

Cut and Paste: No Change for International Family Planning in FY 2017 Omnibus

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Late Sunday night, the congressional leadership wrapped up negotiations on a massive fiscal year 2017 omnibus. The spending package will fund most of the federal government for the five months remaining in the current fiscal year. Funding for international family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programs—and the policies and restrictions governing the program—are virtually identical to those enacted for the

previous fiscal year and in place under the [continuing resolutions](#) that have been keeping the government running since last October. Amidst the deluge of bad news since the inauguration, the fact that congressional family planning champions on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees were able to preserve the status quo in the negotiation is a welcome relief.



The favorable outcome was not preordained but follows the outline of the deal that has been struck between House and Senate appropriators for the last seven fiscal years in reconciling a punitive [House committee-passed bill](#) with a supportive [Senate counter-proposal](#). In a side-by-side comparison, it is apparent that negotiators literally cut and pasted the text of the [FY 2016 omnibus](#) legislation currently governing overseas FP/RH programs into the new omnibus package.

Funding levels and policy provisions incorporated in the just-introduced [omnibus bill](#) include:

- Total amount of FP/RH funding from all accounts equals \$607.5 million, including statutory earmarks of “not less than” \$575 million for FP/RH programs from all bilateral accounts and an additional \$32.5 million “shall be made available for a U.S. contribution to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) from the International Organizations and Programs account;
- Charts in the [explanatory statement](#) accompanying the bill specify that \$523.95 million is to be allocated to bilateral FP/RH programs from the Global Health Programs (GHP) account and \$51.05 million is to be allocated from the Economic Support Fund (note: specific ESF allocation is new and positive as it was not included in the FY 2016 omnibus report language);
- No new abortion-related policy “riders” included—both the House bill’s legislative codification of the Global Gag Rule and the Senate’s permanent GGR repeal amendment dropped during the negotiation;
- Identical restrictions on a U.S. voluntary contribution to UNFPA from the IO&P account including requirements that U.S. funds be maintained in a segregated account, none of which may be spent in China or for abortion, and dollar-for-dollar withholding of any amount UNFPA plans to

spend in China, all rendered moot by the Trump State Department's March 30th Kemp-Kasten determination [cutting off any U.S. funding to UNFPA](#); and finally

- Continuation of a legislative requirement dating to the UNFPA funding cut-off during the Bush administration that ensures that funds withheld from UNFPA due to the “operation of any provision of law” are transferred to the GHP account for bilateral “family planning, maternal, and reproductive health activities,” an important protection to preserve scarce family planning funds in the wake of the recent negative Kemp-Kasten determination.

The successful conclusion of the negotiation of an FY 2017 omnibus spending package reflects a bipartisan desire to avoid a government shutdown. But such an outcome could have been accomplished over four months ago if the pragmatic policymakers of the Appropriation Committees had been left to their own devices to complete the work. Appropriators were close to a deal back in December until Vice President-elect Pence appealed to the House Republican leadership to delay until the end of April to allow the incoming Trump administration to put their stamp on FY 2017 spending priorities, scuttling the attempt.

The Trump administration did eventually express their funding priorities to Congress, including for State Department operations and foreign assistance, in a proposal from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that was a day late and a dollar short. Fortunately, especially for family planning supporters, the last-minute OMB intervention was ignored by appropriators—including a proposed \$146.5 million cut to FP/RH programs down to the House committee-passed level of \$461 million, a reduction of nearly one-quarter.

[OMB's FY 2017 omnibus proposal](#) unfortunately foreshadows the likely direction that the Trump administration's FY 2018 budget request for international FP/RH programs is headed—downward. Although nothing on paper has become public so far, credible rumors suggest that funding for international FP/RH programs will be zeroed-out. Such a hostile act against contraception is unlikely to be confirmed until the President's FY 2018 budget request is sent to Capitol Hill, now expected sometime during the week of May 22nd. However, the magnitude of cuts to USAID Global Health programs in countries throughout the developing world contained in an internal [State Department budget document](#) leaked by *Foreign Policy* last week suggests that a zeroing-out or a steep funding reduction for FP/RH programs likely represents a major share of the [large overall cut](#) to the account of **36%** being proposed.

In the face of the hostility toward women both here and abroad that is expected to continue to emanate from the Trump-Pence administration, family planning advocates are grateful for the [strong champions on Capitol Hill](#) and their unwavering commitment and remain guardedly optimistic in their ability to resist and prevail once again in the FY 2018 appropriations process, building off their most recent success.