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House Passes First Appropriations Bills of the Cycle; Rescissions Package Passes House, Senate Prospects Unclear

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On Friday, June 8, the House passed a roughly \$147 billion three-bill FY 2019 spending package on a 235 to 179 vote, overcoming Democratic objections to environmental policy riders and funding priorities in the GOP-drafted Energy-Water title. The "minibus," which also includes the Military Construction-VA and Legislative Branch measures, is the first of what House GOP leaders expect to be a series of three-bill packages to try to expedite passage of at least a few of the 12 annual spending bills before the end of the fiscal year on September 30. On final passage, 16 Republicans crossed the aisle to vote "no" on the package, but these votes were outweighed by 23 Democratic votes in favor of the minibus.

The three bills advanced by the House are among those GOP leaders consider prime candidates to get to President Donald Trump's desk before the September 30 deadline, thus breaking the recent streak of mega-spending bills, called "omnibuses," encompassing all 12 of the measures. President Trump has stated that he will not sign another last-minute omnibus bill, after the 2,200-page \$1.3 trillion FY 2018 omnibus enacted in March that cleared Congress within two days of its introduction.

The same day, by a vote of 210 to 206, the House narrowly approved a White House rescissions package that aims to cancel billions in unspent funds from the prior fiscal year. While the package cancels \$15 billion in federal spending, the Congressional Budget Office found that the bill would only actually cut about \$1.1 billion in spending over a decade. The largest portion of the package – \$7 billion – is slated to come from unspent funds in the Children's Health Insurance Program. Although the rescissions package passed the House, its outlook in the Senate remains uncertain, even though the package only needs a simple majority to pass. On June 20, the Senate failed to approve a procedural motion to consider the rescissions package on a 48-50 vote, with Senators Richard Burr (R-NC) and Susan Collins (R-ME) joining all 48 Democrats in opposition. The Senate has until June 22 to consider the measure, after which the rescissions bill loses its special procedural powers that would allow Republicans to pass the legislation with a simple majority.

The Senate's schedule for considering their version of the appropriations bills remains unclear, as the Appropriations Committee is only now beginning consideration of the measures and the Senate floor schedule is expected to be full for the next couple of weeks. The possibility remains that Congress may be forced to enact a Continuing Resolution keeping the government operating at existing spending levels and not move forward on a spending agreement until late November or December.