

Unified budgets can empower members and enable coherent budgeting

The disjointed congressional budget process blocks legislators from contributing.

- Congress' annual budget process only covers discretionary spending in any detail.
 - Appropriations are ~30% of federal spending and shrinking, but they are broken up and are increasingly closed to floor amendments, especially between subcommittee bills.
 - Mandatory spending is twice as large and growing, but members have no inclusive—and anticipated—way to adjust direct spending and revenue policies.
- Major trust fund programs will be depleted in the next fifteen years, but members have no regularized path to pursue solvency and other improvements.
- The budget resolution mostly supports messaging and reinforces divides.
- Deficits and trust fund imbalances keep growing.
- The annual process forces members to vote for or against legislation on which they had little, if any, input and while they are against a shutdown and/or holiday deadline.
- Coalitions to enact appropriations routinely exclude certain members.

Unified budgets are an important part of the solution.

What are unified budgets?

- All spending (discretionary and mandatory) and all revenue amounts—and any changes—are in one annual budget bill. Many states already do this routinely.
- Bundle direct spending and revenue levels and proposed changes from authorizers with

appropriations bills in the full Appropriations Committee markup. Appropriations would incorporate authorizing committee levels and proposals without substantive changes.

- Members' floor amendments could adjust priorities across all areas.

Why are unified budgets better?

- Give members of all committees a greater stake in a successful annual process.
- Empower members to take ownership for budget priorities and outcomes.
- Provide effective vehicle to pursue budget goals and targets.
- Reveal tradeoffs across fiscal policies, help reduce overlap and fragmentation.
- Allow routine correction of imbalances with cover from other budget areas.
- Expand potential coalitions for budget and appropriations legislation.
- Free up floor time for other legislation to update and improve programs.

Unified budgets are far better than leadership-driven omnibus deals.

- Include all line items as a matter of course, not just extenders and other ad hoc changes.
- Let members channel their unique talents in committees and on the floor.
- Increase mutual benefits for members by involving them in multiple stages of the process.
- Strengthen Congress' power of the purse and help reclaim other legislative powers.

[Read the full paper.](#)