

Appropriations 101 – How Congress Actually Funds Government

Overview:

Appropriations are the legal authority for the federal government to spend money. This course explains the difference between authorization and appropriation, outlines the 12 appropriations subcommittees, and walks through the annual funding process from budget request to signed law.

Key Takeaways:

- **Authorization vs. Appropriation:** Authorization creates or continues a program and sets policy; appropriation provides actual funding.
- Congress controls the purse under Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution.
- Appropriations decisions directly determine what programs operate and at what funding level.

Appropriations Committees:

- House Appropriations Committee (HAC)
- Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC)
- Each has 12 parallel subcommittees, including:
 - **Defense** (Function 050)
 - **State, Foreign Operations (SFOPS)** (Function 150)
 - Homeland Security, Labor-HHS-Education, Energy & Water, and others

Budget Functions:

- **Function 050:** National Defense
- **Function 150:** International Affairs
- Budget functions track spending across agencies and priorities.

Budget Lifecycle:

1. President's Budget Request (PBR) – sets administration priorities
2. Hearings – agency heads testify, Members highlight priorities
3. Subcommittee markup – initial funding decisions
4. Full committee markup – amendments, policy riders
5. Floor consideration – debate, amendments, votes
6. Conference committee – reconcile House/Senate differences
7. Final passage & presidential signature

Timelines & Fiscal Year:

- Fiscal year runs Oct 1 – Sept 30
- If bills aren't passed on time: Continuing Resolutions (CRs), Omnibus bills, or shutdowns

Key Documents:

- **J-Books:** Defense funding justifications
- **Congressional Budget Justifications (CBJs):** Civilian agency requests
- Show program funding levels, justifications, and performance metrics

Political Dynamics:



- Bipartisan cooperation common, but priorities differ
- Earmarks/community project funding influence allocations
- Emergencies can trigger supplemental appropriations

Practical Skills:

- Learn subcommittee jurisdictions
- Track bills via committee websites
- Use J-Books/CBJs to identify funding changes and priorities