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Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill: Fact Sheet on Structure, Content, and Process

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The legislative branch appropriations bill is one of the regular appropriations bills that Congress normally enacts each year for the fiscal year beginning on October 1. It provides budget authority, which is statutory authority to spend specified amounts of money, for expenditures of the legislative branch for the fiscal year, including salaries. This bill funds the operations not only of Congress itself but also of its support agencies and other entities within the legislative branch.

Congressional Operations and Related Agencies

Since the late 1970s, the legislative branch bill has been divided into two titles. Title I, "Congressional Operations," funds activities directly supporting Congress, including the House, the Senate, joint items, the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service (within the Library of Congress), the Architect of the Capitol (except Library of Congress buildings and grounds), and congressional printing and binding done by the Government Printing Office. Title II, "Related Agencies," funds legislative branch entities that do not exclusively, or almost exclusively, support Congress, including the remaining functions of the Library of Congress and the Government Printing Office, Library buildings and grounds (under the Architect of the Capitol), the General Accounting Office, and the Botanic Garden. For FY2000, Title I is funded at \$1.7 billion, and Title II at \$743.1 million. From time to time, the legislative branch bill might contain additional titles for special one-time activities.

For FY2000, the House account is funded at \$760 million and the Senate account at \$489 million. These accounts provide budget authority for salaries and other expenses for Member offices, leadership offices, officers and their employees, and committees. Although the legislative branch appropriations bill funds committees annually on a fiscal year basis, each chamber authorizes its committees (except House Appropriations and Senate Ethics) for two years at a time through resolutions adopted near the beginning of each Congress. Under the Joint Items account, \$98.9 million in budget authority was provided to fund the expenses and salaries of the joint committees, the Capitol Police Board, the Office of the Attending Physician, the Capitol Guide Service and Special Services Office, and preparation of statements of appropriations.

The FY2000 Legislative Branch Appropriations Act (P.L. 106-57) provides \$2.457 billion for funding the legislative branch. For a detailed examination of this act, see CRS Report RL30212, *Appropriations for FY2000*, by Paul Dwyer. The FY2000 legislative budget was subsequently rescinded by 0.38% in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, signed into law on November 29, 1999 (P.L.106-113). The 0.38% across the board cut, contained in P.L.106-113, applied to all FY2000 appropriations acts (with some flexibility in cutting some accounts). Periodically, supplemental appropriations are needed to accommodate specific purposes or activities, unexpected expenditures, or shortfalls. For example, a FY1999 supplemental appropriation (P.L.106-31) of \$5.6 million was made to the architect of the Capitol for safety renovations to the O'Neill House Office Building (\$1.8 million), and for expenses of a House page dormitory (\$3.8 million).

Appropriation Process

Most of the annual general appropriations bills fund activities of executive branch agencies, and the amounts of budget authority requested for those agencies in the President's annual budget represent spending levels proposed by the President. For legislative branch expenses, however, as a matter of comity between the branches, the President's budget simply presents estimates submitted by Congress. These estimates are developed by the Senate and House, including the leadership and the Appropriations Committees, and by legislative support agencies.

As with other appropriations bills, the House and Senate Subcommittees on the Legislative Branch each hold hearings, at which the heads of legislative entities and the respective chamber's administrative officers provide budget requests, justifications, and explanations. The House Appropriations Committee, which traditionally originates appropriations bills, reports a legislative branch appropriations bill that includes funding only for the House, joint items, and other legislative branch entities. As a matter of comity, the House leaves Senate funding to be added to the bill in the Senate. The Senate Appropriations Committee and the Senate also propose alterations in funding levels for joint items and other legislative branch entities, but customarily make no revisions in House items. As with other appropriations bills, differences between House and Senate versions may be reconciled in a House-Senate conference committee. The President customarily signs the final version of legislative branch bill without questioning the spending levels Congress has determined.

Permanent Budget Authority; Trust Funds

There are legislative branch budget authorities not included in the legislative branch appropriations act. These include permanent budget authorities and trust funds. Permanent appropriations are made available in the amounts necessary for the purposes specified as the result of previously enacted legislation, and do not require annual action. In FY2000, these permanent appropriations include compensation of Members, congressional use of foreign currencies, international conference expenses, and Library of Congress payments to copyright owners. Trust funds are monies held in accounts credited with collections from sources specified by law for defined purposes. In FY2000, trust funds include gifts and donations to the Library of Congress and the Architect of the Capitol (Botanic Garden), and funds held by the U.S. Capitol Preservation Commission and the John C. Stennis Center for Public Service Training and Development.