



# The Federal Budget: How it works, and what Presbyterians can do about it

An educational resource from the  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office

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# Introducing.....The Federal Budget!

## How to Use this Resource

*“Be it resolved that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States commits itself and calls on members of the church to intensify efforts in urging the members of Congress to do everything in their power to maintain at least the existing level of support of the domestic programs in nutrition, housing, education, welfare, social security, and employment;” (Minutes, 201<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (1980), PCUS, p. 221)*

Hello, and thank you for picking up a copy of this resource. Its purpose is to demystify the federal budget process so that Presbyterians are equipped to speak out when the budget is being created.

The resource has five sections. The first section is on what Presbyterians have said about issues related to the federal budget. The second section includes an explanation of a few key terms and concepts. The third is an introduction to the five steps in the budget process- the President’s proposal, the Congressional Budget Resolution, Appropriations, Budget Reconciliation, and Supplemental Appropriations. The fourth section shows how you can take action at every step of the budget process, and the final section includes a list of resources that can help answer further questions about the budget. Appendix A and B include extra resources that can help you teach the material in the resource to other people.

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## Why is the budget important? And why should Presbyterians use this resource?

*Give the king your justice, O God...May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice...May he defend the cause of the poor of the people and give deliverance to the needy (Psalm 72:1-4, NRSV)*

**What is the federal budget process?** It is the way that the federal government decides how much money it will take in, and what it is going to spend it on. Like any other kind of budget, how the federal government decides to spend determines what it can do for the year. It is how the government puts constraints on the size and scope of every program it runs- from the military to the Environmental Protection Agency to the Food Stamp Program. Everything.

**The budget is also a process of setting our nation's priorities.** The finite nature of the federal budget forces politicians to make trade-offs between all of its programs. There is only so much money to go around, so our representatives must choose which programs will get more, and which will get less. Programs are weighed against each other, and the funding they ultimately get is an indication of Congress's priorities for public services that year.

**These are the priorities by which we can judge whether our government is defending the cause of all its people – particularly the most needy.** When Congress is drawing up a budget, we must ask, is Congress doing the right thing? Is it funding the programs that we think are important? Are sacrifices being shared properly? Is prosperity being shared properly? If we find the answers wanting, we are obligated to make our voices heard.

*“I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” (Matthew 25:45)*

**We live in a nation of want amidst plenty.** In the richest nation in the world, 12.7 percent of people live in poverty (<http://www.npc.umich.edu/poverty/>). One out of every four children live in a low-income family (<http://urban.org/publications/900832.html>). 38.2 million Americans were not sure that they will make it through the month without having to skip a meal ([http://www.frac.org/html/hunger\\_in\\_the\\_us/hunger\\_index.html](http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html)). As Matthew 25:45 instructs, Presbyterians have an obligation to help lift people out of poverty, hunger and homelessness. And the federal budget gives ample opportunity to do the right thing for “the least of these.”

*“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you...and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will have your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:7, NRSV)*

**The budget touches millions of lives.** Every year, Congress and the President get to decide how to spend *trillions* of dollars. The decisions they make have an incredible influence on everything we believe in; providing for the poor and vulnerable, protecting the common good, and serving the interests of economic justice. Programs that achieve these goals can be changed dramatically through the budget process. They can lose a share of their funding. They could even lose their funding altogether. When budgets are cut, the millions of people who rely on good federal programs could suffer.

**The budget also gives us a chance to reach more people in need.** The budget is the context in which the federal government makes many of its decisions. If the government has enough room in its budget, it is easier to grow the programs that make life better for millions of people. In fact, many programs would serve more people, if only they were allocated greater funding in the budget. It is our responsibility to push for a budget that has enough funding for programs to expand, and for increased funding for specific programs that can reach more people. That way, all of “the least of these” can share in our nation’s unprecedented prosperity.

*The 191<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the PCUS favors the continuing review of existing tax expenditures, within the context of the federal budget process, to the end that these be continued only if a) their economic and social results are judged to serve the common good, b) it is clearly more feasible to achieve these results through tax expenditures than by direct appropriations, and c) their cost to the federal treasury does not stand in the way of achieving purposes of still greater importance through direct appropriations (Minutes, 200<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1970), PCUS, p. 277).*

**The budget process gives lawmakers a prime opportunity to change the federal tax code.** Progressive taxation can improve the lives of low-income people. The Earned Income Tax Credit, for example, is the federal program that lifts the greatest number of American families out of poverty every year, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org/4-10-06tax.htm>). Too often, though, tax cuts enabled by the budget process bestow great relief on the wealthy, and little or nothing on the middle and lower classes. Large tax cuts can also deepen the federal debt and deficit. More debt and big deficits mean the government has to pay more in interest on its debt, and has less money for programs that benefit everyone- particularly “the least of these.”

*“I, the Lord, have called you and given you the power to see that justice is done on earth.” (Isaiah, 42:6)*

*In 1997, the 209th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) passed a resolution on welfare reform following the 1996 legislation that changed welfare into a temporary benefit for the poor. The resolution emphasized that while the church, voluntary organizations, business, and government must work cooperatively to address the needs of poor persons and communities, government must assume the primary role in providing direct assistance for people in poverty. (ACSWP Commentary- PCUSA, p. 261)*

**The budget makes a huge impact on nonprofits.** The government often seeks the aid of non-profit organizations to help provide social services. In FY2006 alone, the federal government

allocated \$335 billion to nonprofits to help provide human needs services, according to the non-partisan Aspen Institute ([http://www.nonprofitresearch.org/usr\\_doc/BushBudgetFinal.pdf](http://www.nonprofitresearch.org/usr_doc/BushBudgetFinal.pdf)). As a result, federal budget cuts often impact nonprofits that provide social services. And when government cuts the services that it runs, people often ask for help from private nonprofits, including faith-based organizations. More demand for nonprofit services can crowd out clients who already depend on charitable resources, and put budgetary strains on nonprofits. In other words, nonprofits and their clients have a strong interest in a sound federal budget.

**The budget also determines our priorities as peacemakers and stewards of God's creation.**

In FY 2005, we spent 89 percent of our national security budget on the military, and only 4 percent on preventative aid packages

([http://nationalpriorities.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=97&Itemid=132](http://nationalpriorities.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=97&Itemid=132)).

In FY 2007, the President requested a 7 percent **cut** to the Environmental Protection Agency ([http://www.nrdc.org/legislation/factsheets/leg\\_06020801a.pdf](http://www.nrdc.org/legislation/factsheets/leg_06020801a.pdf)), at the same time that he requested a 7 percent **increase** in funding for the Department of Defense. How this funding for environmental programs, defense programs, and international aid programs is allocated can make a strong impact on how our government can pursue peace and environmental stability.

**In sum, no matter what we care about, we all have a stake in the budget process.** This resource shows how all aspects of the federal budget process works. Though most of the examples in the resource highlight how the budget affects hunger and poverty, the budget process works the same for programs that address all types of society's needs and values. Please feel free to adapt this resource so that it focuses on the issues that you are most passionate about. **Thank you, and enjoy the rest of the tutorial!**





## First, a few key terms and concepts.....

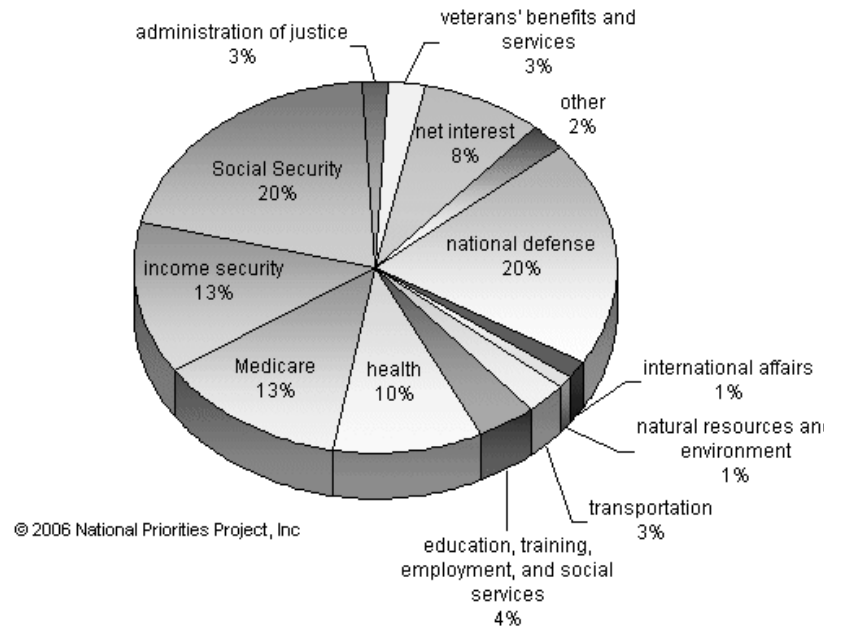
### The Three Terms

- Revenues
  - Money that the federal government's getting
- Spending
  - Money that the federal government's giving out
- Deficit
  - The difference between revenues and spending

### The Three Types of Spending

- Mandatory
  - Mandatory spending (also known as *direct* spending, or *entitlement* spending) is money the government *promises* to pay. Programs that use mandatory spending offer all the good and services they are authorized to, and then the government has to figure out how much money it owes. Sometimes, this is called *budgeting by need*, or *budgeting by goods and services*. The main way the government can limit mandatory spending is by changing the statutes that control what goods and services are offered. Congress in part handles this side of mandatory spending through the *reconciliation process*.
    - Examples: Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, Food Stamps.
- Discretionary
  - Discretionary spending is not promised. Congress decides every year how much discretionary spending it will do. Programs that use discretionary spending are given a certain amount of money for the year, and then administrators decide what goods and services it can offer. Sometimes, this is called *budgeting by dollars*. Discretionary programs are often divided into two categories: "domestic" and "defense and homeland security." Congress handles both types of spending through the *appropriations process*.
    - Examples: Section 8 Housing Assistance, Department of Defense Appropriations, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program.
- Tax
  - Tax spending is "revenue foregone," or money that under normal circumstances the federal government would get, but instead the taxpayer has kept. Some common ways of spending through the tax system are temporary tax breaks, tax deductions, or tax credits. Some tax spending occurs through the *reconciliation process* and the *appropriations process*.

Total Federal Outlays, FY2006



**Now that we are prepared, on to the budget!**

## The President's Budget Proposal:

### The Beginning of Budget Season

**When:** The first week of February

**Who:** The President's Office of Management and Budget

**What is the President's Budget Proposal?** You just said it: it is a proposal. It is not a bill, so it cannot become law. It is not a resolution, so it cannot become a rule. It is just a proposal- and an enormous one, at that. It lays out broad spending, revenue and deficit goals. It makes funding requests for every single federal program. And it lifts up ideas for legislation to change the budget process.

**So why does it matter if it is just a proposal?** The importance of the President's proposal differs from year to year, depending on political and economic circumstances. The President's requests often appear in all different kinds of budget bills. Sometimes, the requests serve as a starting point in deliberations over individual budget bills. The requests in the President's proposal that matter often include:

- **The Discretionary Accounts Number:** Each year, the President will request a total funding level for all discretionary programs. The Budget Committees often use this number as starting point for negotiations over the discretionary accounts cap in the *Congressional Budget Resolution* (See Page 7).
- **Department and Program Funding Levels:** The President will also request funding for each program and agency. These funding increases, funding reductions, and program terminations usually show up again in the *appropriations process*, when Congress specifies how it will reach spending goals (See Page 8).
- **Reconciliation Instructions:** The President's proposal may recommend *reconciliation instructions*, which make it easy for Congress to change laws that have a direct impact on the federal budget (See Page 9). If these instructions are a centerpiece of the President's agenda, as they were in 2001, 2003, and 2005, it is usually a sign of things to come.

**Budget gimmicks:** Budget politics often revolve around one thing that most Americans dislike: *the federal debt and annual deficit*. Presidents want to look like they are doing something to reduce the deficit, at the same time that they pursue spending and taxation priorities that could increase the deficit. As a result, the President's proposal often resorts to gimmicks that conceal the size of the debt and deficit. One common way to do that is to not account for "emergency" supplemental spending, even if it can be predicted (See Page 9). Another way is to not assume the passage of deficit-expanding legislation that most people expect to pass. The President's FY 2007 Proposal did both, as it failed to factor in emergency spending on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a "patch" to the Alternative Minimum Tax that passed after the budget proposal's release.

## The Congressional Budget Resolution: Congress's Budget Proposal

**Who:** Budget Committees, Congress

**When:** March through May

**What is it?** The Congressional Budget Resolution is what is called a “concurrent resolution.” It has to be passed by both houses of Congress, but the President does not sign it. Therefore, it is not a law, and it does not give federal agencies the authority to spend money. What it does do is establish a *rule* that both houses of Congress have to follow. The rules that the Congressional Budget Resolution sets up have to do with *annual appropriations spending, reconciliation instructions, and budget functions*.

**Ok. So why does it matter if it is just a rule?** Much like the President’s proposal, the budget resolution is a *plan* that guides Congress as it makes budget decisions. It proposes some budgetary goals and policy, and it estimates how much spending and taxing the federal government will do for at least the next five years. But unlike the President’s proposal, *it also has important practical consequences*, since, as a rule, it makes Congress do certain things during the budget process. For example:

- **Discretionary Cap.** Unlike the President’s proposal, the budget resolution establishes an enforceable cap on appropriations spending for the year (sometimes called a 302(a) allocation). *This figure - \$866 Billion in FY2006- is very important.* If it leaves enough room, it lets many federal programs expand. If it is too tight, it forces the appropriations committees to make cuts in some programs to fund other ones (See Page 8). And note that it does not specify how much funding each program gets.
- **Reconciliation Instructions.** The budget resolution can also start up the *reconciliation process*, which can have enormous consequences for tax law and mandatory spending. These instructions force committees to draft bills that cut a certain amount of money in an entitlement program, or release a certain amount of money in tax breaks. *Once initiated, reconciliation bills almost always pass in some form.* The budget resolution, therefore, is the most critical step in the reconciliation process (See Page 9).

**The 2006 Budget Resolution: Why Discretionary Caps Matter.** The 2006 budget resolution forced deep cuts in all programs. Case in point: the 1% across-the-board cut passed at the end of the appropriations cycle. Try as they did to cut programs, Congress did not succeed in bringing spending in line with the 2006 discretionary cap. Instead, after all appropriations bills had been passed, Congress instituted a 1% across the board cut in all discretionary programs to meet the cap figure. This hit many human-needs programs hard, since a disproportionate share had already been cut through normal appropriations bills.

## Appropriations: Keep Hustlin’

**Who:** Appropriations Committees, Congress, the President

**When:** May through October, and even December

**What is it?** Appropriations bills are the real deal. Unlike the President’s proposal and the Congressional Budget Resolution, they are *laws*, and as such, they give the federal government the authority to spend or cut money. Appropriation bills give money to discretionary programs that require new funding sources every year, so the Appropriations Committees, and their subcommittees, have to generate appropriations bills annually. If Congress doesn’t pass these bills, the government has to shut down, as it did in 1995.

### What are the most important things that happen in the appropriations process?

- **302 (b) allocations.** The first step the Appropriations Committees take is to issue what are called 302 (b) reports. What they do is take the 302 (a) figure from the Congressional Budget Resolution, which puts a cap on all appropriations (pg. 4), and break it down into smaller pots of money for each appropriations subcommittees (there are 12 in the Senate, and 13 in the House). These smaller caps limit how much money each subcommittee can spend on the agencies in its jurisdiction. The Appropriations Committees typically issue 302(b) reports in mid-May.
- **Subcommittee bills.** Once subcommittees have been assigned a cap, the next step is to draft an appropriations bill. *Here, the subcommittee decides how much money each program they oversee gets.* When the subcommittee approves the bill, it goes to the full committee for review. And from there, it goes to the floor for votes and amendments.
- **Floor Action.** On the House and Senate floor, any number of things can happen to an appropriations bill. It can be amended and passed on its own. It can be grouped together with other appropriations bills, in what’s called an “omnibus bill.” Or if Congress does not pass all appropriations bills by the beginning of the federal government’s next fiscal year (October 1<sup>st</sup>) it passes a “continuing resolution.” A continuing resolution can be either temporary or permanent, and essentially what it does is continue to fund programs at the level given to them in the last year, until the proper appropriations bill is passed.

**Why Appropriations Matter: CDBG Funds in Waterloo, Iowa.** In an April 26, 2006 article from the *Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier*, community leaders described the effect that declining appropriations for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program had on redevelopment efforts in Waterloo, Iowa. "We're basically cut to the bone," said Community Development Director Rudy Jones. Less funding caused the elimination of programs to fix sidewalks in low-income neighborhoods, make emergency repairs on homes, and tear down run-down buildings. "We have been receiving a declining amount of funds in each of the past several years," Jones said. "We try to do the best we can with the declining dollars."

## The Reconciliation Process:

### When Congress is Itchin' for a Fight

**Who:** Authorizing Committees, Congress, the President

**When:** When they are introduced to when they pass

**What's budget reconciliation?** As you may know, budget reconciliation is much different than biblical reconciliation. What it essentially does is “reconcile” entitlement programs and tax laws with the spending, revenue, and deficit goals of the Congressional Budget Resolution. Since these programs and laws do not require annual appropriations, the only way to tinker with their budgets is to change the laws that govern how they work. And the reconciliation process is one way to do change these laws to meet budgetary goals.

**So what's so special about it?** Reconciliation instructions essentially make it easier to change entitlement and tax laws. A reconciliation bill cannot be “filibustered” by the Senate, which means it only needs 50 Senator's support to get a vote. And once a committee gets reconciliation instructions, it must produce a bill that obtains the requested savings. Congress has to vote on the bill, and they almost always pass it in some form.

**What happens during reconciliation?** Unlike appropriations, Congress does not have to put itself through the reconciliation process every year. But when it does, it has to start with the Congressional Budget Resolution. If reconciliation is to occur, the budget resolution must specify three things:

- which authorizing committees get instructions
- how much in spending or revenue they need to cut, and
- the deadline by which they need to produce a bill.

**Why Reconciliation Matters: Medicaid, 2006.** The Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2006, a reconciliation bill, opened the floodgates for harmful changes in Medicaid. A June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006 *Washington Post* article reported that states were aggressively adding co-payments and premiums and restricting benefits for Medicaid patients, all of which was made possible by the DRA. Florida has decided to privatize part of Medicaid and cap benefits. West Virginia now requires patients to sign an agreement that, if broken, would make them eligible for less health care. And Kentucky is dividing patients up into categories that give different benefits and require higher co-payments. “We've got a whole new dialogue about how health should be delivered and financed,” said Diane Rowland, executive director of the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, a nonpartisan policy group.

Reconciliation instructions also often come with guidance as to how Congress envisioned each authorizing committee would make the cuts. For example, the Senate Finance Committee may receive an instruction to cut \$1 billion out of its budget, with guidance to take that money out of the prescription drug benefit in Medicare.

Then, committees figure out how they will meet the savings targets they have been assigned. They may follow the guidance of the budget resolution, but they do not have to. Once all the committees who got reconciliation instructions have finished writing up their bills, the Budget Committee will combine them into a single reconciliation bill, or, in some cases, a couple of bills.

## **Supplemental Appropriations:**

### **Oh, you thought budget season was over?**

**Who:** Appropriations Committees, Congress, the President

**When:** Whenever

**What is it?** Supplemental appropriations (“supplementals”) are just appropriations that normal budget procedures do not regulate. The cap on discretionary spending does not limit them, they can be any size, and they can be passed at any time. That is because they are intended for unanticipated emergencies that the annual budget process may have trouble accommodating. However, since there are no criteria to ensure that spending in a supplemental act is for a genuine emergency, they often include funding that could be handled under normal circumstances.

**Why are they important?** Essentially, they are a loophole in the budget process. Since they do not go through the appropriations process, they let Congress spend however it wants without making difficult trade-offs. And they have become another gimmick that Congress and the President use to avoid responsibility for the annual deficit, since the money spent in supplemental appropriations does not factor into the Congressional Budget Resolution’s deficit projection.

For these reasons, supplemental spending has become the *de facto means of funding expensive military campaigns*. Supplementals have provided for every year of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Unhindered by a cap, a 2006 supplemental provided a record \$94.5 billion for the wars and hurricane relief. Special projects have also added to supplemental price tags, as lawmakers see these pieces of “must-pass” legislation as perfect vehicles for spending proposals that otherwise might not pass. There is also reason to suspect that some war spending is compensating for shortfalls in defense appropriations. Worse, many experts argue that most funding for military operations can now be anticipated and included in defense appropriations bills.

**How does the process work?** These bills can originate in the Appropriations Committee at any time. The President will often get the ball rolling by requesting an amount of money, and the Appropriations Committees will work to create bills for Congress to vote on. On the floor, supplementals are likely vehicles for special spending projects, since they are nearly guaranteed to pass in some form or another. There is no deadline to pass a supplemental, so Congress may drag its feet if passage requires difficult compromises.

## Taking Action

### Step 1: The President's Budget

- **See for yourself:** The President's Budget can be found on the Office of Management and Budget's Web site: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/>
- **Sign up:** Connect to the Washington Office by signing up for email updates at <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/mlm/signup/>. Sign up for the Coalition on Human Needs' listserv to receive more action alerts at <http://www.chn.org/signUp.jspt>. And keep an eye on Congress's schedule by checking <http://congress.nw.dc.us/c-span/home/>.
- **Educate:** If you have not done much advocacy before, you may want to learn a few tips on how to make your voice heard most effectively. Check out <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/christiancitizen/effectiveadvocate.pdf> or <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/christiancitizen/fivesession.pdf> for a free advocate's guide.
- **Advocate:** Send your Congressperson a letter or email expressing how you feel about the President's budget. You could also meet with them or their aides in person, or send a letter signed by friends on the President's budget. A great way to get started is to visit <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/home/> for more information on convenient ways of contacting Congress.
- **Build momentum:** Try to organize a group study on the budget in your congregation. Ask a non-profit leader, a government official, or benefits recipient in your area to come speak about how the budget affects them. You might also try to coordinate with other organizations, educate through the media, or ask state government officials to publicly weigh in.



## Step 2: The Congressional Budget Resolution

- **See for yourself:** The Senate Budget Committee Chairperson's draft of the budget resolution can be found here: <http://budget.senate.gov/>, and the House draft can be found here: <http://budget.senate.gov/>. For analysis of the budget resolution, check out the resources listed at the end of this guide (Page 14).
- **Budget Committee:** If you did not meet with your Congressperson over the President's proposal, let them know about your priorities while the Budget Committees are meeting in February. Find out if your Congressperson is on a Budget Committee (<http://www.house.gov/budget/>, <http://budget.senate.gov/>). As one of the few people who understand the budget process, your Congressperson would love to hear from you!
- **Floor Vote:** Once the Budget Committees are done with their work (by March to mid April), the budget resolution will come to the floor of the Senate and the House for a vote. If any aspect of the budget resolution needs to be changed, ask your Congressperson to add an appropriate amendment.
- **Conference Committee:** Once the Senate and House have passed their budget resolutions, they send negotiators to a *conference committee* to work out the differences between their bills (the same thing happens for all bills involved in the budget process). If your Congressperson is on the committee, make sure to let them know what needs to be kept and what needs to be taken out in both bills. If your Congressperson is not on the committee, ask them to apply pressure to the committee in whatever way they can. And when the conference committee produces a final bill, you may want to again voice your concerns.



## Step 3: Annual Appropriations

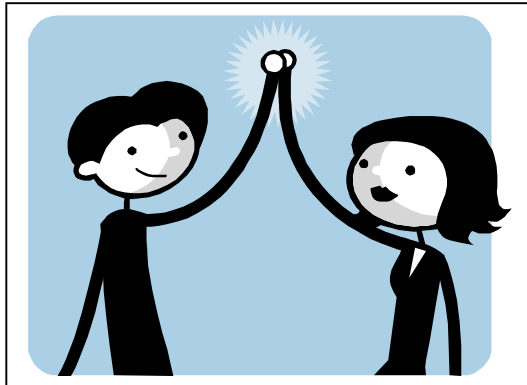
- Committees:** The Appropriations Committee starts working around mid to late May, depending on how long it takes to pass the budget resolution conference report. It is important to educate the media, your public officials, and any organizations you have partnered with about the effect that the budget might have. And check to see if your Congressperson is on the Appropriations Committee, and if so, which subcommittees they belong to (<http://appropriations.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=AboutTheCommittee.MemberList&SubcommitteeId=18>, <http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/members/members.htm>). Even if they are not on the right committee, they may have some influence over the bill.
- Specific issues:** All federal programs funded with discretionary dollars receive budget allocations through this process. What programs are you and your congregation most interested in? Housing, nutrition, education, military spending? Contact the Washington Office for specific information about how these programs are faring during the appropriations process.
- Full Congress:** As relevant appropriation bills are amended and voted on, you may need to take action. Check in with <http://congress.nw.dc.us/c-span/home/> for information on Congress's schedule.

## Step 4: Reconciliation Instructions

- Committee Work:** Authorizing committees (<http://www.house.gov/>, [http://senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d\\_three\\_sections\\_with\\_teasers/committees\\_home.htm](http://senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/d_three_sections_with_teasers/committees_home.htm)) work on Reconciliation legislation. Let the appropriate representatives know which programs you think ought to be protected.
- Voting:** Reconciliation votes occur at almost any point after the budget resolution conference report is passed. Typically, it has been passed after appropriations are finished, between October and January. Stay tuned to new developments, and let your Congressperson, the media, and your congregation know about your opinion. You can also do tinker with many of the action activities listed under steps 1, 2, 3, and 4 so that they apply to reconciliation bills.

## Step 5: Supplemental Appropriations

- **Keep Watching:** Supplementals are nearly a normal part of the budget cycle, but it is hard to predict when they will be brought up, because it can happen whenever lawmakers want. Keep your eye on your local newspaper and C-SPAN through <http://congress.nw.dc.us/c-span/home/>, and let your Congressperson know how you feel about them when appropriate.



## Extra Resources

You are done! Congratulations on making it through the budget cycle. If you have more questions, or are just curious, here are some very helpful Presbyterian resources. Enjoy, and thanks for taking a look at this resource!

### **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office** <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/>

The Presbyterian Washington Office is the public policy information and advocacy office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Its task is to advocate, and help the church to advocate, the social witness perspectives and policies of the Presbyterian General Assembly. Contact the advocates of the Washington Office for any kind of assistance you need when you advocate on the budget.

### **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Mission and Advocacy Opportunities**

<http://www.pcusa.org/navigation/mission.htm>

The Presbyterian Church believes in engaging in mission activities through advocacy and ministries. Take a look at these groups, and see which one is right for you.

For further study, consider visiting these organization's websites:

### **Center on Budget and Policy Priorities** [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)

This non-partisan think tank generates analysis of budget legislation throughout the year.

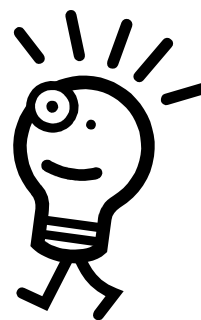
### **Coalition on Human Needs** [www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org)

A coalition of service providers, faith groups, and labor organizations that advocates on the federal budget. Sign up for their email alerts here: <http://www.chn.org/signUp.jsp>

### **OMB Watch** [www.ombwatch.org](http://www.ombwatch.org)

For a complete glossary of budget and legislative terms, see OMB Watch at

<http://www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/1932/1/197>



### **National Priorities Project** [www.nationalpriorities.org](http://www.nationalpriorities.org)

A non-partisan think-tank that produces state-by-state analysis of the federal budget and excellent budget education tools.

Hello! Thanks for deciding to host a study group on the federal budget. The purpose of this pamphlet is to give you some guidance as you plan your study session. First, there are some things you'll need to do to get ready for the study session. Next, there's a sample agenda for a study session, complete with ideas for how to run each section of the meeting. Enjoy, and if you have any questions, please contact the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office at (202) 543-1126.

## Getting Ready

### Some things you'll need for the study session:

- Copies of the Budget Resource for everyone
- Bibles
- A board to write on and markers
- Snacks and drinks (optional)
- Agendas (optional)

### Some things you might want to do to prepare for the study session:

- Invite more people to come than you'll have room for, since not everyone will be able to attend. Make an announcement in your congregation's newsletter or bulletin, or during Sunday services. Ask everyone to RSVP so you will have a good idea how many materials to bring.
- Review the budget resource. If you have any questions, make sure to ask someone at the Presbyterian Washington Office.
- Send out a reminder about the study session a few days before it happens. It's easiest to do this by email, but most effective if you call people. Everyone will appreciate it!
- If you'd like, ask some people to help you facilitate the study session.
- Ask everyone to complete the tasks required for the "Personal Stories" section of the study guide (explained below).

## Preparing the Study Session

### Welcome<sup>1</sup>

In your own words, briefly welcome the group and invite them to be seated for the opening prayer.

### Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

The leader, or a chosen participant, begins:

**(L) In the name of God, in us creating, for us redeeming, with us transforming (or, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit).**

**(All) Amen.**

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the Presbyterian Hunger Program for providing some of the language and the format used in this section of the study guide.

Ask each participant to say his or her first name and a brief, two or three word reason for being present. If there are more than twelve people, ask each person to share this with a person next to her or him.

**(L) We have begun in God’s name and given each other our own name. Let us now pray:**

**Loving God, in your grace you have gathered us at this time and in this place to hear the word you are speaking this day in the voice of people who are hungry and poor. Open our hearts and minds to the power of that word. May we see with your eyes the vision of a world which knows no borders, no boundaries, no fear, but invites us again to live together the promise of abundance which is both your gift and promise. We ask this in the name of your own beloved son, who lives and reigns united in the love of your Holy Spirit, now and always.**

**(All) Amen.**

### **Biblical Stories (10 minutes)**

First, introduce the scripture lesson by reading aloud the paragraph below or paraphrase it in your own words:

**The Gospel of Matthew is an interesting choice to begin this study of the budget and how we as the church are related to it, since it is the only gospel to actually use the word “church” to describe the community of believers. It was most likely written in a Jewish Christian community. The writer understands the faith of the church to be built on the Hebrew scriptures and traditions of the Jewish community. This passage is set in a scene in which all the nations of the world – the Gentiles – are envisioned around God’s throne. While the passage sounds like it is about the end of the world, remember that it was intended to speak to the church about what was then the present time. Hear now what the Spirit says to the church:**

Have someone with a strong voice read Matthew 25:30-50

**31 ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, <sup>\*</sup> you did it to me.” <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand,**

**“You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’**

Then, lead a discussion of the passage. You may want to ask some of the following questions:

- In what ways is it true, or false, that when we see hungry or poor people, we are looking at the face of Christ?
- Who do you think the “least of these who are members of my family” are today?
- What are some ways that we try to help the “least of these who are members of my family?” What role might the federal budget play?

### **Personal Stories (15 minutes)**

Prior to the meeting, you should ask everyone who will attend to do a little research on the federal budget. Ask them to bring something they would like to share about how the federal budget affects ordinary people’s lives. They could find an article in the newspaper, relate an experience they have had or someone they know has had, or even invite someone to come speak about it. If they have trouble, let them know that they can contact the Presbyterian Washington Office for additional resources.

Let everyone go around the room and share what they have found out. Then, ask participants to discuss what they have heard and said. Provide paper for one person in each group to make notes of their conversation. The following questions should help you get started:

- How would you relate the lessons of Matthew 24: 30-50 to the stories you just heard?
- Does the church have a responsibility to stop budget cuts if they hurt “the least of these who are members of my family?”

### **The Budget Story (20 minutes)**

Make sure to familiarize yourself with the resource prior to the study group. If you have any questions, contact the Washington Office for more information.

Pass out copies of the budget process resource and the brief overview.

Begin with the discussion of key terms. Pause for feedback, and ask if anyone has any questions about the terms. Move on to “Step 1- The President’s Budget (Page ?).” Read, or paraphrase in your own words, the main sections in each of the five steps included in the resource. As you go along, make sure to point out where you are in the diagram, and show how the lines in the diagram represent relationships between steps in the process (the broken lines represent informal ties, and the solid lines represent formal ties). You may want to use an overhead projector or a

chalkboard to draw out the relationships pictured in the diagram. Encourage people to ask questions, and ask if people in the group would like to read.

### **Our Story (5 minutes)**

Here you can discuss how your group would like to take action on the budget. Take a look at the “action steps” section of the budget resource. Find the step or steps that Congress is currently engaged in. Discuss which activities you would consider doing. Brainstorm about different activities your group could do. Think about what you would have to do to make sure the activity is successful. Try, if you have time, to delegate some initial tasks to group members who have volunteered to help plan an activity.

Close the session with a prayer of your choice.