



CENTER *for*  
**COMMUNITY CHANGE**

# CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET PROCESS: A TIMELINE & OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION



# JANUARY

# FEBRUARY

First Monday in February  
President's Budget is Released

House and Senate  
Budget Committees  
draft budget resolution

JANUARY



The United States Senate and House of Representatives reconvene.

The President will give a major speech (either an inaugural address or a State of the Union Address, or both) that lays out the President's program and budgetary priorities for that year.

### Opportunities for Action-

Create a framework for understanding budget choices. Advocates should try to shape how the media and policy makers understand the potential impact of the President's budget proposal.

- Meet with local editorial boards.
- Place op eds in newspapers.
- Meet with your members of Congress.
- Hold educational forums and press events in your community.

FEBRUARY



The Administration releases the President's budget the first Monday in February.

House and Senate committees hold hearings on the President's budget and gather testimony from Administration officials, program stakeholders, House and Senate committees, and other experts.

MARCH



### In Committee

The House and Senate Budget Committees then draft, "mark-up" (review and revise) and vote on a budget resolution, and send it to the House and Senate floor.

Reconciliation instructions may be included in the budget resolution. These instructions direct certain committees to make cuts to entitlement programs or change tax laws to reach spending and revenue goals.

### Opportunities for Action-

Aggressively make the case to fund programs important to low-income communities. Focus your attention on decisive policy makers in Congress: the chairs and members of the House and Senate Budget Committees and House and Senate Party Leaders.

State Governors and locally elected officials also have a lot of influence at this point in the process, as do moderate Representatives and Senators in Congress.

- Meet with influential policy makers and educate them about the importance of speaking up to support low-income programs.
- Send large numbers of calls, letters, etc. to Budget Committee members and other influential policy makers reminding them of the importance of low-income programs.
- Meet with editorial boards of local newspapers and send letters to the editor providing stories about the real impact budget decisions may have on your community.
- Hold educational forums and press events in your community.

## MARCH

House and Senate Budget Committees vote on budget resolution

Floor votes in the House and Senate

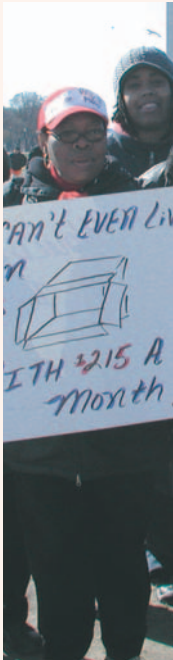
## APRIL

Budget resolution in conference committee

Conferenced version back on House and Senate floor for final vote

April 15 - Budget Resolution done

MARCH CONT



### **On the Floor**

The House and Senate debate and vote on the Budget Committees' proposed budget resolution.

Limited to 20 hours of debate, Representatives and Senators have the opportunity to offer amendments to the resolution, including amendments to change or delete reconciliation instructions.

A simple majority vote is necessary to pass the budget resolution in both the House (218 votes) and Senate (51 votes). No filibusters (unlimited discussion and debate) or other delaying tactics are allowed.

### **Opportunities for Action-**

Every Senator and Representative plays a role at this point in the process, but, individual Senators are likely to have more impact.

- Meet with influential policy makers and educate them about the importance of speaking up to support low-income programs.
- Send large numbers of calls, letters, etc. to Budget Committee members and other influential policy makers reminding them of the importance of low-income programs.
- Keep track of developments in the Senate and educate your Senators about opportunities to introduce or support amendments that protect or advance low-income programs.
- Hold educational forums and press events in your community.

APRIL



### **In Conference**

The House and Senate leaders appoint members ("conferees") to serve on the Conference Committee, which will hash out differences between the House and Senate bills. Conferees change and compromise on elements of their bills. Most of this takes place outside of public hearings.

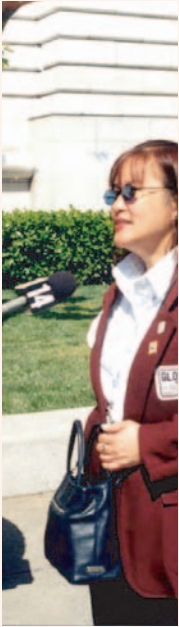
The Conference Committee then votes on a conference report that will be sent back to the House and Senate for final approval. Only a simple majority of conferees is needed.

### **Opportunities for Action-**

While all Representatives and Senators can try to weigh in, the most influential policy makers at this point are the House and Senate conferees (typically high-ranking members of the House and Senate leadership, Budget Committees and other committees most directly impacted by the budget resolution).

- Keep track of differences between the House and Senate budget resolutions and educate your Representatives and Senators on the differences that may help to protect low-income programs.
- Direct calls, letters, etc. in large volume at conferees and other influential policy makers reminding them of the importance of low-income programs.
- Meet with editorial boards of local newspapers and send letters to the editor providing stories about the real impact budget decisions may have on your community.
- Hold educational forums and press events in your community.

APRIL CONT



**Back on the Floor**

The final compromise version worked out between the House and Senate in conference committee (the conference report) is sent back to the floor in both the House and Senate for a final vote.

Once the conference report goes to the House and Senate floors, it is no longer possible to offer amendments or make changes. A simple majority vote is needed to pass the conference report.

In the Senate, a filibuster is possible if there are less than 60 votes secured for the budget resolution, but at this point in the process a filibuster is unlikely.

**Opportunities for Action-**

At this point in the process, Senators and Representatives can only vote yes or no. Advocates should look for opportunities to make sure their communities understand what the final budget resolution could mean for their members.

- Educate your Representatives and Senators on what impact the final conference report language will have on your community.
- Use local media outlets to educate your larger community about the impact the budget decisions will have on local residents.

**MAY** If Congress has completed action on the budget resolution on schedule, other House and Senate committees begin to assign funds to particular program areas based on decisions laid out by the budget resolution.

If reconciliation instructions are included in the budget resolution, then affected House and Senate committees must begin to make cuts and program changes to tax and entitlement programs. If committees fail to reach the level of cuts or changes required, the Budget Committee has the authority to make those changes for them. These cuts and program changes are packaged together as a Reconciliation Bill that the House and Senate must then vote on under special rules of debate (simple majority vote, no filibusters allowed in the Senate, limited time for debate, restricted opportunity for amendment).



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