

New DC Spending Bill Concerns Christian Lawmakers

Days ahead of a deadline to avoid a partial government shutdown, congressional budget negotiators have reached a deal on a \$1.3 trillion budget.

The sweeping 2,232-page bill substantially boosts both defense and domestic spending.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., praised the \$80 billion bump for the military, but said no spending bill this large is perfect.

"Years of cuts and years of uncertainty have hollowed out our armed forces," he said. "Aging equipment, personnel shortages, training lapses, maintenance lapses. All of this has cost us, it has hurt us. Last year alone, we lost four times as many service members in accidents, in training exercises as we did in combat."

While the spending plan keeps the government operating, a top Senate aide tells CBN News it drops protections for young immigrant Dreamers, and it only partially funds President Donald Trump's border wall. Nevertheless, the White House still supports the bill.

"The president had a discussion with Speaker Ryan and Leader (Mitch) McConnell, where they talked about their shared priorities secured in the omnibus spending bill," White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said.

"The president and the leaders discussed their support for the bill, which includes more funds to rebuild the military, such as the largest pay raise for our troops in a decade, more than 100 miles of new construction for the border wall and other key domestic priorities, like combating the opioid crisis and

rebuilding our nation's infrastructure," she added.

A Blow for Christians?

The House Freedom Caucus, however, is less than thrilled with the deal, with all 32 members saying they'll vote against the legislation.

Pro-life lawmakers were told there was hope the Conscience Protection Act would be included in the bill, but there was no mention of it in the text released Wednesday. That provision would have ensured health care professionals and others would not be forced to participate in actions, such as abortion, that would violate their sincere religious beliefs.

There is also no repeal of the Johnson Amendment in the spending plan, even though President Trump has voiced strong support for doing away with the law that keeps pastors and religious leaders from speaking about politics from the pulpit.

The Heritage Foundation is blasting the measure, calling it an embarrassment.

Lawmakers hope to start voting on the bill Thursday, but may need to pass a stopgap measure to keep the government open until they can get the bill passed. {eo}

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