



Plain Text Edition

Follow the Money: **The U.S. Budget and You**

Part 6: What can we do?

6. What can we do?

During every step of the budget process, we get a chance to tell Congress what we think the budget should be. The budget process has a lot of steps. This means we have lots of chances to tell Congress what we think.

You can find out what part of the process is happening by listening to the news. Disability organizations will also send out emails about budget ideas that could hurt or help disabled people. At every step, you can call your Members of Congress.

EXAMPLE SCENARIO: Sally wants to get bee houses funded again

In our toolkit on talking to your elected officials, we used a made-up story. The story was about Sally Jones, a woman who lives in Normaltown, CA. In her town and in towns all over the United States, swarms of angry bees were showing up everywhere.

Sally asked Congress to fix the problem. She called, emailed, and met with her elected officials. Because of Sally's hard work, Congress passed the Beekeeping Act. This law paid people to find the bees places to live. They found places for the bees to live that were not near cities and towns.

The law also paid for people to set up bee houses in those places. The law paid for people to keep taking care of the bee houses. Now the bees do not swarm people's towns anymore.

The bee houses worked really well, but they cost money. It costs \$50 million every year to keep the bee houses going. Now, money to take care of the bee houses is running out. Sally wants to make sure the government puts money in the budget for bee houses.

We will show you how Sally can get involved in the budget process. We will show all the parts of the process where Sally can have a say.

1. The President sends a budget request to Congress.

The President's budget request doesn't ask for more money to take care of the bee houses. Without more money, the bee house programs will shut down. No one will take care of the bee houses anymore. Then, the bees might swarm again. They might go back to Sally's town and other towns.

What can Sally do?

Sally calls her Members of Congress. She tells them that the people in Normaltown want to keep the bee houses going.

Sally knows that Congress will be writing budget resolutions. She asks her Members of Congress to make sure money for bee houses is part of the budget resolutions.

2. Congress writes and votes on a budget resolution

The House and the Senate each write their budget resolutions. The House passes their budget resolution. The House resolution includes new money for bee houses. Yay!

Then, the Senate passes their budget resolution. The Senate version does not include any money for bee houses. Oh no! The House and Senate decide to work together to combine their budget resolutions. They work together in a conference committee.

Sally's Representative, Anne Smith, is on the conference committee. One of Sally's Senators, Dan Jones, is on the conference committee too.

What can Sally do?

Sally calls Representative Smith and Senator Jones. She tells them both that the final budget resolution needs to include money for bee houses.

The conference committee sends the final budget resolution back to the House and the Senate. This new budget resolution does not have any money for the bee houses.

The House and the Senate both have to pass the same version of the budget resolution. If either one makes any changes, they will have to make a new conference committee.

Sally calls her Representative and both of her Senators. She tells them all to vote NO on any budget resolution that doesn't include money for bee houses.

The House and the Senate both vote to pass the budget resolution without making any new changes. Sally is disappointed, but there is more she can do. Now, the budget resolution will get sent to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.

Remember, the budget resolution is just a plan. Congress still has to decide how to spend the money. It is time for the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to get to work.

3. House and Senate Appropriations subcommittees markup bills

The House

Sally's Representative, Anne Smith, is on the House Appropriations Committee. The House Appropriations Committee has different subcommittees for each part of the government. The part of the government that handles the bee house is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The House Subcommittee on Agriculture gets to decide how much money the USDA gets for different things, including the bee houses. Sally's Representative isn't a member of the Subcommittee on Agriculture. So, Representative Smith isn't part of the markup process.

The Subcommittee on Agriculture finishes their markup process and makes a bill. The bill is called H.R. 8335, the Agriculture Appropriations Act. H.R. 8335 does not include funding for the bee houses.

The Subcommittee sends H.R. 8335 back to the full Appropriations Committee. Now, the members of the Appropriations Committee can introduce amendments to H.R. 8335.

What can Sally do?

Sally calls Representative Smith. She asks her to introduce an amendment to H.R. 8335. The amendment can put in funding for bee houses.

Representative Smith promised she would support the bee houses – and she does! Representative Smith introduces an amendment to H.R. 8335. The amendment changes H.R. 8335 so that it pays the USDA to keep taking care of the bee houses.

The other members of the House Appropriations Committee make more changes to the bill.

Now, the Appropriations Committee will vote on the bills from each of the subcommittees. Sally calls Representative Smith to ask her to vote YES on H.R. 8335. The House Appropriations Committee votes to pass H.R. 8335. This bill includes the money that the bee houses need!

The Senate

Now, the Senate Appropriations Committee will look at the appropriations bills that the House committee voted on. One of Sally's Senators is on the Senate Appropriations Committee. Neither of Sally's Senators are on the Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture.

The subcommittee finishes the markup process and makes their own version of the Agriculture Appropriations Act, named S.B. 8222. This bill includes the \$50 million that the USDA needs for the bee houses. The subcommittee sends S.B. 8222 back to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

What can Sally do?

Sally calls Senator Jones to ask him to vote YES on S.B. 8222.

Both the House version of the Agriculture Appropriations Act (H.R. 8335) and the Senate version (S.B. 8222) pass out of the Appropriations Committees. The two bills look exactly the same. They both include funding for the bee houses.

4. The Senate and House vote on all of the different appropriations bills.

Now, the entire House and the entire Senate get to vote on all the different appropriations bills that came from the committees.

What can Sally do?

Now that the entire House is voting, Sally calls Representative Smith again. Sally asks her to vote YES on H.R. 8335. Because the whole Senate will be voting, Sally calls both her Senators. She asks them to vote YES on S.B. 8222.

The Agriculture Appropriations Act is passed in both the House and the Senate. Once the Agriculture Appropriations Act is signed into law, the bee houses will have the money they need. Sally and millions of other Americans will still be safe from bees!

5. The President signs all of the different appropriations bills. The budget becomes law.

What Budget Issues Will We Need to Watch Out for in 2019 and Beyond?

Every year, the government spends more money on programs and services, including services for people with disabilities. Here are 3 big reasons why:

1. Lots of things get a little more expensive every year. That is normal.
2. There are more people in our country every year. Every year, more people are born. Some people move here. More people means that our country needs more programs and services.
3. People are living for a longer time. That means there are more people every year who need services and programs for elderly people.

Because the government spends more money every year, the deficit also gets bigger every year. Whenever the deficit gets bigger, some people say that the government should spend less money. Other people don't think it's a problem. Another group of people say that the government should raise taxes so that it has more money to spend.

At the end of 2017, Congress passed a law that cut taxes. That means the government will have less money.

When the government has less money, some people think we should spend less money. That usually means they want to cut important programs. Many Members of Congress have already said they plan to cut Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security. This would be very bad for people with disabilities.

There are also some Members of Congress who want to spend more money on different things, like building bridges, helping people after hurricanes, and the military. Some Members of Congress think we should spend more money on these things, and less money on people with disabilities.

Remember, your Members of Congress work for you! If you think programs for people with disabilities are important, you can tell them that. We made this toolkit so that people with disabilities can understand how the budget works, and how to advocate for ourselves. We will all need to work hard to protect programs for people with disabilities!