



BETTER BUDGET PROCESS SUMMIT

Prospects for Budget Process Reform: Lessons from History

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Key Budget & Appropriations Process Reforms

- Appropriations Committee reform, 1920 (House) & 1922 (Senate)
- Budget and Accounting Act of 1921
- Congressional Budget Act of 1974
- First use of budget reconciliation, 1980
- Budget process reforms (Byrd rule), 1985
- Budget Enforcement Act (PAYGO), 1990

Broad, bipartisan consensus. Enduring congressional reforms were adopted on the basis of broad consensus and were not perceived as efforts to stack the deck in favor of one party's policy preferences. All of the successful reforms listed above were broadly supported in both parties at the time of their adoption.

“Common carriers.” Broad congressional support for reform does not mean that supporters necessarily agree on the nature of the policy problems the reform addresses or what the policy result will be. Reforms usually contain “common carriers,” meaning that members can agree on new processes and procedures despite disagreeing on what they hope to obtain from them.

Turf. Successful reforms have been designed so as to limit disruptions to existing legislative turf. Reforms have tended to layer atop existing congressional procedures and practices, rather than displace them.

Evolve over time: Congress is always changing, and it is not possible to predict in advance how new processes will work decades in the future. Past reforms have grown in importance over time in various ways, evolving into more substantial institutional innovations than reformers initially anticipated.