fox News reports that support for the tax extensions is bipartisan.

Another item on the congressional agenda is a bill that would repeal portions of the Affordable Care Act and defund Planned Parenthood. Republicans have turned to the controversial budget reconciliation to pass the bill because it would require just a simple majority. But they are struggling to win support among some of the more conservative lawmakers, such as Senators Ted Cruz of Texas and Marco Rubio of Florida, who have stated they will not vote for the ObamaCare repeal unless the bill expands to remove more provisions of the law. Additionally, moderate Republicans, including Senators Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine, have objected to defunding Planned Parenthood.

*Politico* reports that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has called a senators-only meeting for Monday night to discuss the legislation.



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