

ISSUE BRIEF

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Spending Season Is Back: How Congress Is Planning to Dish Out Your Tax Dollars in 2015

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After the past two years of budgetary dysfunction, during which Congress relied on temporary agreements to fund the government, the appropriations committees are back in session with the charge to present all 12 spending bills for fiscal year (FY) 2015.¹ These bills will divide the \$1.014 trillion designated for discretionary spending in FY 2015 amongst the federal government's myriad agencies and programs.²

Indeed, appropriators have an arduous journey ahead: Congress has not successfully passed all 12 spending bills on time since 1997.³ But even if Congress is unable to pass all 12 bills, just a partial return to the regular budget process will allow for timely debate regarding the nation's financial situation.

However, the normal budget process is still complex and rather opaque. Heritage fellow Patrick Louis Knudsen notes that budgeting has historically been a powerful tool for the people's representatives to best address the immediate concerns of their constituents and control the growth of government. He points to a statement by James Madison: "This power of the purse may, in fact, be regarded as the most complete and effectual weapon with which any constitution can arm the immediate representatives

of the people, for obtaining a redress of every grievance, and for carrying into effect every just and salutary measure." To be an effective tool for the people, the opaque and complicated budget process should strive for public accessibility rather than continue as a series of crisis-control measures produced behind closed doors in Washington.⁴

While taxpayers write the federal government a check each year, it is difficult to follow where your money is actually spent. In order to create more accountability and visibility in the appropriations process, Heritage will be tracking the progress of all 12 spending bills and keeping you updated in an easy-to-read appropriations chart. This tracker will allow Americans to easily compare the differences between the House, Senate, and President's proposals and will show you which departments and programs are slated to receive the most funds in 2015.⁵

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4218>

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TABLE 1

Appropriations Tracker for FY 2015

The Ryan–Murray budget deal in December 2013 broke the sequester spending caps and set total discretionary spending at nearly \$1.014 trillion for 2015, a \$2 billion increase from 2014. This tracker will display how discretionary funds would be distributed between the 12 appropriations subcommittees based on the House, Senate, and President’s requests. It will also show the final allocations as the spending bills are enacted by Congress.

BUDGET AUTHORITY IN MILLIONS OF CURRENT DOLLARS

Subcommittee	FY 2014			FY 2015			
	House Request	Senate Request	Enacted Allocations	President’s Budget	House Request	Senate Request	Enacted Allocations
Agriculture	\$19,450	\$20,930	\$20,880	—	\$20,880	—	—
Commerce, Justice, Science	\$47,396	\$52,272	\$51,600	—	\$51,202	—	—
Defense	\$512,522	\$516,624	\$486,851	—	\$490,960	—	—
Energy, Water	\$30,426	\$34,773	\$34,060	—	\$34,010	—	—
Financial Services, General Government	\$16,966	\$23,031	\$21,851	—	\$21,276	—	—
Homeland Security	\$38,991	\$39,100	\$39,270	—	\$39,220	—	—
Interior, Environment	\$24,278	\$30,100	\$30,058	—	\$30,220	—	—
Labor, HHS, Education	\$121,797	\$164,330	\$156,773	—	\$155,693	—	—
Legislative Branch	\$4,124	\$4,350	\$4,258	—	\$4,258	—	—
Military Construction, VA	\$73,320	\$74,366	\$73,299	—	\$71,499	—	—
State and Foreign Ops	\$34,103	\$44,079	\$42,481	—	\$42,381	—	—
Transportation, HUD	\$44,100	\$54,045	\$50,856	—	\$52,029	—	—
Total	\$967,473	\$1,058,000	\$1,012,237	—	\$1,013,628	—	—
Overseas Contingency Operations	\$91,938	\$91,938	\$91,938	—	\$85,357	—	—
Emergency/Disaster Relief	\$5,626	\$5,626	\$5,626	—	—	—	—
Program Integrity	\$924	\$924	\$924	—	—	—	—
Total Discretionary Budget Authority	\$1,065,961	\$1,156,488	\$1,110,725	—	\$1,098,985	—	—

Sources:

- **2014 House Request:** Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, and Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, “House and Senate 302(b) Allocations for Fiscal 2014,” *Congressional Quarterly*, <http://media.cq.com/pub/table/index.php?id=153> (accessed May 6, 2014); and Congressional Budget Office, “Fiscal Year 2014 Current Status of Discretionary Appropriations,” Table 1, January 30, 2014, https://cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/44399-Jan2014-BY2014Appropriations_0.pdf (accessed May 6, 2014).
- **2014 Senate Request:** Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, and Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, “House and Senate 302(b) Allocations for Fiscal 2014,” *Congressional Quarterly*, <http://media.cq.com/pub/table/index.php?id=153> (accessed May 6, 2014).
- **2014 Enacted Appropriations:** *Congressional Quarterly*, “FY 2014 Discretionary Spending by Appropriations Subcommittee,” January 13, 2014, <http://www.cq.com/pdf/govdoc-4406747> (accessed May 6, 2014); and Congressional Budget Office, “CBO Estimate of Discretionary Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2014, Including H.R. 3547, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, as Posted on the Website of the House Committee on Rules on January 13, 2014,” January 14, 2014, <https://cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/hr3547.pdf> (accessed May 6, 2014).
- **2015 House Request:** Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, “Report on the Revised Suballocation of Budget Allocations for Fiscal Year 2015,” May 2014, <http://appropriations.house.gov/uploadedfiles/fy2015-302b.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2014).

Endnotes

1. See Romina Boccia and Michael Sargent, "The Federal Budget in 2013: Dysfunction Revisited," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4189, April 1, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/the-federal-budget-in-2013-dysfunction-revisited>.
2. Discretionary spending makes up one-third of federal spending in any given fiscal year. Two-thirds of spending goes toward mandatory programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and interest on the debt.
3. Jessica Tollestrup, "The Congressional Appropriations Process: An Introduction," Congressional Research Service *Report for Congress*, February 23, 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42388.pdf> (accessed April 28, 2014).
4. For an analysis of possible budget process reforms, see Patrick Louis Knudsen, "An Analysis of Selected Budget Process Reforms," Heritage Foundation *Center for Policy Innovation Discussion Paper* No. 16, April 11, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/an-analysis-of-selected-budget-process-reforms>.
5. For further reading on the budget and appropriations process, see Boccia and Sargent, "The Federal Budget in 2013"; The Heritage Foundation, "President Obama's 2015 Budget: How Government Expansion Will Limit Opportunity, Slow Economic Growth, and Erode Financial and National Security," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2903, April 14, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/04/president-obamas-2015-budget-how-government-expansion-will-limit-opportunity-slow-economic-growth-and-erode-financial-and-national-security>; and Marguerite Bowling, "The \$1 Trillion Omnibus Spending Bill Is Out: Now Find Out What's In It," The Heritage Foundation, The Foundry, January 14, 2014, <http://blog.heritage.org/2014/01/14/1-trillion-omnibus-now-find-whats/>.