

Mini Glossary of Gov Terms

Appropriation: Authority for programs to withdraw funds from the federal Treasury for specified purposes. Similar to “writing a check” drawn on a federal “checking account.” Appropriations are limited by the overall amount allocated by the budget resolution.

Authorization: Authority for a federal program to perform certain tasks dictated by Congress. Authorizing committees can set limits on how much funding is available. Similar to “depositing money” into a federal “checking account” for a specific purpose or program. Authorizing committees can also pass legislation that obligates the government to spend money, called mandatory spending, which isn’t subject to the yearly appropriations process. The Social Security program is an example of mandatory spending.

Budget Proposal: The President’s projection of income & expenditures, including his funding priorities for the next year.

Budget Resolution: Congress’ spending allocations and income projections, which reflect the priorities of House and Senate members. Budget resolutions set overall limits on how much can be appropriated during the year (called “allocations”) and can also direct authorizing committees to change existing laws to conform to revenue or spending targets (called “reconciliation directives”).

Byrd Rule: Named after Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), the Byrd Rule prohibits “extraneous material” from being attached to budget bills.

Continuing Resolution: Temporary appropriations legislation designed to maintain the operation of the federal government when the regular appropriation bill has not been enacted.

Debt: Cumulative deficits create a national debt. The Congress has authorized the borrowing of \$8.18 trillion dollars (known as the “debt limit”).

Deficit: Expenditures exceed revenues in a given fiscal year. A surplus is when revenues exceed expenditures in a given fiscal year.

Discretionary Spending: Federal spending that is subject to yearly review through the appropriations process. (See Mandatory Spending.)

Filibuster: A provision allowed by Senate rules that creates an unlimited debate that can be effectively used to block or delay the passage of a bill. Senate rules require at least a 3/5ths vote (60 members) to end debate. Budget resolutions and reconciliation bills are exempt from the Senate filibuster rule. There is no filibuster in the House of Representatives.

Fiscal Year: For the federal government, the fiscal year begins October 1 and ends September 30. Fiscal year 2007 began on October 1, 2006, and ends on September 30, 2007.

Hearings: Meetings where congressional committees hear testimony, gather information, and learn about particular issues—usually in preparation to act on specific legislation.

Mandatory Spending: Federal spending that is governed by formulas or criteria set forth in authorizing legislation, rather than by appropriations. Examples include Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Because their budgets are based on formulas, instead of a yearly appropriations review, many of these programs are known as “entitlements.”

Markup: Meetings where congressional committees debate, rewrite, negotiate, and compromise on the language of bills or resolutions.

Reconciliation Process: A process designed to reconcile the pending budget to existing law, in terms of mandatory spending.