



KNOWING THE VOCABULARY: An Effective Advocacy Tool A Legislative Glossary

ACT - term for legislation once it has passed both houses of Congress and has been signed by the President or passed by a 2/3 vote over his veto, thus becoming law.

ADJOURNMENT - termination or closing of a session of the legislature or committee until another set time for meeting. Adjournment "sine die" means the final adjournment of the legislative body "without [a] day" set for reconvening.

AMENDMENT - A proposal of a member of Congress to alter the language, provisions or stipulations in a bill, resolution, amendment, motion, treaty or in an amendment. An amendment is usually printed, debated and voted upon in the same manner as a bill.

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE - Usually this is an amendment that seeks to replace the entire text of a bill. Passage of this type of amendment strikes out everything after the enacting clause and inserts a new version of the bill.

APPROPRIATION - Legal authority to spend or obligate money from the Treasury. The Constitution forbids money to be drawn from the Treasury "but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law." This provision of law provides authority for Federal agencies to obligate funds and for the Treasury to make payments for specified purposes. Appropriations for the Federal government are provided both in annual acts and in permanent provisions of law.

AUTHORIZATION - Establishes or continues one or more Federal agencies or programs, the terms and conditions under which they operate, allows the enactment of appropriations and specifies how these funds shall be used. Authorizations sometimes provide permanent appropriations. Authorizing legislation may limit the amount of budget authority or may authorize the unlimited appropriation of "such sums as are necessary."

BILL - Most legislative proposals before Congress are in the form of bills. Bills are designated H.R. if they originate in the House of Representatives and S. if they originate in the Senate and by a number assigned to the order in which they are introduced during the two-year period of a legislative session.

BASELINE - Projection of the receipts, outlays, and other budget amounts that would ensue without any change in existing policy. Baseline projections are used to gauge the extent to which proposed legislation, if enacted, would alter current spending and revenue.

BUDGET AUTHORITY - Authority provided by law to enter into obligations that will result in outlays of Federal funds. The basic forms of budget authority are appropriations, contract authority and borrowing authority. Budget authority may be classified by the period of availability (one-year or multiyear), by the timing of congressional action (current or permanent), or by the manner of determining the amount available (definite or indefinite).

BUDGET DEFICIT – This is the amount by which the Government's total outlays exceed its total revenues for a given fiscal year.

BUDGET RESOLUTION - A legislative device in the form of a concurrent resolution (usually non-binding) that Congress uses to establish federal spending and revenue guidelines. It sets budget totals, divides these totals into functional categories (e.g., transportation, health and human services, etc.), and may include instructions to House or Senate Appropriations and revenue committees that can be binding.

CALENDAR - An agenda of business for committees or for other measures eligible for floor consideration. Each chamber decides which measures are discussed and in what order they will be considered based on its rules and practices.

CAUCUS - An informal organization of members of the House or Senate that meets to discuss issues of mutual concern and perform legislative research and strategic policy planning on specific issues of special interest to the group. There are regional, political or ideological, ethnic, and economic-based caucuses.

CHAIR - The presiding officer of a committee or subcommittee. Chairmanship is often based on seniority, regional representation or ideology. Senators may not chair more than one standing committee.

CHAIRMAN'S MARK - RECOMMENDATION by committee (or subcommittee) chair on a measure prior to its approval or revision in Committee usually drafted as a bill by the staff of the committee.

COMMITTEE - Committees are formed to examine issues, review legislative proposals and prepare legislation for action by the full membership of each chamber. The issues and functions of each committee are assigned by rule, resolution, precedent, or practice and also include oversight and investigations. In the Senate, it includes approval of presidential executive office nominations. Committees hold hearings, report on bills, and often offer amendments. Committees have continuing responsibility in a particular area of legislative activity usually reflected in the names of the committees.

CONSTITUENT - a citizen residing in a district or state represented by a Representative or Senator.

CONTINUING RESOLUTION - A joint resolution enacted by Congress and signed by the president when the new fiscal year is approaching or has already begun that extends budget authority of federal agencies and programs on a short-term basis. Referred to as a "CR" it allows federal programs to continue operating without disruption until final appropriations are approved.

DISCRETIONARY SPENDING - A category of spending (budget authority and outlays) subject to the annual appropriations process.

ENGROSSED BILL – This is usually the final version of the bill that is signed by the President and is written into law. The bill includes all adopted amendments to the original measure.

ENTITLEMENT - A federal program that guarantees benefits to persons or entities who meet requirements set by law. Some entitlement legislation requires annual appropriations; some appropriations for entitlements are permanent. Eligible recipients have legal recourse if this obligation is not fulfilled. Examples of entitlement programs are Social Security, Medicare and veterans' compensation programs.

EXPENDITURES - The actual spending by the federal government as distinguished from the appropriation of funds. The disbursing officers of the administration make expenditures; only

Congress makes appropriations. The two are rarely identical in any fiscal year. In addition to current budget authority, expenditures may represent budget authority made available over one, two or more years.

FAST-TRACK - Procedures that circumvent or speed up the legislative process. Some rule-making statutes prescribe expedited procedures for certain measures, such as trade agreements.

FEDERAL DEBT - Consists of all outstanding Treasury and agency debt. Current law places a limit or ceiling on the amount of debt. Debt subject to limit has two components: debt held by the government and debt held by the public.

FILIBUSTER - a device used by a Senator to delay or prevent a vote by engaging in time-consuming floor discussion. House rules have the effect of preventing a filibuster. Since rules are more lax a filibuster may occur in the Senate.

FISCAL YEAR - A fiscal year is a 12-month accounting period. The fiscal year for the Federal Government begins October 1 and ends on September 30 of the following calendar year; for example FY 2005 is the year beginning October 1, 2004, and ending September 30, 2005.

INSTRUCT CONFEREES - Formal action by one chamber urging its conferees to uphold or adopt a particular position in conference.

INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION - the formal presentation of a bill to the legislature for its consideration. Any member of the House or the Senate can introduce legislation.

MAJORITY - the political party that has the greatest number of elected members and therefore controls leadership positions as well as the order and consideration of various measures before the full membership.

MAJORITY/MINORITY LEADERS - Floor leaders, spokespersons, and strategists for the major parties, elected by his or her colleagues.

MANDATORY SPENDING - Spending (budget authority and outlays) controlled by laws other than annual appropriations acts. This term is often used in reference to permanent entitlement program spending.

MARK-UP - The process of revising legislation in committee or subcommittee... If a bill is extensively amended, the committee's version may be introduced as a new bill, with a new number for consideration by the full House or Senate.

OMNIBUS BILL - Legislation often used to enact appropriations measures, Omnibus bills combine or "lump" many separate items into one large bill.

POCKET VETO - This Presidential action kills a bill by "pocketing" it at the end of a Congressional session. If Congress adjourns within ten days after the President receives a bill, the President can kill the bill by doing nothing. Congress must convene a special legislative session to override a pocket veto.

PRESIDENT'S BUDGET - The document sent to Congress each year by the Administration, usually in January. It estimates receipts and spending, and recommends priorities for appropriations in the upcoming fiscal year.

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE - presiding officer of the Senate who under the Constitution is the Vice President; normally he or she presides only if a close vote is expected (the Vice President's vote can break a tie) or if there is a key debate or vote on policy important to the administration.

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE - member of the Senate designated to preside in the absence of the Vice-President and during day-to-day operations of the Senate.

QUORUM - the number of members whose presence is necessary to conduct business. In the House and Senate, it is a majority of the membership.

RECONCILIATION PROCESS - This legislative process allows Congress reconcile its expenditures with its appropriations. This process may include instructions to specific committees to decrease spending or increase revenues. The legislation may also contain an increase in the debt limit. The reported legislation is considered as a single bill under expedited procedures.

REVENUES - Collections from the public by the government. Revenues include individual and corporate income taxes, social insurance taxes, excise taxes, estate and gift taxes, customs duties, and other fees.

SCORING - The process for estimating the cost or financial gain to the government of specific legislative and executive proposals and actions. Estimates for federal legislation are prepared by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and may compare projected or real expenditures to the amounts set by Congress in budget resolutions. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) prepares the scoring data for administrative proposals.

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS - An act appropriating funds in addition to annual appropriations acts. Supplemental appropriations provide additional budget authority beyond original amounts for programs or activities (including new programs authorized after the date of the latest appropriation). Supplemental appropriations are used in "emergencies" where the need for funds is too urgent to wait until a regular appropriation bill is enacted.

SPEAKER - This presiding officer of the House of Representatives, elected by the majority party members.

SUBCOMMITTEE - division of full committee appointed by standing committee chairperson to cover specific area of full committee's jurisdiction; i.e. the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education.

UNFUNDED MANDATE - an act or regulation which imposes an enforceable duty upon State, local, or tribal governments, or upon public and private institutions that does not authorize and appropriate the funds necessary to carry out these obligations.

VETO - the act of the president opposing a legislative measure. Once legislation is enacted by Congress and presented to the President, he/she has ten days, to sign the bill into law, let it become law without signing, or to veto it. Congress can override a veto with a 2/3 vote in both chambers.

WITNESS - one who is called before a legislative committee to present testimony on a matter being considered by the committee. Witnesses are usually selected because of their specialized knowledge in a field, through their profession or association or because they are directly effected by a matter being considered by the committee. Witnesses may also be leaders of groups that represent large numbers of constituents who may be affected by policy proposals.