

BY U.S. REP. FRANK LUCAS As 2015 comes to an end, Congress is tasked with funding the federal government through the end of next September, or the remainder of the fiscal year. Earlier this month, the House and Senate passed a spending agreement that combined the 12 appropriations bills to fund various aspects of our government, ranging everywhere from defense to agriculture. In addition to this funding, the spending package also includes a number of policies to boost economic growth and encourage job creation in the private sector. Many of these provisions are aimed at supporting the future and success of families and businesses in rural America. One of the most important provisions helps secure our country's energy future by lifting the 40 year-old ban on exporting crude oil. Recently, oil producers have been forced to scale back due to a number of factors. This has hurt many who work in the industry and has even impacted our state budget. Abolishing the outdated crude oil export ban will incentivize energy producers to continue to invest and hire more employees. The Congressional Budget Office estimates this policy would generate \$1.4 billion in profits to the federal government through oil and gas leases. And in Oklahoma, the Energy Equipment and Infrastructure Alliance predicts that roughly 11,000 jobs would be created by 2018 as a result of this policy. Lifting the ban also reduces our allies' reliance on importing oil from more volatile nations such as Russia, Iran or Venezuela. The United States must continue to lead the way in global energy production. This is in stark contrast to President Barack Obama's recent decision to block construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, a project that would create thousands of jobs and contribute to economic growth. In the wake of recent terror attacks both domestic and abroad, it is crucial that we provide funding to our national security. The spending agreement passed fully funds our national defense and ensures our troops are paid and receive the equipment they need to get the job done. It also strengthens our country's visa waiver program by tightening requirements and blocking visa waiver status to anyone who has recently been to regions

with high terrorist activity such as Syria or Iraq. This legislation builds upon stringent reforms to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Last year's spending agreement slashed more than \$300 million from the IRS's budget after a series of reports found the agency illegally targeted American citizens based on their political and religious beliefs. Under this bill, Congress lays out even greater restrictions to IRS operations in order to prevent this from happening again. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is also reined in. The agreement sets the agency's funding to its lowest levels since 1989 and blocks any effort to slap a climate change-related fee on livestock producers. In fact, several fees to ranching, aviation and oil and gas proposed by the White House are prohibited. And with the full repeal of country of origin labeling (COOL), the United States will now avoid over a billion dollars of punitive tariffs to our livestock industry. In addition to the year-end budget agreement, Congress passed legislation called the PATH Act to extend a series of tax credits that millions of Americans and small businesses rely on. This includes Section 179, a critical tax write-off that enables many farmers, ranchers and small businesses to make smarter business decisions when purchasing new equipment. This, in turn, helps invigorate our local economy by boosting investment and job creation here in Oklahoma. Permanently extending this tax credit and several others restores much needed certainty and stability in the tax code so that families and businesses can effectively plan for the future. These two pieces of legislation represent incremental but significant steps forward to set the stage for next year. I look forward to working with my colleagues as we set out to advance conservative, commonsense policies that will help families prosper and keep our country strong for the next generation. My family and I would like to wish you and yours a Happy New Year – may it be filled with peace, joy and time well spent with family and friends. U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas represents the 3rd Congressional District. [Ã](#), [Subscribe to Daily Headlines](#) [Sign up!](#)

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