Press Release

What's a "CR"?

PAULINA ENCK | OCTOBER 12, 2021

A continuing resolution (CR) is the legislative equivalent of cruise control – it sets spending levels for federal agencies by essentially just referencing past spending levels and adjusting them, or simply maintaining current spending levels. In a new Insight, Director of Fiscal Policy Gordon Gray reviews what a CR is, and notes Congress' increasing reliance on the stopgap measure in past decades. Gray notes that while CRs serve a useful purpose in providing Congress with an expeditious avenue for keeping agencies funded, they fall short of the detailed and deliberate policy choices that full agency appropriations acts contain.

Key points:

- The federal budget process establishes an orderly pathway for funding the federal government through 12 appropriations acts that are supposed to be considered and enacted separately, with careful and specific funding decisions made therein.
- Congress has completed this process on time only 4 times in over 40 years.
- Congress instead often relies on a stopgap measure known as a continuing resolution, more often than not shorthanded to "CR."
- As legislation, CRs are simple – typically just an across-the-board formulaic adjustment to all federal spending.

Read the analysis