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Bipartisan Budget Experts Release Plan to Fix Broken Budget Process

“Strange bedfellows” and budget experts from across the ideological spectrum united to develop blueprint for fixing failed budget process

WASHINGTON—Leading advocates and budget experts from across the political spectrum today jointly released [a groundbreaking report](#) outlining steps to fix our broken budget process. Since 1976, our government has shut down twenty times: most recently twice last month, and for more than two weeks in 2013. Congress last completed the budget process on time – with all appropriations bills passed prior to the beginning of the fiscal year – in 1997, more than 20 years ago. Today’s report comes just weeks after Congress reached a budget agreement mandating the creation of a special committee to investigate and propose changes to the broken budget process.

The 23 members of the Convergence Building a Better Budget Process Project (B3P) brought together by Convergence Center on Policy Resolution [identified five key steps](#) that will help prevent future government shutdowns, reduce budget uncertainty and restore faith in our government. The group was made up of leaders representing constituency groups, including U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Center for American Progress, Brookings Institution, Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, Veterans of Foreign Wars and others who came together to release the report, over a year in the making, at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget’s first annual Better Budget Process Summit.

“Rarely has a group as politically diverse as the B3P participants agreed on anything. Yet, these remarkable individuals have worked collegially and diligently over 18 months to develop practical and widely supportable proposals to help the critically important challenge of fixing our federal budget process,” said Robert J. Fersh, President and Founder of Convergence Center for Policy Resolution.

The [report](#) proposed that a better budget process should include:

1. **A Budget Action Plan**—negotiated by the President and Congress at the beginning of a new Congress and enacted into law—to synchronize the budget cycle with the electoral cycle and to change expectations for the process. The plan would make certain key fiscal decisions – setting discretionary funding levels and adjusting the debt limit, for example – for a two-year period.
2. **A Fiscal State of the Nation Report**, published every four years at a key point in the national election cycle, to make the federal budget more accessible to the American public and elevate the discourse about the country’s finances.
3. **A review of the performance of portfolios of federal programs** that involve long-term or inter-generational commitments (e.g., retirement security, health coverage, education or national security). This review conducted by Congress, through the Government Accountability Office, would reinforce the importance of the long-term effects of budget decisions.

4. **Strengthening the Budget Committees** by revising the membership rules and assigning responsibility to create new expectations for the budget process so that Congress and the public can expect more timely action on budget decisions.
5. **Investment in agencies that support the congressional budget process**, including the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT), so these institutions can continue to provide high-quality and independent information the nation relies on in making budgetary choices.

While process reforms alone cannot make Congress act on budget issues in a timely and bipartisan basis, the B3P stakeholders believe that if Congress adopts these proposals, it significantly improves the odds that the federal budget process will function more effectively.

Signatories include:

- * Mike Barron, Director, Currently Serving/Retired Affairs
Military Officers Association of America
- * Sam Berger, Senior Adviser
Center for American Progress
- * Neil Bradley, Executive Vice President and Chief Policy Officer
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- * Stuart Butler, Senior Fellow
Brookings Institution
- * Sara Chang, Director of Policy and Advocacy
Research!America
- * Sandy Davis, Senior Advisor, Economic Policy Project
Bipartisan Policy Center
- * Joel Friedman, Vice President, Federal Fiscal Policy
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- Carlos Fuentes, Director, National Legislative Services
Veterans of Foreign Wars
- * Niles Godes, Senior Vice President, Congressional Affairs LeadingAge
- * John Hicks, Executive Director
National Association of State Budget Officers
- Candy Hill, Director, External Affairs
American Public Human Services Association
- * Emily Holubowich, Executive Director
Coalition for Health Funding
- Maya MacGuineas, President

Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget

- * Rachel Merker, Director, Policy & Research
First Focus
- * Edward Mortimer, Executive Director, Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- * Matthew Owens, Vice President for Federal Relations and Administration
Association of American Universities
- Brian Pallasch, Managing Director, Government Relations and Infrastructure Initiatives
American Society of Civil Engineers
- * Pete Sepp, President
National Taxpayers Union
- * Reid Setzer, Deputy Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs
Young Invincibles
- * Ellen Teller, Director, Government Affairs
Food Research and Action Center
- * Lindsay Torrico, Director of Policy and Advocacy
United Way Worldwide
- * Paul Van de Water, Senior Fellow
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- * Alison Winters, Senior Policy Fellow
Americans for Prosperity

** B3P dialogue members have joined in their individual capacities with institutional affiliations provided for identification purposes only.*

Statements from B3P members

“In this day and age, it’s difficult to find bipartisan agreement, especially on the budget process,” said Neil Bradley, Executive Vice President & Chief Policy Officer, U.S. Chamber Of Commerce. **“By speaking with voices from across the political spectrum, we’ve found that agreement. Together, we developed a set of recommendations that we believe will correct our nation’s course and help end the trend of self-inflicted, periodic crises.”**

“While we do not all agree on policy substance—what we do all agree on is that we need to fix the budget process,” added Sam Berger, Senior Advisor at Center for American Progress. **“Our recommendations represent a path for real bipartisan improvements, and I hope Congress takes heed and acts swiftly.”**

“There’s a dilemma in designing reform. If you ‘go big’ and radical the chances of implementation are near zero,” said Stuart Butler, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. **“But if you only tweak at the edges nothing changes. So, what we did was to design a framework of achievable, critical first steps down a series of paths, such as a focus on the long-term,**

that will build political momentum for further action. That's the way most major reform is actually accomplished."

"The Convergence process, which brings together diverse stakeholders from across the ideological spectrum to negotiate and solve pressing problems, offers policymakers much to learn from and emulate," added Maya MacGuineas, President, Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. **"Reforming our nation's failing budget process offers a clear opportunity to work across the aisle on an issue that should achieve bipartisan consensus, and I hope Congress will look to these recommendations as an example of what can be accomplished in the months ahead."**

"The current dysfunctional budget process has led to a reliance on outdated budget caps and continuing resolutions which threaten our national security and limit our ability to provide service members, veterans, and their families the care and benefits they have earned," said Carlos Fuentes, Director, National Legislative Services, Veterans of Foreign Wars. **"The Convergence group's efforts to improve the federal budgeting process has been a commendable undertaking, and our recommendations represent a path forward that would ensure we can fulfill our promise to the brave men and women who have worn our Nation's uniform."**

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