

Congress needs better budget approaches

Background

Budgets match resources with outcomes. Ideally, they fund core competencies while recognizing limits and trade-offs. The federal budget process—especially Congress’ stage—does not meet these goals. It is incomplete and disconnected, it allows increasingly harmful outcomes, and it gives few members of Congress a meaningful chance to shape federal priorities. A healthier process can produce better results by harnessing the distributed knowledge that members of Congress can access.

Policy Solutions

- **Automatic CRs:** [Prevent Government Shutdowns Act](#) by Sens. James Lankford and Maggie Hassan.
- **Unified budget:** All spending and all revenue in the annual congressional [budget process](#).
- **Smart budget targets—and [automatically increase](#) the debt limit if they are met.**
 - [Business Cycle Balanced Budget Amendment](#) by Sen. Mike Braun and Rep. Jodey Arrington
 - [Responsible Budget Targets Act](#) by Sen. Mike Braun and Rep. Tom Emmer
- **Better budget transparency:**
 - **Interest costs in CBO/JCT estimates:** The [Cost Estimates Improvement Act](#) by Rep. Michael Cloud.
 - **Adopt fiscal gap and generational accounting:** The [INFORM Act](#) by Rep. Greg Murphy and Sen. Mike Braun.
- **Bipartisan commissions:** The [TRUST Act](#) by Sens. Mitt Romney and Joe Manchin and Reps. Mike Gallagher and Ed Case or the [Sustainable Budget Act](#) by Sen. Cynthia Lummis and Reps. Case and Steve Womack.
- **Spin-offs from larger proposals:** [The Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act](#) by Sens. Mike Enzi and Sheldon Whitehouse or the [Republican Study Committee’s FY2022 Budget](#).
- **Control spending growth:** Especially in Social Security, federal pensions, Medicare, Medicaid, and other health care programs (see AFP’s health policy [one-pager](#)).

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