



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Amendment – A change in a bill or document by adding or omitting portions of it.

Appropriation Bill - A bill reported out of the House or Senate Appropriations Committee, which assigns government funds to a program.

Appropriations Committees – There is an Appropriations Committee in both the House and the Senate and both have a set of Subcommittees. These committees decide on funding levels for the programs that the federal government funds on an annual basis. Most of the homeless assistance programs and housing programs fall under the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, and District of Columbia in the House. The Senate Subcommittee has a slightly different name.

Authorization Bill - Legislation establishing a program and setting funding limits.

Authorizing Committees – These committees set policy and also set the maximum funding levels allowed for programs. In some cases, the funding levels that the authorizing committees set are “locked in”; for instance, this is true of welfare legislation.

Bill - A legislative proposal that if passed by both the House and the Senate and approved by the President becomes law. Each bill is assigned a bill number. HR denotes bills that originate in the House and S denotes bills that originate in the Senate.

Budget Authority - Authority provided by law to enter into obligations that will result in immediate or future outlays involving State government funds.

Budget Resolution - The budget resolution is concurrently passed by both Houses of Congress and lays out the budget plan for the coming fiscal year and some years into the future.

Cloture - A motion generally used in the Senate to end a filibuster. Invoking cloture requires a vote by 3/5 of the full Senate. If cloture is invoked further debate is limited to 30 hours, it is not a vote on the passage of the piece of legislation.

Co-Sponsor - A member or members that add his or her name formally in support of another members bill. In the House a member can become a co-sponsor of a bill at any point up to the time the last authorized committee considers it. In the Senate a member can become a co-sponsor of a bill anytime before the vote takes place on the bill. However, a co-sponsor is not required and therefore, not every bill has a co-sponsor or co-sponsors.

Committee – A sub-organization within the House or Senate established for the purpose of considering legislation, conducting hearings and investigations on specific issues.

Conference Committee – Temporary joint committee composed of House and Senate conferees, formed for the purpose of reconciling differences in legislation that has passed both chambers.

Continuing Resolution - Legislation in the form of a joint resolution enacted by Congress, when the new fiscal year is about to begin or has begun, to provide budget authority for Federal agencies and programs to continue in operation until the regular appropriations acts are enacted.

Discretionary Spending – Spending that is controlled through an annual appropriations process.

Earmark – An amount set aside in an appropriations account for a specific purpose.

Filibuster - An informal term for extended debate or other procedures used to prevent a vote on a bill in the Senate.

Fiscal Year - The period of time from October 1 to September 30, 2006 for which Congress is currently creating a budget.

Mandatory Spending - Mandatory spending is authorized by Congress by setting out eligibility or other criteria. Examples of mandatory spending include Social Security and Medicaid.

Marking Up a Bill - The process by which Congressional committees and subcommittees debate, amend, and rewrite proposed legislation.

Omnibus Bill – A bill regarding a single subject that combines many different aspects of that subject.

Ranking Member - The most senior Democratic member of a committee.

Sponsor - The original member who introduces a bill.

Subcommittee - Subunit of a committee established for the purpose of dividing the committee's workload. Recommendations of a subcommittee must be approved by the full committee.

Veto - A power that allows the President, a Governor or a Mayor to refuse approval of a piece of legislation. Federally, a President returns a vetoed bill to the Congress, generally with a message. Congress can accept the veto or attempt to override the veto by a 2/3 majority of those present and voting in both the House and the Senate.