

May 18, 2017

Senate Committee Funding and Process, 115th Congress

Overview

Funding for Senate committees (except for the Committee on Appropriations and the Select Committee on Ethics) follows a two-step process of authorization and appropriation. Operating budgets for all standing and select committees of the Senate (except for the Committee on Appropriations and the Select Committee on Ethics) are authorized pursuant to a chamber funding resolution, and funding is provided by annual appropriations in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill and other appropriations acts.

On February 28, 2017, the Senate agreed by unanimous consent to S.Res. 62, which authorized a total of \$198.2 million for committee expenses, including \$57.8 million for the March 2017-September 2017 period, \$99.1 million for the October 2017-September 2018 period, and \$41.3 million for the October 2018-February 2019 period. Additionally, the resolution authorized up to 7% of the total appropriation for committees to be available as special reserves.

The Senate Committee on Rules and Administration has jurisdiction over committee funding resolutions and issues regulations governing committee expenditures and staff. Committee expenditures and staff are also regulated by Senate rules, especially Rule XXVI, paragraph 9, and Rule XXVII, as well as by statute. Information on individual committees' spending is published semi-annually in the *Report of the Secretary of the Senate*.

Authorization Process

In the two-year funding resolution agreed to at the beginning of each Congress, the aggregate authorization for each committee is apportioned among three calendar periods—from March 1 to September 30 of the first year of a Congress, from October 1 to September 30 of the following year, and from October 1 to the following February 28.

Under Senate Rule XXVI, paragraph 9, each Senate committee (except Appropriations and Ethics) is required to report a funding resolution providing for its expenses. Each committee supports its request by submitting supplementary materials, including those specified by the Committee on Rules and Administration. In recent Congresses, that panel has advised committees on the permissible increase, or required decrease, it hopes to impose on Senate committees, compared to the funding level in the previous Congress.

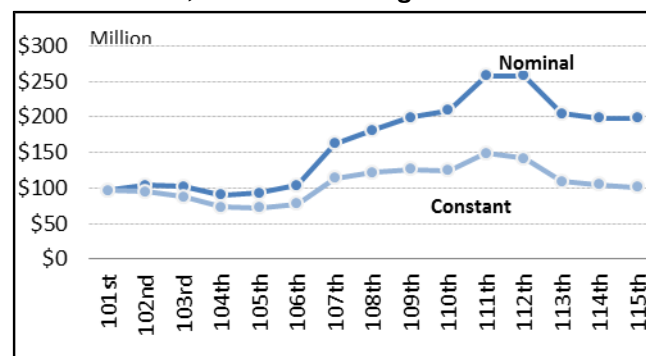
Committees requesting funds in excess of these guidelines have been asked to include a justification in their budget submissions.

The Rules and Administration Committee may then hold hearings at which committee chairs, ranking minority Members, and other Senators may testify. In recent Congresses, however, the committee has held hearings only on certain requests, or has not held hearings. The Rules and Administration Committee chair will normally introduce an omnibus resolution incorporating the amounts requested by each of the Senate committees in their individual resolutions. The Rules and Administration Committee will usually then meet to mark up the resolution and, after final approval by the committee, report it to the Senate. In some Congresses, the committee has issued an accompanying written report. On occasions where both parties have been in agreement on the funding resolution, the Senate has discharged the committee from the consideration of the resolution by unanimous consent, without a formal committee markup or written report. In recent Congresses, the Senate agreed to the funding resolution by unanimous consent with little, if any, floor discussion.

Authorization Trends

Figure 1 reports the aggregate Senate committee funding authorization level from the 101st through the 115th Congresses, in both nominal and constant (1989) dollars. Since the 101st Congress, nominal aggregate Senate committee funding has increased by about 104%, from \$97.1 million to \$198.2 million in the 115th Congress, for an average increase of 7% per Congress. In constant dollars, however, aggregate funding has increased by 4.3% during the same period, for a biennial average real increase of less than one-half of 1%.

Figure 1. Aggregate Senate Committee Authorizations, 101st – 115th Congresses



Source: Senate Committee Funding Resolutions, 101st-115th Congress.

Appropriations

Funding for Senate committees is provided in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill. Line-item appropriations are not made for individual committees, except the Committee on Appropriations. Instead, funding is provided as a single total amount for all committees,

under the heading “Contingent Expenses of the Senate” and the subheading “Inquiries and Investigations.”

Consequently, the amount appropriated for committee funding places a ceiling on *total* committee expenditures, but not on any *individual* committee’s expenditures. The expenditures of individual committees are constrained instead by their authorization.

In addition, authorizations for committee funds are made biennially beginning March 1 and appropriations are made annually beginning October 1. Therefore, for any individual biennial funding resolution, funds may be drawn from money appropriated in three different fiscal years.

For FY2017, \$133.3 million was appropriated for Senate committees (except for the Committee on Appropriations and the Select Committee on Ethics) in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017.

Majority / Minority Distribution

Senate Rule XXVII requires that each committee’s staff reflect the ratio of majority and minority committee members and that the minority receive “fair consideration” in the appointment of staff. A majority of the minority party members of a committee may request at least one-third of the personnel funds for hiring minority staff. This ratio is calculated after excluding funds for staff that perform administrative and clerical functions for the committee as a whole, if any, as agreed to by the chair and ranking minority Member.

In practice, in recent Congresses, the distribution of committee staff and resources has been determined through negotiation by the majority and minority leadership. Committee staff may also be supplemented by consultants and staff detailed to the committee from federal agencies, subject to such restrictions as the Committee on Rules and Administration may impose.

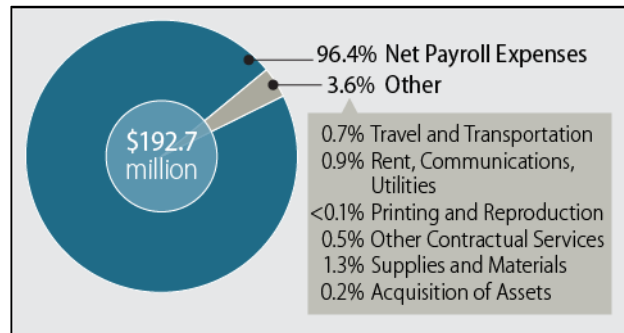
Additional Funding and Special Reserves

If a committee requires additional funds after the omnibus resolution has been agreed to, funds may be requested essentially in the same way as they were for its two-year budget. Since the 106th Congress, the omnibus funding resolution has contained a special reserve from which unexpected funding needs by a Senate committee could be met, upon the request of its chair and ranking Member and upon the approval of the chair and ranking Member of the Rules and Administration Committee.

Usage

Data on committee expenditures were compiled using the semi-annual *Report of the Secretary of the Senate*, which reports Senate expenditures disbursed during the previous six months. The *Report of the Secretary of the Senate* aggregates expenditures for individual committees across standard budget object classes used by the federal government. These include Net Payroll Expenses; Travel and Transportation; Rent, Communications, and Utilities; Printing and Reproduction; Other Contractual Services; Supplies and Materials; and Acquisition of Assets. **Figure 2** reports aggregate committee spending by category during the 112th Congress, the most recent Congress for which complete data has been analyzed.

Figure 2. Committee Expenditures, 112th Congress



As shown in the figure, “Net Payroll Expenses” accounted for just over 96% of total committee spending. Beyond these staff expenses, committees spent an aggregate of 1.3% of their expenditures on “Supplies and Materials,” 0.7% on “Travel and Transportation,” and 1% on “Rent, Communications, and Utilities.”

For further information on Senate committee funding, see CRS Report R40424, *Senate Committee Expenditures Resolutions, 115th Congress, and Funding Authorizations Since 1999*, by Matthew E. Glassman ; and CRS Report R43160, *Senate Committee Funding: Description of Process and Analysis of Disbursements*, by Matthew E. Glassman.

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IF10656

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