

Trimming the Tree on Capitol Hill

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Just before the close of the 113th Congress and almost on the eve of Christmas, Congress passed the Coast Guard and National Defense Authorization bills for fiscal year 2015. These two pieces of hopefully annual legislation, and the Coast Guard bill in particular, have frequently attracted a variety of maritime-related legislative provisions in need of a vehicle, leading some commentators to quip that they have become “Christmas tree bills” ornamented with legislative add-ons.

This year was no different. Seeing these two bills as the only likely pieces of legislation with a decent chance of becoming law before the end of the session and the 2014 holiday recess, various interest groups tacked their provisions onto the legislation. While some maritime interests received presents in time for the holidays, others are more apt to see lumps of coal in these bills. But, as House Appropriations Chairman Hal Rogers and Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski observed in a recent joint statement, “While not everyone got everything they wanted, such compromises must be made in a divided government.”

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