



Allocations and Subdivisions in the Congressional Budget Process

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The annual budget resolution sets forth total spending and revenue levels for at least five fiscal years. The spending amounts are allocated, or “crosswalked,” to the House and Senate committees having jurisdiction over discretionary spending (the Appropriations Committees) and direct spending (the legislative committees). The committee allocations provide Congress with one means of enforcing the spending levels of a budget resolution after it has been adopted. See the CRS Guides to Congressional Processes at <http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml> for more information on the budget process.

While the budget resolution allocates spending among the 20 major functional categories of the federal budget for the purpose of providing a broad statement of budget priorities, the functional categories do not correspond to the committee system by which Congress operates. The committee allocations reformulate the functional category amounts in a budget resolution to correspond to committee jurisdictions. By allocating the spending among committees responsible for spending legislation, the committee allocations allow Congress to hold its committees accountable for staying within the spending limits established in the budget resolution.

Section 302(a) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (Titles I-IX of P.L. 93-344, 88 Stat. 297-332), as amended, requires that the total budget authority and outlays set forth in the budget resolution be allocated to each House and Senate committee that has jurisdiction over specific spending legislation. These committee allocations usually are included in the joint explanatory statement accompanying the conference report on a budget resolution. Section 302(b) of the Budget Act requires the Appropriations Committee of each chamber to subdivide its committee allocation among its subcommittees as soon as practicable after a budget resolution has been adopted. The Appropriations Committees are then required to report these subdivisions to their respective chamber and may revise the subdivisions any time during the appropriations process to reflect actions taken on spending legislation. Section 302(c) of the Budget Act provides a point of order against the consideration of any appropriations measures before the Appropriations Committees report their subdivisions.

The spending allocations may be revised after a budget resolution has been adopted if provided for in the resolution. For instance, Congress usually includes reserve fund provisions in the annual budget resolution, which provide the chairs of the House and Senate Budget Committees the authority to revise the committee spending allocations if certain legislation is reported by the appropriate committee or other conditions are met.

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees have jurisdiction over the regular appropriations acts and other appropriations acts. The Appropriations Committees of each chamber have parallel subcommittees, each of which is responsible for one of the regular appropriations acts. After extensive hearings, each of the subcommittees reports one of the regular appropriations bills to its respective full committee. Then, the full Appropriations Committees report the bills to their respective chamber. A cost estimate of each bill is prepared and compared to the amount allocated or subdivided to the relevant subcommittee.

Section 302(f) of the Budget Act prohibits any measure or amendment that would cause the 302(a) or 302(b) allocations to be exceeded. In the House, these committee allocations and suballocations are the primary focus of enforcement since Section 311(c) of the Budget Act, known as the “Fazio exception,” allows the overall limit of spending to be breached so long as a committee’s 302(a) allocation is not exceeded.

The allocation limits are not self-enforcing; a Member must raise a point of order for an allocation to be enforced. The points of order may also be waived. In the House, a special rule may be adopted, or unanimous consent may be granted, waiving any budgetary points of order. In the Senate, the point of order against violations of the spending allocations may be waived by a motion under Section 904 of the Budget Act or by unanimous consent. A motion to waive the point of order requires a three-fifths vote of all Senators duly sworn and chosen (60 votes if there are no vacancies).

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