Fixing the Federal Appropriations Process

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Abstract
The annual appropriations process in the United States is broken. In only four of the past 41 years have all appropriations bills been completed on time. In January 2019, the U.S. entered the longest government shutdown in history. The inconsistent delivery of federal monies causes several problems, most notably for the employees and contractors who work for the federal government, and the many institutions and people who receive benefits and/or services from the federal government. Continuing Resolutions and lapses in appropriation also negatively affect hiring and retention of employees, harm the U.S. economy, and create inefficiencies and management challenges in government agencies. This policy proposal examines the history of the current budgetary process and considers options to provide federal appropriations in a more regularized and timely manner, resulting in improved planning within government agencies, increased efficiency in the provision of government services, and fewer disruptions for federal agencies, employees, and contractors.

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In general, the appropriations process addresses the discretionary portion of the budget – spending ranging from national defense to food safety to education to federal employee salaries – but excludes mandatory spending, such as Medicare and Social Security, which is spent automatically according to formulas. Maya MacGuineas is president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and head of the Campaign to Fix the Debt. She recently wrote an Read More +. Appropriations for the U.S. federal government are decided by Congress through various committees. A company might appropriate money for short-term or long-term needs that include employee salaries, research and development, and dividends. Key Takeaways. Appropriation is the act of setting aside money for a specific purpose. Appropriations tell us how money or capital is being allocated whether it's through the federal government's budget or a company's use of cash and capital. Appropriations by governments are made for federal funds each year for various programs. Appropriations for companies may also be known as capital allocation. Appropriation could also refer to setting apart land or buildings for public use such as for public buildings or parks. The federal funding process begins with the submission of the president’s annual budget request to Congress. Traditionally, this is done on the first Monday in February, though that date often slips, especially when new administrations take office. The president’s budget request details the administration’s position on the full range of federal revenue and spending. The chairs of the appropriations subcommittees, under direction of the appropriations committee chairperson, divide the 302a allocation among the 12 subcommittees. This allocation provides the total funding pool for each of the appropriations bills, known as the “302b allocation.” In the United States Congress, an appropriations bill is legislation to appropriate federal funds to specific federal government departments, agencies and programs. The money provides funding for operations, personnel, equipment and activities. Regular appropriations bills are passed annually, with the funding they provide covering one fiscal year. The fiscal year is the accounting period of the federal government, which runs from October 1 to September 30 of the following year. Appropriations bills