Appropriations 101: How Congress Actually Funds Government

From Budget Requests to Signed Bills

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Course Objectives

- Understand the difference between authorization and appropriation
- Learn how the 12 appropriations subcommittees operate
- Follow the lifecycle of a budget request
- Develop skills for reading J-Books and Congressional Budget Justifications

Why Appropriations Matter

- Constitutional foundation: Congress controls the purse
- Appropriations = actual funding; without them, programs can't operate
- Covers all federal spending: defense, foreign policy, domestic programs

Authorization vs. Appropriation

- Authorization: Creates or continues a program, sets policy
- Appropriation: Provides actual funding
- Both are needed for most federal programs
- Example: NDAA (authorization) vs. Defense Appropriations Act (appropriation)

The Appropriations Committees

- House Appropriations Committee (HAC)
- Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC)
- Jurisdiction and influence
- Seniority and leadership roles

The 12 Subcommittees

- List all 12 (e.g., Defense; State/Foreign Ops; Homeland Security; Labor-HHS-Education)
- Highlight Defense (Function 050) and State/Foreign Ops (Function 150)
- Parallel structure in House and Senate

Budget Function Codes

- What budget functions are and why they matter
- Function 050 (National Defense) vs. Function 150 (International Affairs)
- How to track spending within these functions

The Budget Lifecycle (Overview)

- President's Budget Request (PBR)
- Hearings and testimony
- Subcommittee and full committee markups
- Floor consideration
- Conference committee and final passage
- Presidential signature

Step 1: President's Budget Request

- Released early February (by law, but often delayed)
- Reflects administration priorities
- Accompanied by agency justifications (J-Books, CBJs)

Step 2: Hearings

- Agency heads testify before subcommittees
- Members use hearings to set priorities and press agencies on issues
- Opportunities for advocacy and oversight

Step 3: Markups

- Subcommittee markup: initial funding decisions
- Full committee markup: amendments and policy riders
- Differences in House/Senate processes

Step 4: Floor Consideration

- Debate and amendments (House often open; Senate more constrained)
- Political fights and messaging amendments
- Importance of floor strategy

Step 5: Conference Committee

- Resolving differences between House and Senate bills
- Role of "big four" appropriators
- Agreement packaged for final passage

Timelines & Fiscal Year

- Fiscal year runs Oct 1 – Sept 30
- What happens when bills aren't passed in time:
  - Continuing resolutions (CRs)
  - Omnibus and minibuses
  - Shutdown scenarios and impacts

Reading a J-Book or CBJ

- What these documents contain: program funding levels, justifications, performance metrics
- How to identify line items and priorities
- Using them to prepare questions or amendments

Political Dynamics

- Partisan priorities and negotiations
- Earmarks/community project funding
- Emergency supplementals and disaster funding
- Interaction with authorizing committees
- Rescission and Impoundment

Questions & Next Steps

- Open Q&A
- Encourage review of recent PBs and J-Books
- Invite to take other related modules (Oversight and Investigations, Op-Ed Writing)