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Biennial Budgeting: Options, Issues, and Previous Congressional Action

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Summary

Difficulties in the timely enactment of budgetary legislation have long fueled interest in ways to structure the congressional budget process to ease time constraints. One long-discussed reform proposal would attempt to remedy this by changing the budget cycle from one to two years.

Biennial budgeting is a concept that may involve several variations, including two-year budget resolutions, two-year appropriations, and other changes in the timing of legislation related to revenue or spending. Biennial budgeting proposals may focus on enacting budgetary legislation for either a two-year period or two succeeding one-year periods in a single measure. The overall time frame for a biennial budget cycle has previously taken either a "stretch" approach, where the current budget process timetable is extended to two full years, or a split sessions approach, where all budgetary activity is expected to occur in a single year or session of Congress (typically the first), while the other year or session is reserved primarily for oversight and the consideration of non-budgetary matters.

Proponents of biennial budgeting have generally advanced three arguments—that a two-year budget cycle would (1) reduce congressional workload by eliminating the need for annual review of routine matters; (2) reserve the second session of each Congress for improved congressional oversight and program review; and (3) allow better long-term planning by the agencies that spend federal funds at the federal, state, or local level.

Critics of biennial budgeting have countered by asserting that the projected benefits might not be realized. Projecting revenues and expenditures for a two-year cycle requires forecasting as much as 30 months in advance. This might result in less accurate forecasts and could require Congress to choose either allowing the President greater latitude to make budgetary adjustments in the off-years or engaging in mid-cycle corrections, which might effectively undercut any workload reduction or intended improvements in planning. Opponents have also pointed out that oversight through annual review of appropriations would be lost under a biennial budget, with no guarantee that a separate oversight session would be effective. Furthermore, they have argued that reducing the number of times that Congress considers budget matters may only raise the stakes, which heightens the possibility for conflict and increased delay.

Biennial budgeting has a long history at the state level. The trend since World War II has been for states to convert to an annual budget cycle; however, the most recent data available, from 2011, indicate that 19 states operate with a two-year cycle, and some states operate with mixed cycles that put significant portions of their budgets on a two-year cycle.

Congressional action related to biennial budgeting first occurred in 1982 with hearings on S. 2008, the Budget and Oversight Reform Act of 1981 (97th Congress). Additional action occurred with respect to biennial budgeting during the 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, and 109th Congresses. None of these proposals were ultimately enacted. In the 112th Congress, the House Rules Committee Subcommittee on the Legislative and Budget Process held a hearing on H.R. 114, the Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act of 2011, but took no further action. In the 113th Congress, the Senate adopted an amendment (S.Amdt. 136) to the FY2014 budget resolution (S.Con.Res. 8), that created a deficit neutral reserve fund for the establishment of a biennial budget and appropriations process. Additionally, the House Budget Committee reported H.R. 1869, the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act of 2014, with an amendment (H.Rept. 113-382). No further action was taken.

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Introduction

One of the main congressional concerns related to the budget process in recent years has been the amount of time it requires. The current process, which provides for consideration of various budget questions in the form of a concurrent resolution on the budget, reconciliation measures, tax measures, public debt measures, authorizations, regular appropriations, continuing appropriations, and supplemental appropriations, has been faulted as repetitive and inefficient.[1] This, in turn, has fueled interest in the idea that the congressional budget process could be better structured to promote a more efficient use of Congress's limited time.

Despite the perceived or actual permanence of much federal spending, the process of formulating, enacting, and executing the federal budget has remained characteristically annual. This annual budget cycle poses both an opportunity and a dilemma for Congress—although the annual review of spending legislation can afford Congress the opportunity to maximize its influence concerning the funding and operation of various programs and policies, many Members have expressed concern with the high percentage of the congressional workload that is devoted to budgetary matters.[2]

The annual completion of the budget cycle is dependent on the timely enactment of budgetary legislation. Consideration of certain types of budgetary legislation is often closely linked to the consideration of other types, so that delays in consideration of one measure may have an impact on the timing of all subsequent budgetary legislation. In recent years, final action occurred on appropriations measures an average of about 104 days after the start of the fiscal year on October 1 (see **Table 1**). The result has been frustration with the budget process and a desire to reduce the number or frequency of budget measures that need to be considered.[3]

The budget process has also been criticized as being unnecessarily repetitive, with some questions being debated in various forms several times each year. Defense policy, for example, may be debated in terms of its priority within the overall budget in the context of the budget resolution, in terms of policy in an authorization measure, and in terms of funding levels on an appropriations bill, only to have it all repeated the following year. Rather than promote efficient consideration, critics contend, this repetition has contributed to the complexity of the budget process, as well as to inefficiency and delay.[4]

[1] For general information on the congressional budget process, see CRS Report 98-721, *Introduction to the Federal Budget Process*, coordinated by Bill Heniff Jr.

[2] This workload is illustrated by the number of budget related roll call votes, as shown in Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann, and Michael J. Malbin, *Vital Statistics on Congress: 2008* (Washington: Brookings Institute Press, 2008), chap. 7, p. 141.

[3] For more on this perspective, see, Rudolph G. Penner and Alan J. Abramson, *Broken Purse Strings* (Washington: The Urban Institute Press, 1988), p. 110.

[4] For more on this perspective, see Prepared Statement of Senator Pete Domenici, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Financial Management and Accountability, *S. 1434—Biennial Budgeting Act of 1995*, hearing, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 1996, S.Hrg. 104-638 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

Table 1. Last Regular Appropriations Act Date of Enactment, FY1996-FY2013

Fiscal Year	Public Law	Date of Enactment	Days Late
FY1996	P.L. 104-134	April 26, 1996	208
FY1997	P.L. 104-208	September 30, 1996	0
FY1998	P.L. 105-118 P.L. 105-119	November 26, 1997	57
FY1999	P.L. 105-277	October 21, 1998	21
FY2000	P.L. 106-113	November 29, 1999	60
FY2001	P.L. 106-553 P.L. 106-554	December 21, 2000	82
FY2002	P.L. 107-115 P.L. 107-116 P.L. 107-117	January 10, 2002	102
FY2003	P.L. 108-7	February 20, 2003	143
FY2004	P.L. 108-199	January 23, 2004	115
FY2005	P.L. 108-447	December 8, 2004	69
FY2006	P.L. 109-149	December 30, 2005	91
FY2007	P.L. 110-5	February 15, 2007	138
FY2008	P.L. 110-161	December 26, 2007	87
FY2009	P.L. 111-8	March 11, 2009	162
FY2010	P.L. 111-118	December 19, 2009	80
FY2011	P.L. 112-10	April 15, 2011	197
FY2012	P.L. 112-74	December 23, 2011	84
FY2013	P.L. 113-6	March 26, 2013	177
FY2014	P.L. 113-76	January 17, 2014	109

Source: Compiled by CRS with data from the Legislative Information System of the U.S. Congress.

A number of possible reforms, such as automatic continuing resolutions,[5] joint budget resolutions,[6] or merging the authorization and appropriations processes, have been advanced, at least in part, in the hope that they could make the budget process operate in a more timely fashion. For example, advocates of an automatic continuing resolution have argued that it could reduce deadline pressures in the appropriations process;[7] those in favor of a joint budget resolution suggest that it would promote early agreement on budget priorities between Congress

[5] For further information on automatic continuing resolutions, see CRS Report R41948, *Automatic Continuing Resolutions: Background and Overview of Recent Proposals*, by Jessica Tollestrup.

[6] For further information joint budget resolutions, see CRS Report R42383, *Budget Process Reform: Proposals and Legislative Actions in 2012*, by Megan S. Lynch.

[7] For more on this perspective, see the testimony of Martha Phillips, Concord Coalition, U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on the Budget and Committee on Governmental Affairs, *To Consider Budget Process Reform*, joint hearing, 106th Cong., 1st sess., S.Hrg. 106-24 (Washington, DC: GPO 1999), p. 63; Brian M. Riedl, "Backgrounder: 10 Elements of Comprehensive Budget Process Reform," The Heritage Foundation, no. 1943, June 15, 2006, p. 7.

and the President;[8] and some argue that a merged authorization-appropriations process could reduce the volume of legislation that needs to be considered in any given session of Congress.[9] As a result, some see these and other proposed reforms as offering the potential to make the timely enactment of budget legislation more likely.

Another possible approach to addressing this concern is to change the budget cycle from one year to two years, also known as "biennial budgeting." Because budgeting for the federal government encompasses a number of types of measures, biennial budgeting can have several meanings. Biennial budgeting can involve two-year budget resolutions, two-year appropriations, and other changes in the timing of legislation related to revenue or spending. Typically, biennial budgeting proposals have included at least the first two aspects. Biennial budgeting proposals may focus on enacting budgetary legislation for either a two-year period or two succeeding one-year periods in a single measure. In addition, biennial budget proposals typically require that executive branch planning and performance reviews be revised so that they are based on a two-year cycle.

This report provides background on options, issues, and previous congressional action related to biennial budgeting.

Types of Biennial Budgeting

Biennial budgeting as a concept has many permutations, and may include a requirement for two-year budget resolutions, two-year appropriations, and also affect the timing of consideration for other types of legislation related to revenue and spending.

The overall time frame contained in previous biennial budgeting proposals has typically taken either a "stretch" or "split sessions" approach. The stretch approach would extend the current budget process timetable to two full years.[10] Advocates of this approach often argue that it allows for less hurried and more thorough consideration of budgetary legislation. In contrast, the split sessions approach is based on the expectation that all budgetary legislation would be considered in a single year or session of Congress (typically the first), while consideration of non-budgetary matters would occur primarily in the other year or session.[11] Advocates of this approach often assert that limiting the time frame during which Congress may consider budgetary matters to every other year or session will encourage greater levels of agency and program oversight during the other.[12]

Biennial budgeting proposals have also varied with respect to the time frame for appropriations. "Biennial appropriations" may refer to all appropriations being enacted for a two-year period, all appropriations being enacted for two succeeding one-year periods in a single measure. In addition, the consideration of the 12 regular appropriations bills might occur in stages, so that

[8] For more on this perspective, see Penner and Abramson, *Broken Purse Strings*, pp. 113-114.

[9] See, for example, Testimony of Tim Roemer, in U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Congressional Oversight of Intelligence Activities*, hearing, 110th Cong., 1st sess., November 13, 2007, S.Hrg. 110-794 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2007).

[10] See, for example, S. 211 and H.R. 114 (112th Cong.).

[11] See, for example, S. 286 and H.R. 22 (100th Cong.).

[12] For a more extensive discussion of the differences between these approaches, see U.S. Congressional Budget Office, *Biennial Budgeting*, February 1988, pp. 1-2.

some are enacted during the first year of the biennium and the others are enacted during the second year of the biennium.

Because of the variety of approaches discussed above, biennial budgeting may have different meanings for different people. This section provides an overview of the options and selected issues related to two-year budget resolutions, two-year appropriations acts, and other possible changes in the timing of other types of legislation that might be associated with biennial budgeting. It is important to note, however, that this section does not discuss all possible outcomes and there is likely to be variance in what would occur if biennial budgeting were adopted, depending on the context and framework that was implemented. Whether these implications are viewed positively or negatively depends on the observer's assessment of the probable consequences of switching to a biennial budget, as well as the normative value placed on those consequences.

Two-Year Budget Resolutions

Since the enactment of the Congressional Budget Act in 1974 (P.L. 93-344; 88 Stat. 297), the budget process has centered around the concurrent resolution on the budget, which sets aggregate budget policies and functional priorities for Congress.[13] The budget resolution is used to coordinate the various budgetary actions that are to be taken during a session of Congress. Proposals to convert the budget process to a two-year cycle have typically involved a process centered on a two-year budget resolution.

Although the budget process is characteristically annual, there are a number of aspects of the Budget Act that encourage Congress to look beyond a single fiscal year. In particular, Section 301(a) currently requires that the budget resolution include binding figures for the upcoming fiscal year, plus planning levels for at least each of the four ensuing fiscal years. In recent years, budget resolutions have often included planning levels beyond the minimum number required by the Budget Act. For example, the budget resolution for FY2004 (H.Con.Res. 95, 108th Congress) included planning levels through FY2013. The Budget Act also provides for the enforcement of the five-year totals for revenues and direct spending, and allows multi-year reconciliation instructions. In addition, the Senate's Pay-As-You-Go point of order (Section 201(a) of S.Con.Res. 21, 110th Congress, the FY2008 budget resolution) prohibits the consideration of revenue or direct spending legislation that would increase or cause an on-budget deficit over a six-year period and an 11-year period, each beginning with the current year.[14] The Cut-As-You-Go rule in the House (Rule XXI, Clause 10) also provides a point of order against the consideration of legislation that would have the net effect of increasing mandatory spending over the same two time periods.

It is possible that Congress might benefit from only needing to adopt the broad outlines of fiscal policy every two years. As Joseph White of the Brookings Institution stated in testimony before the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress in 1993, "Annual fights about priorities between the same Congress and President do nobody any good."[15] In addition, Congress was

[13] For further information on the budget resolution, see CRS Report 98-512, *Formulation and Content of the Budget Resolution* and CRS Report 98-511, *Consideration of the Budget Resolution*, by Bill Heniff Jr.

[14] For more on the Senate PAYGO point of order, see CRS Report RL31943, *Budget Enforcement Procedures: Senate Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) Rule*, by Bill Heniff Jr.

[15] U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Budget Process: Testimony of Hon. Anthony* (continued...)

unable to adopt a budget resolution for FY1999, FY2003, FY2005, FY2007, and FY2011 through FY2014, and has therefore had to use other means to coordinate and enforce budgetary actions in those years.[16] Based upon this recent experience, it could be argued that it is not necessary to adopt a budget resolution every year, and that a two-year budget resolution would better reflect current practice.

It is also possible, however, that budget resolutions have served a useful purpose by providing Congress with the opportunity to participate in setting fiscal policy, and that the inability to adopt a budget resolution has been a portent of further budgetary battles throughout the year, rather than an indication that there is still agreement within Congress on the policies that were adopted in the previous year. In addition, although fiscal policy can be set for two-year periods, it is potentially subject to considerable uncertainty.[17] If the adoption of a biennial budget resolution were to fully eliminate the opportunity currently provided by the budget resolution each year to either alter or confirm current policy, it might serve to further weaken the latter stages of the process.

Two-Year Appropriations

One of the significant changes that might be made by a biennial budgeting proposal would be a two-year cycle for appropriations.[18] Under the split sessions approach, all regular appropriations measures would be considered in the first year of each Congress and could be provided either for a single two-year fiscal period or for two one-year periods. In either case, Congress would not need to act on appropriations during the second year of each Congress, except for emergency and other supplemental appropriations as needed. The stretch approach would opt instead for a process that would increase the duration of the current budget cycle so that, while the appropriations process could begin in the first session of a Congress, the fiscal biennium would not begin until October 1 of the second year. This would give Congress and the President a period of 20 months, rather than the current 8 months, to negotiate appropriations details. Under such proposals, Congress would not need to act on appropriations in the off-year, except for emergency or supplemental appropriations.

Most biennial budget proposals include two-year appropriations because, supporters contend, a biennial budget resolution would not, in and of itself, present sufficient certainty for long-term planning by agencies, significant savings in congressional workload, or enough additional time for oversight.[19] If regular appropriations were to be confined to the first fiscal year of the biennium, a possible benefit might be that additional programmatic review and oversight could occur during the year in which routine appropriations had already been provided. The extent to which this benefit would translate into greater time for the consideration of non-budgetary legislation and additional oversight would be dependent on a number of factors, including the

(...continued)

Beilenson and a Panel of Experts, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., Mar. 23, 1993 (Washington,: GPO, 1993), p. 82.

[16] See CRS Report RL31443, *The "Deeming Resolution": A Budget Enforcement Tool*, by Megan S. Lynch.

[17] For a discussion of challenges related to long-term budgeting, see CRS Report R41516, *Adopting a Long-Term Budget Focus: Challenges and Proposals*, by Megan S. Lynch, Marc Labonte, and Mindy R. Levit.

[18] For general information on the appropriations process, see CRS Report R42388, *The Congressional Appropriations Process: An Introduction*, by Jessica Tollestrup.

[19] Testimony of Alice M. Rivlin, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Government Operations, Subcommittee on Legislation and National Security, *Reform of the Federal Budget Process*, hearing, 100th Cong., 1st sess., March 12, April 2, and 30, H.Rept. 401-43 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1987).

extent to which emergency and other supplemental appropriations actions were necessary in the off-year.[20]

Current practice already includes a number of the devices proposed as part of a biennial budgeting system. For example, appropriations acts can provide for both budget authority that becomes available in future fiscal years ("advance appropriations") and budget authority available for periods of longer than a single fiscal year (multi-year or "no-year" appropriations).[21] Making these practices mandatory for all programs could result in the more timely enactment of appropriations; this outcome, however, is dependent upon the type of appropriations that produce conflict and delays in the budget process.[22] If routine appropriations are the cause of delays, then it is possible that making these decisions less often would be a beneficial change. If unforeseen and contentious issues are responsible, then widening the above practices (advance appropriations, for example) to mandate their use for all programs every other year is unlikely to result in any significant improvement in the process.

One effect of either the stretch or split sessions biennial budgeting approaches would be that regular appropriations bills would be enacted only every other year. One consequence is that Congress over the years has previously attempted to limit the amount of executive branch discretion over the execution phase of the budget process by including earmarks and other types of provisos within the text or joint explanatory statement accompanying conference reports on regular appropriations bills. A decrease in the frequency of regular appropriations would appear to reduce the number of vehicles available to Congress, and thus have a direct impact on its ability to influence executive branch budget execution in this manner.

Other Types of Legislation

Biennial budget proposals also might explicitly address the timing of other types of legislation—such as authorizations of appropriations, supplemental or emergency appropriations, reconciliation, entitlements, revenue, or other non-budgetary policy measures—within a biennial budgeting time frame.

Many biennial budgeting proposals require that all types of authorizations be enacted for periods of at least two fiscal years. Under current practice, however, many authorizations of appropriations are already enacted for multi-year periods. The main exceptions to this are the Department of Defense and Intelligence authorizations of appropriations, which are considered annually, so the impact of such a requirement on other policy issues is unclear. Most proposals also divide action so that all authorizations would normally be considered in the second year of each Congress, separate from consideration of the budget resolution and regular appropriations measures. A previous concern regarding a multi-year authorization requirement is that, unless

[20] Observers disagree as to the extent to which off-year appropriations might be necessary within a biennial budgeting cycle. For more on this debate, see Robert Greenstein and James Horney, "Biennial Budgeting: Do the Drawbacks Outweigh the Advantages?," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 16, 2006 and David Kendall and Jim Kessler, "Biennial Budgeting: Better Value for Taxpayers," Third Way, September 2010.

[21] For further information on the future provision of budget authority, see CRS Report RS20441, *Advance Appropriations, Forward Funding, and Advance Funding*, by Sandy Streeter.

[22] Testimony of Director, Congressional Budget Office, Dan L. Crippen, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Rules, *Biennial Budgeting: A Tool for Promoting Fiscal Management and Oversight*, hearing, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, March 10 and 16, H.Hrg.106-681 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000).

supported by biennial appropriations, they may lack the degree of certainty required to achieve the promised benefits of long-range planning.[23] One proposed benefit of multi-year authorizations is that they could be in place before the appropriations process begins, providing for smoother working relationship between authorizers and appropriators.[24]

Although the requirement for multi-year authorizations within biennial budgeting would only affect some programs, such a system could have major repercussions for those specific issue areas. For example, Congress has operated under the presumption that the Defense and Intelligence authorizations are sensitive to a variety of foreign policy issues and, consequently, that these issues need to be addressed every year. An attempt to experiment with two-year authorizations for the Department of Defense in the 1980s proved unsuccessful. This experience has sometimes been partly attributed to the fact that the experiment was not part of a comprehensive move to biennial budgeting and was not supported by two-year appropriations. Another contributing factor was that the two-year process was overtaken by other budgetary decisions. For example, the deficit reduction concerns that led to a late 1987 budget summit between Congress and President Reagan effectively required the second year of the two-year authorization to be amended extensively. Given this experience, support for two-year defense authorizations waned.[25]

The proposed division between the consideration of authorizations and appropriations for split session approaches could serve to augment the separation of money and policy decisions currently embodied in House and Senate rules. The division also could clarify the different functions that authorizations and appropriations serve, but that some Members feel have been blurred or weakened in recent decades.[26] Conversely, there might be an erosion of the separation between authorizations and appropriations. Absent an opportunity to consider authorizing legislation in the first year of a Congress, Members might feel it necessary to use appropriations bills as legislative vehicles to raise policy questions, rather than wait for the second authorization/oversight session.[27]

The extent to which supplemental or emergency appropriations might be available during various portions of the biennium depends on both the type of biennial budgeting that was enacted and the types of appropriations that would be allowed (or not explicitly prohibited) under a particular framework. Under a split session timetable, decisions on appropriations are typically confined to the first year in the biennium, with the goal being that the second year will be focused on programmatic decisions and oversight. The degree to which separation was enforced would

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[23] For further information on the relationship of authorizations and appropriations, see CRS Report R42098, *Authorization of Appropriations: Procedural and Legal Issues*, by Jessica Tollestrup and Brian T. Yeh.

[24] Rep. William H. Natcher, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, testified in 1993 that requiring multi-year authorizations to be enacted the year before appropriations measures would serve the Congress well. U.S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, *Budget Process: Testimony of Hon. William H. Natcher*, hearing, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., March 11, 1993 (Washington: GPO, 1993), p. 5.

[25] David C. Morrison, "Two at a Time," *National Journal*, vol. 21, no. 35 (September 2, 1989), p. 2172; and Robert J. Art, "The Pentagon: The Case for Biennial Budgeting," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 2 (summer 1989), pp. 193-214.

[26] As illustrated by testimony on budget process reform on several occasions in recent years. One example is the extensive testimony before the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress in 1992.

[27] Testimony of Deputy Director, Congressional Budget Office, James L. Blum, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Financial Management and Accountability, *S. 1434—Biennial Budgeting Act of 1995*, hearing, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 1996, S.Hrg. 104-638 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

determine the extent to which supplemental appropriations might also be confined to the first year of the biennium, or another alternative timetable. A stretch model might also limit the time frame in which appropriations decisions can be adjusted, for example, to the period after the budget resolution was adopted.[28]

Reconciliation instructions produce a type of legislation intended to bring existing revenue and spending law into conformity with the policies in the budget resolution.[29] For such legislation to be in order, reconciliation instructions must first be adopted in the budget resolution. As a result, under a biennial budget resolution, the possibility of enacting reconciliation legislation would typically only exist once every two years, unless the rules governing reconciliation contained in the Congressional Budget Act were modified to allow for such legislation under an alternative mechanism or time frame. Some observers perceive this implication as an argument against biennial budgeting.[30]

Although biennial budget proposals have not typically addressed restricting other types of legislation, such as entitlements and revenue, to a particular time frame within the biennium, some observers have suggested that this also might be preferable. For example, under a split session approach, legislation affecting revenue or spending might be limited to the first year or session of Congress when other decisions regarding budgetary legislation are made.[31]

General Arguments Favoring and Opposing Biennial Budgeting

Aside from issues concerning how particular aspects of biennial budgeting might work in practice, a number of arguments have been made for and against its overall utility. These arguments are primarily drawn from congressional hearings, analyses of biennial budgeting by governmental committees and commissions, and scholarly articles and reports issued by think tanks analyzing various budget process reform proposals. Note that some of these arguments are based upon the potential implications discussed in the previous section. While these arguments are not an exhaustive list of all reasons why biennial budgeting proposals have been supported or opposed, and their applicability is heavily dependent upon the type of biennial budgeting being considered, they are representative of the debate that has developed over the past 30 years.

[28] For a discussion of this possibility, see U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Proposed Budget Reforms: A Critical Analysis*, committee print, 100th Cong., 2nd sess., April 1988, S.Prt. 100-98 (Washington: GPO, 1988), pp. 22-23.

[29] For further information on reconciliation, see CRS Report 98-814, *Budget Reconciliation Legislation: Development and Consideration*, by Bill Heniff Jr.

[30] See, for example, Prepared Statement of Congressman Nick Smith, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Rules, *Biennial Budgeting: A Tool for Promoting Fiscal Management and Oversight*, hearing, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, March 10 and 16, H.Hrg.106-681 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000).

[31] See, for example, Testimony of Director, Congressional Budget Office, Dan L. Crippen, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Rules, *Biennial Budgeting: A Tool for Promoting Fiscal Management and Oversight*, hearing, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, March 10 and 16, H.Hrg.106-681 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000).

Arguments Made by Proponents of Biennial Budgeting

Supporters of biennial budgeting have generally advanced three arguments—that a two-year budget cycle would (1) reduce congressional workload by eliminating the need for annual consideration of routine or repetitious matters; (2) allow Congress to reserve time to promote improved oversight and program review; and (3) allow better long-term planning by the agencies that spend federal funds at the federal, state, or local level.

Advocates have asserted that reducing the number of times that Congress must consider budget questions would reduce the percentage of congressional time consumed by the process and would allow more time for Congress to conduct agency and program oversight.[32] By effectively dividing each Congress into a budget year and an authorization/oversight year, a two-year cycle might reduce competition for Members' time and attention, and allow for more effective use of authorizations to establish policy. Congress would not have to resort to appropriating in the absence of a current authorization as often, because the authorizations would not be crowded out of the congressional schedule by appropriations questions.[33] Another anticipated benefit has been that executive branch agencies, relieved of the need to develop and defend budget proposals as frequently, could better manage federal programs.[34]

Another argument that has often been made by proponents of biennial budgeting is that it might increase certainty about the level of future funding, thus allowing better long-range planning by federal agencies and by state and local governments. The Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush Administrations all have previously expressed support for biennial budgeting.[35] The 1993 report of the National Performance Review (the Gore Commission) noted, "Considerable time could be saved—and used more effectively—in both the executive and legislative branches of government if budgets and appropriations were moved to a biennial cycle."[36] The Clinton Administration's final budget submission in 2000 reiterated its support for biennial budgeting.[37] The George W. Bush Administration also included support for biennial budgeting (as well as other budget process reforms) in the President's annual budget submission to Congress. The FY2004 Budget request stated that "a biennial budget would allow lawmakers to devote more time every other year to ensuring that taxpayers' money is spent wisely and efficiently. In addition, Government agencies would receive more stable funding, which would facilitate longer range planning and improved fiscal management."[38]

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[32] See, for example, Prepared Statement of Senator Pete Domenici, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Financial Management and Accountability, *S. 1434—Biennial Budgeting Act of 1995*, hearing, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 1996, S.Hrg. 104-638 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

[33] See, for example, Prepared Statement of Senator Wendell H. Ford, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Financial Management and Accountability, *S. 1434—Biennial Budgeting Act of 1995*, hearing, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 1996, S.Hrg. 104-638 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

[34] See, for example, U.S. Office of the Vice President, *Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less: Mission-Driven, Results-Oriented Budgeting*, accompanying report of the National Performance Review (Washington: GPO, 1993).

[35] As of the date of this report, the Obama Administration has not adopted an official position on biennial budgeting.

[36] Vice President, *Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less: Mission-Driven, Results-Oriented Budgeting*, p. 59.

[37] U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2001, Analytical Perspectives* (Washington: GPO, 2000), p. 287.

[38] U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2004, Analytical Perspectives* (Washington: GPO, 2003), p. 318.

Supporters have also pointed to the multi-year nature of the budget summit agreements between Congress and the President both as evidence of the efficacy of multi-year budgeting and as a major factor in recent years for promoting more efficient consideration of budgetary legislation. Notably, the 1987 agreement between Congress and the Reagan Administration, the 1990 agreement with the Bush Administration, and the 1993 and 1997 agreements with the Clinton Administration were all built around the projected future impact of a budget plan. Subsequent budget resolutions, and budget implementing legislation, generally adhered to those agreements. By institutionalizing this arrangement, advocates of biennial budgeting posit that the success of these agreements can be duplicated.[39]

Arguments Made by Opponents of Biennial Budgeting

Critics of biennial budgeting have countered with several arguments as to why some of the projected benefits might not be realized. Reducing the number of times that Congress considers budget matters, they have suggested, may only raise the stakes, and thereby heighten the possibility for conflict and increased delay.[40] In addition, enacting a budget resolution and spending legislation every other year could be effective in reducing congressional workload or aiding longer-term planning, but likely only in the second year of the cycle.[41] Even that benefit may not accrue without accurate budget projections. Making accurate projections of revenues and expenditures is always difficult. With total appropriations for FY2010 in excess of $1.9 trillion (of which mandatory spending accounted for over one-third)[42] even small errors can be significant. Projecting revenues and expenditures for a two-year cycle requires forecasting as much as 30 months in advance, rather than 18 under an annual budget cycle, and even 18-month projections have previously been inaccurate. For example, during the FY2006 appropriations cycle, when the budget projections for the upcoming fiscal year were discovered to be $1.2 billion less than what would be required to provide for veterans' health care.[43] Such issues with inaccurate forecasting, critics have argued, might be heightened by biennial budgeting and could result in providing either too much or too little money for individual programs. Some have feared that this would increase the need for revisions to the budget resolution, supplemental appropriations, or other adjustments in the off-year that would effectively undercut any intended improvements in planning.[44]

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[39] For a discussion of this issue, see Testimony of Associate Director, U.S. General Accounting Office, Susan J. Irving, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Financial Management and Accountability, *S. 1434—Biennial Budgeting Act of 1995*, hearing, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 1996, S.Hrg. 104-638 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

[40] See, for example, Louis Fisher, "Biennial Budgeting in the Federal Government," *Public Budgeting and Finance*, vol. 17, no. 3 (fall 1997), p. 89 and Greenstein and Horney, "Biennial Budgeting: Do the Drawbacks Outweigh the Advantages?"

[41] See, for example, Testimony of Deputy Director, Congressional Budget Office, James L. Blum, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Financial Management and Accountability, *S. 1434—Biennial Budgeting Act of 1995*, hearing, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 1996, S.Hrg. 104-638 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

[42] U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *Report of Committee Activities*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., H.Rept. 111-700 (Washington, DC: GPO 2011), p. 5.

[43] The reason for this shortfall was attributed at that time, in part, to the unexpected rise in the number of veterans enrolling in the health care system. For further information, see Tim Starks, "Bill Targets Veteran's Funding Shortfall," *CQ Weekly Report*, November 21, 2005, p. 3136.

[44] Penner and Abramson, *Broken Purse Strings*, pp. 116-117 and Greenstein and Horney, "Biennial Budgeting: Do the Drawbacks Outweigh the Advantages?."

With only a limited ability to anticipate future conditions, critics have argued that a two-year cycle could require Congress to choose either to allow the President greater latitude for making budgetary adjustments in the off-years or to engage in mid-cycle corrections to a degree that would nullify any anticipated time savings or planning advantages.[45] Furthermore, they have argued that annual review of appropriations requests is an important part of oversight[46] that would be lost under a biennial budget, with no guarantee that committees would take advantage of a separate oversight session, or that oversight separate from review of funding decisions would be as effective.[47]

In addition, critics have contended that the institutional incentives for supporting two-year budgets can vary based on the expected budgetary outcome. A budget plan that would lock in an amount for the second year of a biennium would draw relatively little support from program advocates in a time of increasing budgets (because the program might receive more generous funding later), and, alternately, would draw relatively little support from program cutters in times of decreasing budgets (because the program would be somewhat insulated from possible later cuts). In other words, these critics have asserted, an action to lock in future budgetary resources would be likely to draw opposition when some decision makers believe that a "better" decision may be arrived at in the future.[48]

In response to the possibility of duplicating the success of previous long-term budget agreements, some opponents have argued that the lessons to be learned from successful executive-congressional summits are somewhat more narrow. Opponents have suggested that while these occasional summits have proved useful in the context of facilitating the following year's budget process, it would not be possible to institutionalize the process. Instead, some of these critics perceive that the political and budgetary context that brings Congress and the President to the bargaining table on a regular basis is also necessary to ensure a commitment to implementing the outcome.[49]

Biennial Budgeting in the States

Perhaps because many Representatives and Senators have government experience at the state level, state practices are often cited in deliberations on budget process reform. In particular, 19 states operate under a two-year budget cycle (see **Table 2**), and this experience has been cited by many in discussing the applicability of biennial budgeting to the federal government.

[45] See, for example, Fisher, "Biennial Budgeting in the Federal Government," p. 91.

[46] For a discussion of appropriations oversight, see CRS Report RL30240, *Congressional Oversight Manual*, by Alissa M. Dolan et al.

[47] See, for example, Testimony of Associate Director, U.S. General Accounting Office, Susan J. Irving, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Financial Management and Accountability, *S. 1434—Biennial Budgeting Act of 1995*, hearing, 104th Cong., 2nd sess., July 24, 1996, S.Hrg. 104-638 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1996).

[48] See, for example, Testimony of Robert Greenstein, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Rules, *Biennial Budgeting: A Tool for Promoting Fiscal Management and Oversight*, hearing, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, March 10 and 16, H.Hrg.106-681 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000).

[49] Prepared statement of Congressman Porter J. Goss, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Rules, *Biennial Budgeting: A Tool for Promoting Fiscal Management and Oversight*, hearing, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., February 16, March 10 and 16, H.Hrg.106-681 (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000).

Table 2. States with Annual and Biennial Budgets (2011)

Annual Budget with Annual Legislative Sessions (31 states)	Biennial Budget with Annual Legislative Sessions (15 states)	Biennial Budget with Biennial Legislative Sessions (4 States)
Alabama	Connecticut	Montana
Alaska	Hawaii	Nevada
Arizona[a]	Indiana	North Dakota[d]
Arkansas	Kentucky	Texas
Colorado	Maine	
California	Minnesota	
Delaware	Nebraska	
Florida	New Hampshire	
Georgia	North Carolina	
Idaho	Ohio	
Illinois	Oregon	
Iowa	Virginia	
Kansas[b]	Washington	
Louisiana	Wisconsin	
Maryland	Wyoming[d]	
Massachusetts		
Michigan		
Mississippi		
Missouri[c]		
New Jersey		
New Mexico		
New York		
Oklahoma		
Pennsylvania		
Rhode Island		
South Carolina		
South Dakota		
Tennessee		
Utah		
Vermont		
West Virginia		

Source: Ronald K. Snell, *State Experiences with Annual and Biennial Budgeting,* National Conference of State Legislatures, April 2011, p. 3, available at http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/budget/state-experiences-with-annual-and-biennial-budgeti.aspx.

a. In Arizona, some small agencies are on a biennial cycle; the rest are on an annual cycle.

b. In Kansas, 20 agencies are on a biennial cycle; the rest are on an annual cycle.

c. In Missouri, the operating budget is on an annual basis; the capital budget is on a biennial cycle.

d. These states enact consolidated two-year budgets; all other states with biennial budgets enact two annual budgets simultaneously.

However, the state experience does not provide any single answer concerning biennial budgeting.[50] Some states that operate under an annual cycle have significant portions of their budget enacted on a two-year cycle. For example, Missouri enacts its operating budget on an

[50] This has been concluded by the Government Accountability Office in a number of studies on biennial budgeting and the states. See, for example, U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Biennial Budgeting: Three States' Experiences*, GAO-01-132, October 2000, p. 6.

annual cycle, but its capital budget on a biennial cycle,[51] whereas Kansas budgets for some regulatory agencies two years at a time within the overall context of an annual budget. Conversely, some states with biennial cycles do a significant portion of their budgeting on an annual basis. For example, Virginia and Oregon both enact a biennial budget that is routinely amended during the session when the budget is being executed. Minnesota considers both its operating and capital budgets on two-year cycles, but in different years. As a result, supporting examples can be found both for and against adopting a two-year cycle at the federal level.[52]

One argument of opponents of a two-year cycle has been that the trend among states has been to shift from biennial to annual budget cycles, particularly in those states with larger populations. This trend, opponents have suggested, demonstrates that biennial budgeting represents a way of budgeting less applicable to modern circumstances. In support of this, they have pointed out that, while 44 states operated with biennial budget cycles in 1940, this was because most state legislatures at that time tended to meet every other year.[53] As of 2011, with the prevalence of annual sessions, 31 states use annual cycles, including 7 of the 10 most populous states.[54] However, not all states have made changes in favor of annual budgeting. At least three states (Hawaii in 1967, Nebraska in 1987, and Connecticut in 1991) have switched to biennial budgeting after extended periods in which they used an annual cycle, while several others (Indiana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) returned to biennial cycles after brief experiments with annual budgets.

As discussed above, one of the main arguments made by opponents of biennial budgeting has been that it would inevitably lead to greater authority for the President. Again the experience at the state level is inconclusive. Both annual and biennial budget cycles have been coupled with varying degrees of executive branch discretion and authority. For example, Maine, with a biennial budget, has far stricter limits on the governor’s authority to transfer funds or cut spending unilaterally than does South Dakota, with an annual budget.[55]

The natural tension between the desire for longer planning horizons and the increasing inaccuracy of budget projections when stretched over longer periods has not been solved at the state level. This is because the same basic system of funding stability and incremental budget changes that characterizes federal budgeting also operates in the state context. Few state programs are subject to sweeping changes in any given year, regardless of the budget cycle. This might suggest that both the assertions of a need for a longer budget cycle to ensure better planning and fears related to the inadequacy of long-term forecasts of budgetary needs might be overstated.

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[51] An operating budgeting accounts for day-to-day government expenditures and is typically funded with current revenues such as taxes and short-term debt (less than one-year maturity). A capital budget accounts for capital expenditures that are funded by a mix of long-term debt and current revenues.

[52] Ronald K. Snell, “Annual vs. Biennial Budgeting: No Clear Winner,” *Spectrum*, vol. 68 (winter 1995), p. 23.

[53] National Conference of State Legislatures, “Table 7-1: Executive Authority to Cut the Enacted Budget,” September 2008. Available at http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/budget/executive-authority-to-cut-the-enacted-budget.aspx.

[54] California, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania all operate with annual cycles, whereas North Carolina, Ohio and Texas operate with biennial cycles.

[55] Snell, “Annual vs. Biennial Budgeting: No Clear Winner,” p. 23.

Congressional Action on Biennial Budgeting

Almost from the time the Congressional Budget Act was enacted in 1974, budget process reform has been a topic of congressional interest and biennial budgeting has been discussed at least since the 95th Congress (1977-1978).[56] Hearings on the subject of budget process reform have often included testimony concerning biennial budgeting. In addition, on several occasions, both House and Senate committees have conducted hearings specifically on the topic of biennial budgeting.[57] Congressional interest in biennial budgeting has also been demonstrated by survey findings[58] and by the level of cosponsorship of biennial budgeting proposals.[59]

Biennial budgeting has also been considered by a number of federal committees and commissions organized to study possible procedural or structural reforms to Congress, the budget process, or both. In addition to the Gore Commission the National Economic Commission,[60] and the Study Group on Senate Practices and Procedures (also known as the Pearson-Ribicoff Commission) recommended a form of biennial budgeting.[61] In 1993, both the Senate and House members of the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress included proposals for a two-year budget cycle in recommendations to their respective chambers (S.Rept. 103-215, vol. 1, and H.Rept. 103-413, vol. 1).

In recent years, House jurisdiction over budget process reform generally has been shared jointly by the Committee on Rules and the Committee on the Budget; both have considered the issue of biennial budgeting. In the Senate, prior to the 109th Congress, jurisdiction over the budget process was shared jointly by the Committee on Governmental Affairs and the Committee on the Budget, under a standing order of the Senate (first agreed to August 4, 1977, and discontinued as of

[56] For a more detailed discussion of earlier consideration of biennial budgeting, see U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, *Improving the Operation of the Legislative Branch of the Federal Government, and for Other Purposes*, report to accompany S. 1824, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., S.Rept. 103-297 (Washington: GPO, 1994), pp. 10-14.

[57] Printed hearings specifically addressing the issue of biennial budgeting include U.S. Congress, House Committee on Government Operations, *The Vice President's National Performance Review—Recommending A Biennial Budget Process*, hearings, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., October 7, 1993 (Washington: GPO, 1994); and U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *S. 261—Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act*, hearings, 105th Cong., 1st sess., April 23, 1997 (Washington: GPO, 1997).

[58] For example, 85% of Representatives and 87.5% of Senators responding to a 1987 survey indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the idea of appropriating on a two-year schedule. *Congress Speaks—A Survey of the 100th Congress* (Washington: Center for Responsive Politics, 1988), pp. 34.

[59] For example, H.Res. 396 (106th Congress) was introduced by Representative David Dreier on November 18, 1999 with 245 cosponsors, expressing the sense of the House in favor of biennial budgeting legislation. More recently, H.R. 1869 (113th Cong.), which would have implemented biennial budgeting, had 142 cosponsors by the end of the 113th Congress.

[60] U.S. National Economic Commission, *Report of the National Economic Commission* (Washington: GPO, 1989), p. 11.

[61] The Pearson-Ribicoff Commission recommended that Congress consider half of the regular appropriations bills each year. For further information, see U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, *Report of the Study Group on Senate Practices and Procedures*, committee print, 98th Cong., 2nd sess., S. Prt. 98-242 (Washington: GPO, 1984), p. 21.

January 2005).[62] Jurisdiction over the budget process is currently held by the Senate Budget Committee.[63]

Congressional action related to biennial budgeting first occurred in 1982 with hearings on S. 2008, the Budget and Oversight Reform Act of 1981 (97th Congress). Additional action, outlined below, occurred with respect to biennial budgeting during the 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 112th, and 113thCongresses. None of these proposals were ultimately enacted. In the 112th Congress, the House Rules Committee Subcommittee on the Legislative and Budget Process held a hearing on H.R. 114, the Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act of 2011; no further action occurred during that Congress. In the 113th Congress, the Senate adopted an amendment (S.Amdt. 136) to the FY2014 budget resolution (S.Con.Res. 8) that created a deficit neutral reserve fund for the establishment of a biennial budget and appropriations process.[64] Additionally, the House Budget Committee reported H.R. 1869, the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act of 2014, with an amendment (H.Rept. 113-382).

97th Congress

S. 2008, the Budget and Oversight Reform Act of 1981, was introduced on January 25, 1982. This bill would have amended the Congressional Budget Act to provide for a biennial budget cycle. The measure was jointly referred to the Senate Committee on the Budget and Committee on Governmental Affairs. The Committee on the Budget held hearings on the measure on September 14, 16, 21, and 23, 1982. S. 2008 was not reported out of committee.

100th Congress

On May 6, 1987, during consideration of S.Con.Res. 49, the budget resolution for FY1988, an amendment (S.Amdt. 186 to S.Amdt. 174) was offered on the floor of the Senate to express the sense of the Congress that biennial budget process should be enacted into law that year. The amendment was tabled, 53-45.[65]

S. 2478, the Biennial Budget Act of 1988, was introduced on June 7, 1988. The measure was jointly referred to the Senate Committee on the Budget and Committee on Governmental Affairs. The Committee on Governmental Affairs held hearings on the measure on June 7, 1988. S. 2478 was reported by the Committee on Governmental Affairs on August 25, 1988, with amendments (S.Rept. 100-499). No further action was taken.

[62] This order provided that if one committee reported a measure, the other had 30 days to report or be discharged from further consideration.

[63] This change was provided for under the terms of S.Res. 445 (108th Congress) and has continued in effect through the date of this report.

[64] For further information on reserve funds and the congressional budget resolution, see CRS Report RL33122, *Congressional Budget Resolutions: Revisions and Adjustments*, by Robert Keith.

[65] Senate debate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 133, part 9 (May 6, 1987), p. 11437.

101st Congress

S. 29, the Biennial Budget Act, was introduced on January 25, 1989. The measure was jointly referred to the Senate Committee on the Budget and Committee on Governmental Affairs. The Committees on Budget and Governmental Affairs held joint hearings on the measure on October 18, 1989. S. 29 was reported by the Committee on Governmental Affairs on March 21, 1990 (S.Rept. 101-254). No further action was taken.

On May 4, 1989, during consideration of S.Con.Res. 30, the Senate budget resolution for FY1990, an amendment (S.Amdt. 88) was offered on the floor of the Senate to express the sense of the Senate that Congress should enact legislation to establish a biennial budget process. The amendment was agreed to by a voice vote[66] and was included in the Senate substitute amendment to H.Con.Res. 106, the vehicle for the FY1990 budget resolution. This provision was ultimately removed in conference (H.Rept. 101-50).

102nd Congress

H.R. 1889, the Budget Simplification and Reform Act of 1991, was introduced on April 17, 1991. This budget process reform bill included provisions establishing a biennial budget. The measure was jointly referred to Committee on Governmental Operations (and subsequently referred to the Subcommittee on Legislation and National Security) and the Committee on Rules (and subsequently referred to the Subcommittee on the Legislative Process). The Subcommittee on the Legislative Process held hearings on the measure on September 18 and 25, 1992. H.R. 1889 was not reported out of committee.

103rd Congress

H.R. 3801, the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1994, was introduced on February 3, 1994. This bill included provisions establishing a biennial budget. The measure was jointly referred to the Committees on Government Operations, House Administration, and Rules (and subsequently referred to the Subcommittee on the Rules of the House and Subcommittee on the Legislative Process). The Committee on House Administration held hearings on the measure on June 14, 30, and July 14, 1994. The Subcommittee on the Rules of the House held hearings on March 9, 10, 16, 24, and April 13, 1994. The Subcommittee on Legislative Process held hearings on February 25 and March 2, 1994. No further action was taken.

S. 1824, the companion measure to H.R. 3801, was introduced on February 3, 1994. The measure was referred to the Committee on Rules, which held hearings on February 10, 24, March 10, 17, and April 28 (S.Hrg. 103-488). The bill was reported with an amendment on July 1, 1994 (S.Rept. 103-297).[67] No further action was taken.

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[66] Senate debate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 135, part 6 (May 4, 1989), p. 8234.

[67] It is notable that in contrast to the comprehensive approach to biennial budgeting taken in most biennial budgeting proposals, S. 1824, as reported, included two-year budget resolutions and multi-year authorizations, but not two-year appropriations.

105th Congress

S. 261, the Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act, was introduced on February 4, 1997. The measure was jointly referred to the Committee on the Budget and Committee on Governmental Affairs. The Committee on the Budget held a hearing on February 13, 1997. The Committee on Governmental Affairs held a hearing on April 23, 1997 (S.Hrg. 105-138). The bill was reported by the Committee on Governmental Affairs with an amendment in the nature of a substitute on September 4, 1997 (S.Rept. 105-72). No further action was taken.

106th Congress

S. 92, the Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act, was introduced on January 19, 1999. The measure was jointly referred to the Committee on the Budget and Committee on Governmental Affairs. The Committees on the Budget and Governmental Affairs held a joint hearing on January 27, 1999. The bill was reported by the Committee on Governmental Affairs with an amendment in the nature of a substitute on March 10, 1999 (S.Rept. 106-12). No further action was taken.

S. 93, the Budget Enforcement Act of 1999, was introduced on January 19, 1999. This bill included provisions providing for a biennial budget. The measure was jointly referred to the Committee on the Budget and Committee on Governmental Affairs. The Committees on the Budget and Governmental Affairs held a joint hearing on January 27, 1999. No further action was taken.

On May 16, 2000, during consideration of H.R. 853, an amendment (H.Amdt. 708) was offered on the floor of the House to add a new title establishing a biennial budget process. The amendment was rejected, 201-217.[68]

107th Congress

H.R. 981, the Budget Responsibility and Efficiency Act of 2001, was introduced on March 13, 2001. This bill would have amended the Congressional Budget Act to provide for a biennial budget cycle. The measure was jointly referred to the Committee on the Budget, Committee on Rules, and Committee on Government Reform. The Committee on the Budget reported the measure with an amendment on September 5, 2001 (H.Rept. 107-200, Part I). The Committee on Rules reported the measure with an amendment on November 14, 2001 (H.Rept. 107-200, Part 2). No further action was taken.

108th Congress

During House consideration of H.R. 4663, the Spending Control Act of 2004, an amendment (H.Amdt. 621) was offered that sought to replace the text of the bill with the "Family Budget Protection Act of 2004," a budget process reform proposal containing provisions to provide for a biennial budget. The amendment was rejected, 88-326.[69]

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[68] House debate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 146, part 6 (May 16, 2000), p. 7978.

[69] House debate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 150, part 10 (June 24, 2004), p. 14089.

109th Congress

S. 3521, the Stop Over Spending Act of 2006, was introduced on June 15, 2006. This bill contained provisions providing for a biennial budget cycle. The measure was referred to the Committee on the Budget, which reported the measure with an amendment on July 14, 2006 (S.Rept. 109-283). No further action was taken.

112th Congress

H.R. 114, the Biennial Budgeting and Appropriations Act of 2011, was introduced on January 5, 2011. The measure was jointly referred to the Committees on the Budget, Oversight and Government Reform, and Rules (and subsequently referred to the Subcommittee on the Legislative and Budget Process). The Subcommittee on the Legislative and Budget Process held a hearing on January 24, 2012. No further action was taken.

113th Congress

During Senate consideration of S.Con.Res. 8, the FY2014 budget resolution, an amendment was offered that created a deficit neutral reserve fund for the establishment of a biennial budget and appropriations process (S.Amdt. 136).[70] The amendment was adopted, 68-31.[71] The resolution passed the Senate, 50-49, but final action on resolving differences did not occur before the end of the Congress.

H.R. 1869, the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act of 2014, was introduced on May 8, 2013. The measure was jointly referred to the Committees on the Budget, Oversight and Government Reform, and Rules. The Committee on the Budget reported the measure with an amendment on March 21, 2014 (H.Rept. 113-382). After the measure was discharged from the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on March 21, 2014, and the Committee on Rules on December 11, 2014, no further congressional action occurred.[72]

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[70] For further information on reserve funds and the congressional budget resolution, see CRS Report RL33122, *Congressional Budget Resolutions: Revisions and Adjustments*, by Robert Keith.

[71] Senate debate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 159, part 43 (March 22, 2013), p. S2282.

[72] Other legislation that included biennial budgeting proposals was introduced in the 113th Congress. This legislation included H.R. 879, H.R. 1654, H.R. 1762, H.R. 1869, H.R. 3059, S. 280, S. 554, and S. 625. No congressional action occurred on these bills.

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