

Bill Descriptions for the Votes that Affect You

1. Appropriations/Coronavirus

H.R. 133, the 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act, includes about \$1.4 trillion in discretionary appropriations and another \$900 billion in Covid aid. Among other discretionary provisions, it includes \$77 billion for overseas military operations and \$590 million in foreign aid. The Covid aid provisions include federal unemployment benefits, \$600 checks per adult or dependent child, and \$81.9 billion in Education Department grants.

Overspending yielded an annual federal deficit of \$3.1 trillion in fiscal 2020. Congress is minimizing its accountability to voters by combining all discretionary federal spending and coronavirus aid into one gigantic “take it or leave it” bill. Also, most of the coronavirus aid provisions, including direct checks, federal unemployment benefits, and subsidization of the economy, exceed the federal government’s authority. These and other matters are reserved for the states and the people under the 10th Amendment.

2. Surveilling Americans

During consideration of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA, H.R. 6172), Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) introduced an amendment to prohibit the use of certain methods to collect information concerning a U.S. person under FISA authorities. Specifically, it would prohibit the collection of electronic surveillance, physical search of premises or property, use of pen register and “trap and trace” phone number identification devices, production of tangible things, and targeting for acquisition of information of a U.S. person. It would require a warrant issued by a non-FISA federal court for the use of such methods.

This amendment seeks specifically to limit FISA authorities and place specific surveillance powers in the hands of non-FISA courts.

3. Spending Cut

During consideration of the short-term appropriations bill (H.R. 4378), Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) introduced an amendment to cut the bill’s funding for federal operations and services by two percent.

Most of the spending falls outside the scope of constitutionally authorized federal powers. The federal government needs to start reining in federal spending and debt in order to avert future fiscal disaster. Although two percent may not seem like much, modest cuts are still better than none at all.

4. Public Lands

H.R. 1957, the Great American Outdoors Act, permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million annually. The bill also creates the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (NPPLRF), which is funded at \$1.9 billion annually for five years. This funding comes from oil, gas, and other energy royalties on federal property, and the NPPLRF allocates this funding to maintenance in national parks and other federal lands.

This bill irresponsibly increases the federal deficit and diverts energy royalties from being spent for needed constitutional purposes. Also, the Constitution does not authorize Congress to purchase private property except “for the Erection of Forts, Magazines, Arsenals, dock-Yards, and other needful Buildings.” Moreover, the federal government already owns a huge percentage of land directly — about 28 percent of the nation — and is a demonstrably poor steward of public lands.

5. Appropriations

This bill (H.R. 1158) would provide \$860.3 billion in discretionary spending for four of the 12 fiscal 2020 appropriations bills. Here are some highlights of the unconstitutional programs hidden within this bill: \$70.7 billion in overseas contingency operations funding, including for the undeclared war in Afghanistan; \$22.3 billion for the unconstitutional Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); and \$3.28 billion in unconstitutional federal funding for state and local law-enforcement activities.

Many programs within this defense-related minibus are for unconstitutional purposes, and in light of a \$26 trillion national debt and a \$3.8 trillion budget deficit, this jumbo-sized appropriations bill is also fiscally irresponsible.

6. Abortion funding

The No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion and Abortion Insurance Full Disclosure Act of 2019 (S. 109) would prohibit the use of federal funds to cover the cost of abortions, except in cases of rape, incest, or when a woman’s life is at risk unless an abortion is performed. The bill would also prohibit qualified health plans from including abortion coverage.

The government should not subsidize or make provision for the killing of innocent human life.