

# Building a Better Budget Process

## THE BUDGET PROCESS IS BROKEN...

Each passing year brings new evidence of the need to repair the process for managing the \$4 trillion U.S. budget. Budget resolutions and spending bills narrowly pass, often very late, with lukewarm promises of hammering out priorities in the following budgeting cycle. It has been more than 20 years since all appropriations bills were passed prior to the beginning of the fiscal year. With so many missed deadlines and little attention paid to longer-term budget priorities and oversight, it is obvious the process needs to change.

## BUT IT IS NOT BEYOND REPAIR...

Convergence Center for Policy Resolution convened a group of policy and budget experts, executives, and advocates with a wide range of business, government, and nonprofit experience to find agreement on how to fix the broken system. This group of seemingly strange bedfellows reached consensus on a set of budget reform proposals in February 2018, after a 16-month facilitated dialogue called the *Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P)*.

In their final report, the B3P participants 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.

A full copy of the report is available on the Convergence website.

While process reforms alone cannot fix all the problems facing the country, B3P participants believe the proposals will, if adopted, provide “better rules of the game” by improving the odds that the federal budget process would function more effectively, and give Congress time to focus on other priorities facing our country.

## BUILDING A BETTER BUDGET PROCESS PARTICIPANTS

Mike Barron *	Maya MacGuineas
Military Officers Association of America	Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget
Sam Berger *	Rachel Merker *
Center for American Progress	First Focus
Neil Bradley *	Edward Mortimer *
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Stuart Butler *	Matthew Owens *
Brookings Institution	Association of American Universities
Sara Chang *	Brian Pallasch
Research!America	American Society of Civil Engineers
Sandy Davis *	Pete Sepp *
Bipartisan Policy Center	National Taxpayers Union
Joel Friedman *	Reid Setzer *
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Young Invincibles
Carlos Fuentes	Ellen Teller *
Veterans of Foreign Wars	Food Research and Action Center
Niles Godes *	Lindsay Torrico *
LeadingAge	United Way Worldwide
John Hicks *	Paul Van de Water *
National Association of State Budget Officers	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Candy Hill	Alison Winters *
American Public Human Services Association	Americans for Prosperity
Emily Holubowich *	
Coalition for Health Funding	

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

*Convergence Center for Policy Resolution works to bring together people and groups with divergent views build trust, identify solutions and form alliances on critical national issues.*

*A grant from the Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative, a project seeking ways to strengthen Congress as an institution and to encourage bipartisan solutions to pressing issues, provided the primary funding for the project. The Stuart Family Foundation provided additional support.*