



The Daily Dish

The Budget Meets the No Elucidation Zone

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(Spoiler Alert! Nobody is doing their d*** job.)

The 1974 Budget Act, as amended, lays out a fairly straightforward calendar of budgetary events. For example, Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 closed on September 30, 2021, and Fiscal Year 2022 began on October 1, 2021. That means the government is operating on the FY 2022 appropriations bills as it begins the process of developing the FY 2023 Budget.

Except that there are no FY 2022 appropriations bills. Instead, the government has been operating on a series of continuing resolutions (CRs) that simply extend current funding levels for short periods of time. This has led to a word soup of budgetary items in the news. There is an “omnibus” appropriations bill under consideration, along with “supplemental” appropriations for both Ukraine (\$10 billion) and COVID-19 response (\$22.5 billion).

Omnibus is not hard to understand. In English, it is the budgetary whale created by jamming all 12 appropriations bills into a single law to accomplish the magic whereby the budget cost exceeds the sum of its parts and no living soul reads the entire bill.

Supplemental is a little trickier because it usually means modifying the appropriations that are in law, and there are no appropriations acts in law for FY 2022. You can't supplement that which does not exist, so these are essentially metaphysical names. Indeed, at this juncture Congress could package the supplementals as the omnibus and have the omnibus be a supplemental. Once they all pass, the desired funding levels will be in place.

Meanwhile, over on the FY 2023 development track, in January the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) puts out its Budget and Economic Outlook. Not. Then, by the first Monday in February the administration sends the President's Budget to the Hill. Not. CBO then does its analysis of the president's budget to serve as the foundation of congressional action on the House and Senate Budget Resolutions. Not. The FY 2023 budget season is running neck-and-neck with the major league baseball season. Nada.

Does any of this matter? Yes. For example, the current CRs embody the priorities of the FY 2021 appropriations bills that were signed by then-president Trump. I have to believe that the current Congress and administration have at least one different priority. What is that priority? Similarly, the last economic [forecast](#) put out by this administration had inflation at 2.1 percent for 2022, declining to 2.0 percent as far as the eye can see. Does it still believe that?

The old saying that “budget is policy” is true because the act of meeting a budget forces choices that elucidate policy priorities. I guess we are just in a no elucidation zone.