



FEDERAL BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS PRIMER

Overview

Each year, Congress and the President embark on a year-long, often-challenging process to establish spending levels for each of the federal government's departments, agencies, and programs for the coming fiscal year. Although the process may vary slightly from year to year, the fashion in which the budget comes to fruition follows a basic timeline and order.

Not unlike a personal or business budget, the federal government has income and expenditures (outlays) and must determine annually how to prioritize and allocate funds for each spending item. Some spending items are **mandatory**,¹ such as the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and some items are **discretionary**, such as funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Funding for mandatory budget items are required by law, such as the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Programs you may think of as a "necessity" — such as funding for cancer research or efforts to contain infectious disease — fall under discretionary funding. The discretionary part of the budget includes funding for biomedical research at NIH and funding for investments in disease prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and for programs to address the nursing shortage.

While the budget includes funding for both mandatory and discretionary programs, most advocates focus their attention on affecting the levels of discretionary spending for programs of interest, such as increasing funding for nursing workforce programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the National Cancer Institute (NCI), or the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR).

The federal budget process is highly complex. Many individuals who have been working on budget and appropriations issues for decades still have difficulty at times understanding it and explaining it to others. This primer seeks to provide budget and appropriations "basics" for the advocate who wishes to understand and influence the federal funding process. With a little time and energy, public health advocates can be successful at increasing funding for programs of priority interest.

Getting Started

The budget process begins with the development and submission of the **president's budget request** to Congress on the first Monday in February. The president's budget is a "blueprint" and does not have the force of law. It is merely his formal request to Congress and Congress is not required to adopt his recommendations. However, typically when the same political party controls the White House, the Senate, and the House of Representatives, the president's budget often is adopted in full or in part by Congress.

Generally, the president's budget is a political document that the Congress can consider and use as a guideline. It may follow it exactly, or reject it entirely.

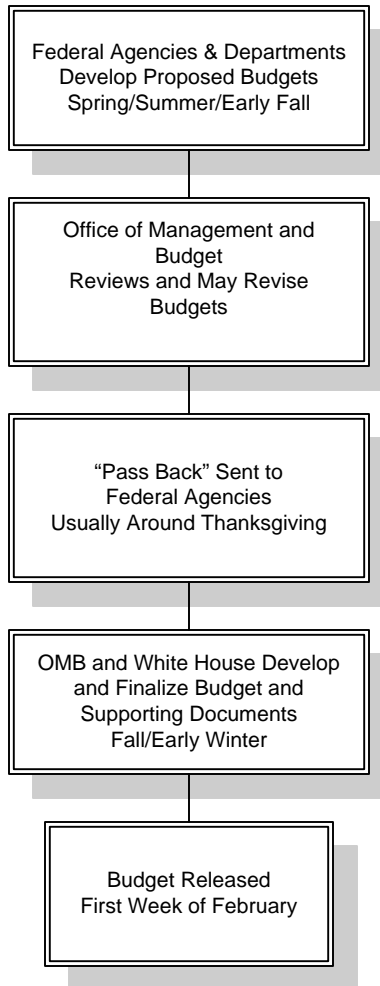
¹ Terms in bold are further defined in the Federal Budget Glossary.

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- Each year, beginning approximately nine months before the president's budget is submitted, the Administration, through the **Office of Management and Budget (OMB)**, collaborates with all the federal departments and agencies to identify programs and areas that need funding increases as well as those that could sustain cuts. Agencies face long lead times in budget preparation, beginning the process approximately 18 months prior to the start of the fiscal year in question. Consequently, agency budget requests are made with significant uncertainty about the political and economic conditions under which the agency will be operating when the budget actually is presented and/or adopted.

Despite the uncertainty, agencies must develop **professional judgment budgets** that recommend the amount of funding that they believe is necessary for each of their programmatic areas. The budgets are sent to OMB where they are reviewed, considered, sometimes revised, and passed back to the agency. The budget number returned to the agency is known as the **pass back**, and the agency can expect that to be the recommended amount included in the president's budget. The budget development process continues through the fall and early winter in anticipation of the president presenting his budget to Congress by the first Monday in February – as required by the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921.

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After the president has developed and released his budget, Congress gets to take its turn.

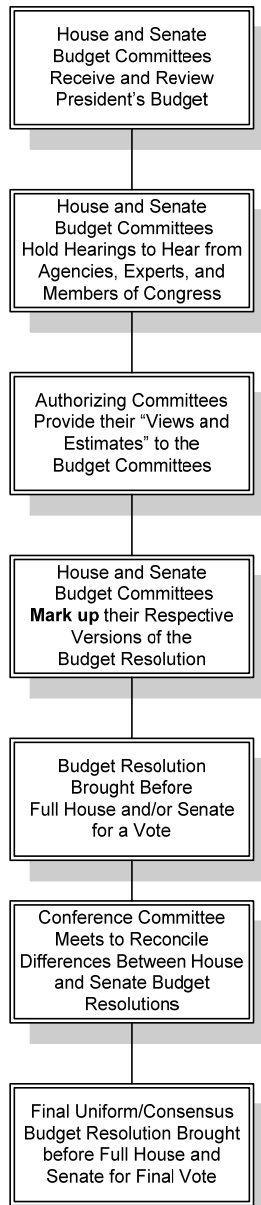
Congressional Budget Process

Each year, Congress is responsible for crafting a budget blueprint as well as developing and enacting up to 12 separate **appropriations bills** that fund all the functions of the federal government. In response to the president's budget proposal, congressional committees hold **hearings** and submit their "views and estimates" of spending and revenues in their respective jurisdictions to the House and Senate Budget Committees. Taking all of this information, the House and Senate Budget Committees draft and report a **budget resolution** to their respective houses. A few important, distinct traits of the budget resolution are important to note.

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- The budget resolution is a **concurrent resolution**—it is approved by the House and the Senate but it is not sent to the president for signature. Therefore, it is not a law and serves merely as a general blueprint or guideline for the House and Senate Appropriations Committees as to how funding should be allocated. To have legal effect, the budget resolution has to be followed by revenue (tax) and spending (appropriations) legislation that is enacted into law.



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- When the House and Senate vote on the budget resolution, they are considering the total size of government taxes and spending. Members often use the resolution as an opportunity to distinguish their budget priorities from the president's or to showcase priorities similar to those in the president's budget.
- The budget resolution does not mention specific programs or accounts. However, it does consist of two major components: (a) the **budget aggregates** section, which contains all of the budget totals for the broad categories of revenue, expenditures, deficit, and public debt, and (b) the **functional allocations** section, which divides funding among 20 more specific functions or categories that include everything from health (function 550) and defense to interest to be paid on the national debt.

The budget resolution sets spending ceilings (limitations) and determines the amount of federal spending available to the appropriations committees (see below). However, the budget resolution *does not* allocate particular funding amounts to specific programs (e.g., \$15 million to the National Program of Cancer Registries).²

- Although the **Congressional Budget Act** maintains an April 15th deadline for final Congressional adoption of the budget resolution, Congress frequently misses the deadline and receives no penalties when this occurs. However, Congress must pass all of its separate appropriations bills by September 30 each year because the new federal **fiscal year** begins on October 1. If Congress misses the September 30th deadline, it must provide for the affected programs in a **continuing resolution** (CR) (explained below), or the government will shut down. Further, the House and Senate **Appropriations Committees** can act without a congressional budget resolution.

Once Congress has adopted its budget resolution, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees begin their process of determining funding for discretionary programs through consideration of all of the separate appropriations bills.

² Members of Congress often offer amendments to the budget resolution in an effort to increase their share of the pie for subcommittees or programs under their jurisdiction or of particular interest to them. For example, in 2006, Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), then-chair of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee, and Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), Senate LHHS Subcommittee then-ranking member, offered an amendment to the budget resolution to increase the overall allocation by \$7 billion to their subcommittee to ensure that they had enough funding to support the health and education programs funded under the LHHS appropriations bill.

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Appropriations Process³

Committees

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees have jurisdiction over discretionary spending, which is approximately one-third of the \$2.8 trillion federal budget. The other two-thirds of the budget is mandatory spending (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security—all whose funding levels are determined by permanent law) and interest on the debt.

Four types of appropriations bills exist.

- Regular measures that provide funding for the upcoming fiscal year.
- **Supplemental appropriations** bills that contain additional money for the current fiscal year. For example, after September 11, 2001, the Congress determined that additional funding for FY 2002 was necessary to fund the war on terror, so it enacted a supplemental appropriations measure to provide for an immediate availability of additional funding.
- Continuing appropriations (commonly referred to as CRs) that offer stop-gap funding in the event that Congress has not completed action on some or all of the regular appropriations measures for the coming fiscal year.⁴
- **Omnibus appropriations** packages or **consolidated appropriations** bills have become more common at the end of a legislative cycle. This occurs when two or more usually separate appropriations bills are combined into one omnibus/consolidated appropriations bill.

Discretionary spending consists of thousands of programs controlled through up to 12 separate annual appropriations bills. In each bill, specific funding levels for federal programs are detailed.⁵ The House and the Senate each have an Appropriations Committee that is broken down into separate subcommittees, with each appropriations subcommittee having jurisdiction

³ See the “How a Bill Becomes a Law” chart in appendix for a basic outline of the legislative process.

⁴ CRs are used most often when Congress misses the September 30th deadline; without a stop-gap funding measure, not-yet-funded agencies would shutdown (as happened in 1995).

⁵ Regular appropriations bills also may include provisions which set aside funds in an account for a more specific purpose, known as an **earmark**. For example, the House LHHS appropriations bill could earmark \$5 million for immunization outreach and education efforts in Peoria, IL. Most earmarks are included in the committee reports and the joint explanatory statements that accompany conference reports—the final versions of the funding bills. While committee reports and joint explanatory statements do not have the force of law, agencies generally follow these guidelines.

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over one regular appropriations bill. The House has 10 subcommittees and the Senate has 12, and their jurisdictions are divided as follows:⁶

Senate Appropriations Subcommittees (12)	House Appropriations Subcommittees (10)	Jurisdictional Comparison
Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies	Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies	Jurisdictions match
Commerce, Justice, and Science	Science, State, Justice, Commerce, and Related	Senate subcommittee does not include funding

⁶ The House and Senate reorganized their appropriations subcommittees in early 2005. The House Appropriations Committee took the lead, eliminating three of its 13 subcommittees, including the District of Columbia; Legislative; and Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Subcommittees. These subcommittees were streamlined into others, leaving the House Appropriations Committee with 10 subcommittees. The Senate Appropriations Committee eliminated only one of its original subcommittees, the Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development panel, and split its workload between two other subcommittees.

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Senate Appropriations Subcommittees (12)	House Appropriations Subcommittees (10)	Jurisdictional Comparison
	Agencies	for the State Department.
Defense	Defense	The Senate subcommittee includes the Department of Defense Cancer Research Programs whereas the House Defense Subcommittee does not.
District of Columbia	<i>Does not exist in the House</i>	House funding for the District of Columbia is included under the House Transportation-Treasury Subcommittee.
Energy and Water Development	Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies	Jurisdictions match
Homeland Security	Homeland Security	Jurisdictions match

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Senate Appropriations Subcommittees (12)	House Appropriations Subcommittees (10)	Jurisdictional Comparison
Interior and Related Agencies	Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies	Jurisdictions match
Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies*, ⁷	Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies*	Jurisdictions match
Legislative Branch	<i>Does not exist in the House</i>	The full House Appropriations Committee handles the allocations for the Legislative Branch.

* An asterisk denotes a key subcommittee that has jurisdiction over program(s) and/or agencies of interest to oncology nurse advocates. To learn who sits on the subcommittees, visit <http://appropriations.senate.gov> or <http://appropriations.house.gov>.

⁷ Funding for the NIH, NCI, NINR, CDC, and HRSA nursing workforce programs falls under the LHHS measure.

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Senate Appropriations Subcommittees (12)	House Appropriations Subcommittees (10)	Jurisdictional Comparison
Military Construction and Veterans Affairs	Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies	House subcommittee includes funding for the Department of Defense Cancer Research Programs. Senate subcommittee handles Selective Service funding.
Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies	Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, Judiciary, District of Columbia, and Related Agencies	Senate funding for the District of Columbia is handled by the District of Columbia Subcommittee. Senate Military Construction Subcommittee handles

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Senate Appropriations Subcommittees (12)	House Appropriations Subcommittees (10)	Jurisdictional Comparison
		Selective Service funding.
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs	State, Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs	House Handles State Department funding in the Science-State-Justice- Commerce Subcommittee.

Timing⁸

In the spring, each of the individual appropriations subcommittees in both the House and Senate receives its share of the total appropriations “pie” – known as **302(b) allocations** – which has been determined by the appropriations committees. Each of the individual bills is limited by the total amount allocated under the budget resolution, as well as by the guidelines established separately in **authorizing legislation**. Authorizing legislation may be permanent or temporary and the associated provisions may be general or specific, but authorizing legislation itself does not provide funding in the absence of appropriations bills.

An analogy: A budget resolution is comprised of broader categories of spending (e.g., housing, food, utilities), whereas appropriations measures allocate particular areas and detail the associated amounts of spending (e.g., mortgage, condo fees, groceries, dining out, water, gas, electricity).

Budget Resolution:

Food - \$500

⁸ The timeline and process described in this primer is how the budget and appropriations process “should” work. Increasingly, however, because of political and substantive reasons, the timing of the process has been pushed back later and later in the year with CRs needed throughout the fall to keep the government operating in the absence of final funding measures for the current fiscal year.

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Utilities - \$250
Housing - \$1,000

Appropriations:

Mortgage - \$750
Condo Fees - \$250
Groceries - \$400
Dining Out - \$100
Water - \$100
Gas - \$75
Electricity - \$75

Advocates must understand the difference between an authorization bill and appropriations measures. The two types of legislation are related.

For example, Congress could pass the “Get Screened Program” to direct the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide colorectal cancer screening for uninsured individuals. By enacting this legislation Congress authorizes—or permits—an annual appropriation of up to \$10 million to support this effort for five years.

However, unless Congress actually provides specific funding in the subsequent LHHS Appropriations bill for the CDC, the “Get Screened Program” will not be funded. Just because the funding has been authorized does not mean it will be appropriated. In fact, Congress could provide funding one year and not the next; or, over the course of a five-year authorization, a program could receive funding two out of five years, all five years, or not at all. Despite having been created by an act of Congress, numerous programs still have failed to secure appropriations for their implementation and support. In these cases, in particular, advocates must take action to help secure much-needed funding to have important programs enacted and implemented.

An analogy: an authorizing measure is like being authorized to use the services at your bank but not actually being given checks or an ATM card to draw funds out of your checking account. An appropriations measure is the actual check being written to draw funding out of the U.S. Treasury and allocated to particular agencies and programs.

Traditionally, the House Appropriations Committee has initiated the consideration of appropriations measures and generally begins reporting bills out of subcommittee in the spring and out of full committee in early summer for full chamber consideration in May or June. Most measures are reported out of the committee by the annual August congressional recess. The full House begins consideration of regular appropriations bills as they are released from the committees, passing most of the bills by the August recess.

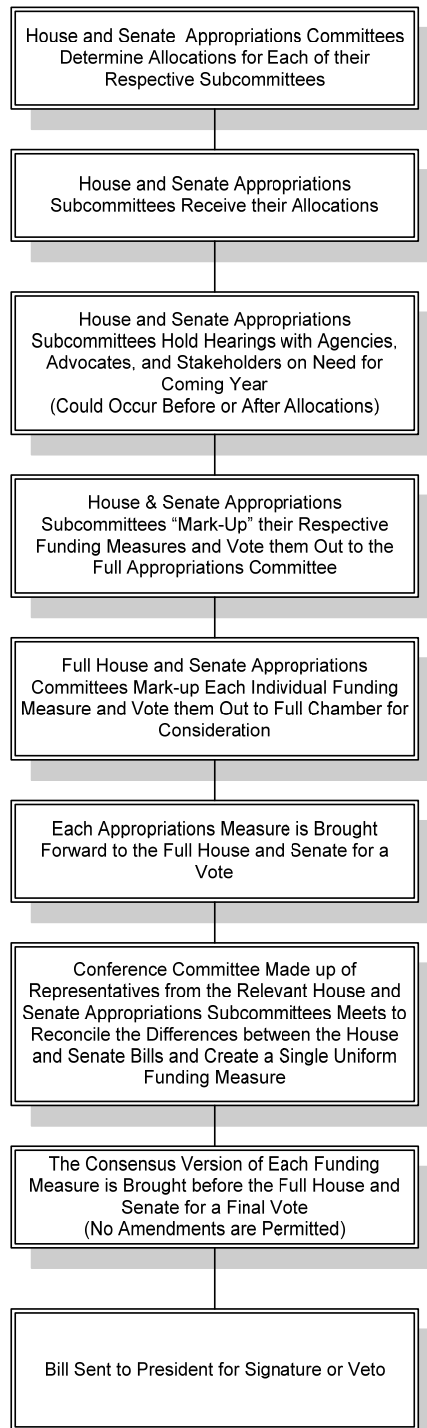
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Generally, the Senate Appropriations Committee follows the House activity and begins reporting the regular funding bills out of committee for full chamber consideration in June or July. All of the measures should be reported from the Senate Appropriations Committee by the August recess or early September, and the full Senate completes most of them by the end of September.

Throughout the early fall, members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees engage in conferences to resolve any differences between the measures passed by the two chambers, with September 30 as the preferred deadline for final action (see below for more detail on conference negotiations).

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When Congress does not complete action on some or all of the funding measures by September 30, it must pass – and the president must sign – CRs to keep the government running.

Committee Process

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees hold full committee and subcommittee hearings on the segments of the budget under their jurisdiction.

Each of the appropriations subcommittees in the House and the Senate hold more detailed hearings to receive further budget justification arguments from federal agency officials and the public, including organizations such as ONS. The subcommittees solicit input and recommendations about the work of the federal departments, agencies, and programs and receive feedback on the necessary funding levels for the initiatives.⁹

After hearings have been completed and the House Appropriations Committee has received its committee spending ceilings and established 302(b) subcommittee allocations, as outlined in the budget resolution, the House Appropriations Subcommittees begin to **mark up** the regular bills under their jurisdiction and report them to the full committee.¹⁰ The full committee considers each subcommittee's recommendations separately and may adopt amendments to a subcommittee bill and then report the bill, as amended, to the full House for consideration.

Traditionally, the Senate Appropriations Committee waits until it receives a House-passed regular appropriations bill before it commences its process. The Senate Appropriations Subcommittees usually report the House-passed bill to the full committee with several amendments distributed throughout the measure or with completely new text included as a substitute amendment. However, more recently, the Senate Appropriations Committee has reported nearly all of its regular funding bills as Senate-originated bills instead of waiting to consider and amend those passed first by the House.

⁹ For example, in calendar year 2004, then-ONS President Judy Lundgren testified before the House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee on ONS's FY 2005 funding recommendations for HRSA, NIH, NCI, and CDC. To view ONS's testimony for FY 2007, visit the ONS Legislative Action Center at www.ons.org/lac.

¹⁰ The subcommittee chair and other subcommittee members discuss amendments to the draft bill – known as the chair's mark – and may agree to include some new provisions. The process is called marking up the bill. The bill is introduced and assigned a number when the House Appropriations Committee reports or releases the bill to the full chamber for consideration.

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When the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees write their respective bills, they also write a committee report that explains congressional intent for the various program allocations. The actual appropriations bills include only funding allocations.

Full Chamber Consideration

After the House or Senate Appropriations Committee reports an appropriations bill to the full House or full Senate, the bill is brought before the full chamber for consideration and a vote. Usually, members of Congress are provided an opportunity to propose amendments to the bill. Once each chamber has finished its consideration and debate, a vote is taken on final passage of the measure to report it out of the chamber.¹¹

Conference Committee

As with other legislation, when the House and Senate pass different versions of an appropriations measure, members of Congress must meet in a **conference committee** to reconcile the differences. Generally, members of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees with jurisdiction over a particular regular appropriations bill, the House and Senate **chairs** of the full committees, and the House and Senate **ranking minority members** of the full committees meet to discuss differences between the House- and Senate-passed bills.¹² These negotiators (or **conferees** or **managers**) generally are required to stay within the scope of the differences between the positions of the House- and Senate-passed bills.

- For example, if the House-passed bill provides \$10 million for the National Program of Cancer Registries and the Senate-passed version allocates \$15 million to the program, the conferees usually must reach an agreement on a final amount that is within the \$10-15 million range. Often they split the difference and allocate a mid-point amount (e.g., \$12.5 million).

Once the conferees have finished their negotiations and have developed a single, uniform spending measure, they develop and report to both chambers a **conference report** containing the agreements along with a **joint explanatory statement**. First the House votes (and then the

¹¹ Advocates seeking to influence the bill once it comes to the full chamber must note that the House and Senate have different rules for floor consideration of appropriations measures. Given the parameters under which each chamber considers funding measures, affecting the content of appropriations measures through the committee process generally is easier than when the measure is before the full chamber for consideration.

¹² Committee and subcommittee chairs are members of the majority party in the chamber. The **ranking minority members** or ranking members are the most senior or highest-ranking members of the minority party on the committee.

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Senate follows) on the conference report before it is sent to the president for his signature and enactment or veto.¹³

Final Enactment—Becoming Law

After the president receives the funding measure from Congress, he has 10 days to sign or veto it. If he takes no action, the bill automatically becomes law at the end of the 10-day period. The president also may veto the bill or, if he takes no action when Congress has adjourned, he may **pocket veto** the bill.

If the president vetoes the measure, it is sent back to Congress and Congress can **override** his veto with a two-thirds vote in both chambers. If Congress successfully secures a two-thirds vote in the House and the Senate, the bill becomes law. If Congress cannot muster the votes, the bill dies.

Cancer- and Nursing-Specific Appropriations

A majority of the programs of interest to ONS are funded in the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education (LHHS) Appropriations measure. The LHHS bill includes funding for NIH, NCI, NINR, CDC, and the Nursing Workforce Development Programs at HRSA.

Because most of the specific funding decisions for programs funded through the LHHS Appropriations bill are made at the subcommittee level in the House and the Senate, advocates must weigh in with these members and ensure that they are aware of the various programs of importance and interest to the nursing community.

To help ensure adequate funding for ONS priority programs, House and Senate LHHS Subcommittee members must hear from oncology nurses in their congressional districts and states about the impact that cancer has on our nation and be educated about the need to increase funding for key cancer and nursing related programs to help win the war on cancer. Because these members decide funding for the programs that ONS cares about, it is especially important for nurses who live in these districts and states to weigh in with their members of Congress.

¹³ Conference Reports cannot be amended in either the House or the Senate—they come before each chamber for a straight, up-or-down (yes or no) vote. If either chamber rejects the conference report, the conferees return to the negotiating table to continue to resolve differences between the two chambers. The measure cannot be sent to the president until the House and the Senate have adopted the same exact text of the bill.

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To learn which members sit on the House and Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittees, visit <http://appropriations.house.gov> and <http://appropriations.senate.gov>.

Correspondence to members of Congress can be addressed as follows:

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable [first name last name of member of Congress] U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515 Dear Representative [last name of member]:

U.S. Senators
The Honorable [first name last name of member of Congress] U.S. Senate Washington, DC 20510 Dear Senator [last name of member]:

Also, you can reach your members of Congress in the following ways.

- By phone through the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121
- E-mail your U.S. representative at www.house.gov/writerep.
- E-mail your two U.S. senators at www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm.
- Be sure to visit www.ons.org/lac regularly for alerts on priority issues, model correspondence to send to federal policymakers, and quick links and information about how to contact your congressional delegation; and

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- Sign up for ONStat, ONS's grassroots response network at www.ons.org/lac/onstat.shtml and you will receive action alerts when your Members of Congress are in a position to advance the ONS Health Policy Agenda.

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Federal Budget Glossary

302(a) allocations: These groupings refer to a section of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 that requires that the total budgetary assets be allocated among relevant committees for further distribution.

302(b) allocations: These groupings refer to a section of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 that requires the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to establish spending allocations for the relevant subcommittees.

Appropriations bill: Provides the legal authority needed to spend or obligate U.S. Treasury funds. As many as 12 annual appropriations bills together fund the entire federal government. The bills must be enacted prior to the start of a new fiscal year, designated as October 1. Failure to meet the deadline results in the need for temporary short-term funding or governmental agencies and offices will be shut down.

Appropriations committee: Allocates federal funds to the numerous government agencies, departments, and organizations on an annual basis. Appropriations are limited to the levels set by a budget resolution, drafted by the House and Senate Budget Committees.

Authorizing legislation or authorization bill: Provides the authority for a program or agency to exist and determines its policy and structure. It also recommends spending levels to carry out the defined policy, but the levels are not binding. Authorizations may be annual, multiyear, or permanent. Expiring programs require reauthorizations. House and Senate rules require that authorization be in place before final funding decisions are made, though this rule frequently is waived or disregarded.

Bill: A legislative proposal that becomes law if it passes both the House and Senate and receives presidential approval. Bills are introduced as "H.R." in the House, and "S." in the Senate with consecutive numbering in each respective chamber. Besides bills, joint resolutions are the only other type of legislation which becomes law (H.J.Res. or S.J.Res.).

Budget Act: Refers to the 1974 Congressional Budget Act which created the current budget process as well as the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the House and Senate Budget Committees. The annual budget resolution and reconciliation bills are processed under the terms of the 1974 Budget Act.

Budget aggregates: Federal budget totals for revenue expenditures, deficit, and public debt.

Budget resolution: The annual document (a Concurrent Resolution) in which Congress sets spending and revenue levels for the coming fiscal year and provides a framework within which

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Congress agrees to limit subsequent funding bills. It also may instruct committees to change current law to reconcile revenues and expenditures.

Chair: The presiding officer of a committee and/or a subcommittee; a member of the majority party in the chamber.

Committee Report language: A document that accompanies the statutory text of a bill and explains Congressional intent.

Concurrent resolution: Used to take action or express opinion on behalf of both the House and Senate; it does not make or become law. Concurrent Resolutions are used to set congressional adjournment dates and set the annual congressional budget.

Conferee: A member of Congress named to represent his or her chamber in negotiations with the other body. Formally known as “managers,” the conferees meet in conference committee to negotiate a compromise between the House and Senate versions of a bill.

Conference committee: A formal meeting, or series of meetings, between House and Senate members, the purpose of which is to engage in negotiations with the goal of reconciling the differences between the House and Senate versions of a bill.

Conference report: Refers to the final version of a bill proposed by House and Senate conferees. It also contains the “statement of managers,” a section-by-section explanation of the final agreement.

Congressional Budget Act: Known formally as the “the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act,” a federal law (enacted in 1974) to establish procedures for developing an annual congressional budget plan and achieving a system of impoundment control. The law also created congressional standing committees devoted solely to the budget and established the Congressional Budget Office. Under the budget act, Congress must adopt its budget resolution by April 15 each year, but Congress often misses that deadline.

Consolidated appropriations bill: A large measure that packages together several appropriations bills into one or combines diverse subjects into a single bill. It is also known as an “omnibus appropriations” measure.

Continuing resolution: Also known as continuing appropriations; this is a short-term or long-term temporary funding bill that funds the federal government after September 30 until a permanent appropriations measure is passed.

Discretionary spending: Refers to spending set by annual appropriation levels made by decisions of Congress. This spending is optional, in contrast to entitlement programs (e.g.

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Medicare and Medicaid) for which funding is mandatory. For example, funding for the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is considered discretionary spending.

Earmarks: Specific provisions detailing—or setting aside—funding for a specific program, purpose, or entity. Expenditures are earmarked in appropriations bills or reports.

Fiscal year: Begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. For example, FY 2006 begins on October 1, 2005 and ends on September 30, 2006.

Functional allocations: Different funding groupings for the 20 government functions. Examples include health and defense.

Hearing: A formal meeting of a committee or subcommittee to review legislation or explore a topic. Hearings may also be called to investigate a matter or conduct oversight of existing programs. Witnesses are called to deliver testimony and answer questions in all three types of hearings.

Joint explanatory statement: Accompanies legislation that is reported out of conference committee. Its purpose is to provide guidance to the executive branch, and the public, on Congress's intent and rationale for the various provisions in the legislation.

Managers: The majority and the minority members who manage the floor debate on a bill for their side.

Manager's amendment: A package of numerous individual amendments agreed to by both sides in advance.

Mandatory spending: Accounts for two-thirds of federal budget. These funds are not controlled by an annual decision of Congress but are automatically obligated by virtue of previously-enacted laws. For example, as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and social security are entitlement programs; funding for them all falls under mandatory spending.

Mark up: Refers to the meeting of a committee held to review the text of a bill before reporting it out to the full chamber for consideration. Committee members offer and vote on proposed changes (amendments) to the bill's language. Most mark ups end with a vote to send the revised version of the bill to the floor for final approval.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB): The federal agency that prepares the president's budget submission to Congress and develops associated economic forecasts.

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Omnibus (appropriations) bill: A large measure that packages together several bills into one or combines diverse subjects into a single bill. Also is known as a “consolidated appropriations” measure.

Override: The vote taken to pass a bill again, after it has been vetoed by the president. To be successful, it requires two-thirds of those voting in each chamber (290 in the House and 67 in the Senate, if all are present and voting) to vote in the affirmative. If the veto is overridden in both chambers, the bill becomes law despite the objection of the president.

Pass back: The recommended budget number returned to the federal agency by OMB that is usually then included in the president’s budget.

Pocket veto: A veto that occurs when the president fails to sign a bill within the 10 days allowed by the Constitution and Congress is in adjournment.

President’s budget: The document sent to Congress each year by the President on the first Monday in February. It estimates the federal government’s receipts and spending, and recommends appropriation levels and administrative priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

Professional judgment budgets: Budgets developed by federal agencies that recommend the amount of funding they believe necessary for each of their programmatic areas.

Question of final passage: Occurs when the presiding officer puts the question to the chamber for a final vote in favor of or in opposition to the measure under consideration

Ranking (minority) member: The member of the minority party on a committee and/or subcommittee with the most seniority. (The Chairman is the highest ranking member of the majority party).

Reconciliation bill: Makes changes in law required to meet preset spending and revenue levels. A reconciliation bill may be considered when permitted by a budget resolution passed by the House and Senate. The budget committee packages the bills produced by the substantive committees of jurisdiction into one omnibus bill.

Supplemental appropriations: A bill that provides funds in addition to the regular appropriations level. Supplemental measures often arise when an emergency (e.g. disaster relief) requires immediate funding.

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Other Related Terms

Companion bill: A bill that is similar or identical to one introduced in the other chamber of Congress.

Committee report: A formal report prepared by a House or Senate committee to explain the content of a bill being reported. Committee reports are optional in the Senate but mandatory in the House. They contain views of committee members, a cost impact analysis, and comparison of the bill to current law.

Congressional Budget Office: At the request of Congress, the agency conducts nonpartisan economic analysis and research and evaluates proposed bills and amendments, assessing their potential cost.

Federal deficit: The amount by which federal expenditures exceed federal revenues.

Federal debt: The total amount of funds borrowed and not yet repaid by the federal government.

Joint resolutions: Measures used to appropriate funding, pose constitutional amendments, or fix technical errors. Joint resolutions become public law if adopted by both the House and Senate and, where relevant, approved by the president. In terms of Constitutional amendments, they must be approved by three-fourths of the states.

Motion to waive the Budget Act: If adopted, this motion temporarily sets aside a specific provision of the Congressional Budget Act. Without a waiver, the provision would cause the pending amendment to fall on a point of order. With a waiver, the amendment may be considered despite violating the Congressional Budget Act. A minimum of 60 votes are required for adoption.

Off budget: Describes programs not counted toward budget limits because of provisions in current law. For example, Social Security trust funds and the U.S. Postal Service are off-budget programs.

Oversight: The term used for congressional review of federal agencies, government programs and performance.

Point of order: A point of order is made during floor proceedings to assert that the rules of procedure are being violated. A point of order halts proceedings while the presiding officer rules on whether it is valid. In the Senate, the chair's ruling may be appealed by any senator.

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Should the Senate vote to approve the appeal, the chair's ruling is overturned. In the House tradition, appeals also are possible but rarely are entered and almost never succeed.

Pork barrel legislation: When used to describe a bill, it implies the legislation is loaded with special projects (known as earmarks) for Members of Congress to distribute to their constituents back home. The term intones that the project funding is an act of largesse, courtesy of the federal taxpayer.

Power of the purse: Refers to the constitutional power given to Congress to raise and spend money.