



Attack Repelled—Amendment Targeting International Family Planning Funding Increase in House Spending Bill Defeated

Yesterday evening, the House of Representatives soundly rejected an amendment that sought to strike the statutory earmark of \$750 million for bilateral international family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programs from the section of a large spending package funding State Department and foreign operations for fiscal year (FY) 2020. The vote puts the House solidly on record in support of the \$175 million increase above current levels approved by the Democratic-controlled House Appropriations Committee on May 16th, positioning FP/RH programs to receive their first funding increase in the last nine fiscal years.

The amendment targeting international FP/RH funding administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was offered to a massive “minibus” ([H.R. 2740](#)) combining four appropriations subcommittee bills—Labor-Health and Human Services, Defense, Energy and Water, and State-Foreign Operations—which collectively total nearly \$1 trillion and represent about 70 percent of discretionary federal spending. Debate on this first minibus began on the House floor last Wednesday, and was approved this afternoon on a vote of [226 to 203](#) with three members not voting.

The anti-family planning funding amendment was offered by Representative Debbie Lesko, a second-term Republican member from Arizona, along with 14 Republican cosponsors. The Lesko amendment would have struck the proviso in the [committee-adopted State-foreign operations bill](#) that mandated that “of the funds appropriated under the heading ‘Global Health Programs’ in this Act, not less than [\$750 million] shall be made available for family planning/reproductive health, including in areas where population growth threatens biodiversity or endangered species.” As drafted, the Lesko amendment would not have technically resulted in a reduction in the amount of funding available for FP/RH funding within the Global Health Programs (GHP) account, but passage would have left the allocation of GHP funds among various health sectors totally at the discretion and the mercy of a hostile Trump-Pence administration that had requested only \$259 million for FP/RH programs—nearly two-thirds less—in its FY 2020 budget proposal back in February.

When the House returned to voting on amendments whose consideration had been postponed from last week, the Lesko amendment was the first up and was defeated on a largely straight party-line vote of 188 to 225, with all Democrats present voting against, except for two—Reps. Lipinski (D-IL) and Peterson (D-MN)—and all 186 Republicans present voting in support. Eleven Democrats and 14 Republicans did not cast votes.

The [roll call vote](#) result confirms that the abandonment of support for government involvement in the

provision of contraceptive services overseas by House Republicans is now complete. Not a single pro-family planning Republican remains in the House. For historical perspective, in August 1999, more than a third of House Republicans at the time (79) opposed a much harsher version of a funding amendment offered by Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX), which would have zeroed out all funding for international FP/RH programs. Over these last twenty years, the Republican party has totally shifted on the issue of contraceptive access.

During debate on the amendment, Rep. Lesko was the only member to speak in support of her amendment arguing that it “aims to ensure that, instead of investing funds in promoting and performing abortions abroad, that the valuable dollars that fund our global health programs are vested in” what she views as more laudable maternal and child health activities.

Appropriations Committee Chair Nita Lowey (D-NY) spoke eloquently on the many benefits derived from the investments in USAID’s overseas FP/RH activities and yielded time to longtime champion Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA), who reinforced the value of program funding as she has witnessed firsthand in visits with women and families in Africa and elsewhere. Chair Lowey expressed shock that Rep. Lesko would seek to reduce funding for services to “prevent unintended pregnancies, maternal deaths, and abortions; reduce rates of infant and child mortality; empower women to stay in school and join the workforce; create stronger and healthier families; and improve economies,” asking rhetorically, “Aren’t these bipartisan policy outcomes that both sides of the aisle should be supporting?”

A second hostile Republican amendment was made in order by the Rules Committee, but its lone sponsor declined to offer it during debate on the State-foreign operations division of the minibus last Thursday. A Marshall (R-KS) amendment proposed striking the section in the committee-approved bill containing a permanent legislative repeal of the Global Gag Rule, amending the foreign assistance authorizing statute with the operative language of the Global HER Act. (A second GGR amendment sponsored by Rep. Duncan (R-SC) targeting the committee bill’s prohibition on the use of appropriated funds to implement the Trump-Pence administration’s expanded GGR was submitted—as were two UNFPA-focused amendments from Reps. Gosar (R-AZ) and Fleischmann (R-TN), et al.—but none of the three were permitted to be offered on the floor by the Rules Committee.) With the passage of the minibus and in the absence of any successful efforts to remove them from the legislation, the House of Representatives is now on record in support of both a permanent and a one-year repeal of the GGR contained therein.

The Senate has yet to begin work formally on its versions of any of the 12 appropriations bills that fund the federal government, awaiting agreement on an as yet elusive deal among the White House, Senate Republicans, and House Democrats on topline spending levels for FY 2020, on raising budget caps on defense and non-defense discretionary spending under the Budget Control Act, and on addressing the need to lift the federal debt ceiling. In the absence of agreement on the overall budget number for FY 2020, funding cannot be allocated among the 12 subcommittees, including the State Department-Foreign Operations Subcommittee, enabling the subcommittees to draft, markup, and approve their bills. As a result, full Senate Appropriations Committee action on the State-foreign operations bill is not expected before mid-July. Until then, the House’s treatment of international FP/RH programs in its first minibus—a large bilateral funding increase, legislative repeals of the GGR, and a robust UNFPA contribution—will stand as a model that Senate appropriations champions can seek to emulate.