



400 North Columbus Street
Suite 203
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-8630
(703) 683-8634 FAX
www.nahma.org

Legislative Terminology

Amendment - A proposal to alter the text of a bill or other measure. Before an amendment becomes part of the bill, the Senate or House must agree to it. Amendments may be offered during consideration of a bill.

Appropriation - The provision of funds, through an annual appropriations act or a permanent law, for federal agencies to make payments out of the Treasury for specified purposes. The formal federal spending process consists of two sequential steps: authorization and then appropriation.

Authorization - A statutory provision that obligates funding for a program or agency (such as the “No Child Left Behind” education bill). An authorization may be effective for one year, a fixed number of years, or an indefinite period. An authorization may be for a definite amount of money or for “such sums as may be necessary”. Before the Federal Government spends money on the provision, funds must be appropriated by Congress.

Authorization act - A law that establishes or continues one or more Federal agencies or programs, establishes the terms and conditions under which they operate, authorizes the enactment of appropriations, and specifies how appropriated funds are to be used. Authorizations acts sometimes provide permanent appropriations.

Budget authority - Authority provided by law to enter into obligations that will result in outlays of Federal funds. Budget authority may be classified by the period of availability (one-year, multiyear, no-year), by the timing of congressional action (current or permanent), or by the manner of determining the amount available (definite or indefinite).

Budget resolution - Legislation in the form of a concurrent resolution setting forth the congressional budget. The budget resolution establishes various budget totals, divides spending totals into functional categories and may include instructions to designated House or Senate committees. A budget resolution does not become law and instead serves as a blueprint for spending allocations; it does not require the President’s signature.

Committee - auxiliary organization of the Senate or House established for the purpose of considering legislation, conducting hearings and investigations, or carrying out other assignments. Generally, a bill will be referred to a specific committee before it arrives on the floor for votes.

Concurrent resolution - A legislative measure (designated “S. Con. Res.” Or “H. Con Res.) *generally* employed to address the sentiments of both chambers of Congress, to deal with issues or matters affecting both houses, such as a concurrent budget resolution, or to create a temporary joint committee. Concurrent resolutions are not submitted to the president and do not have the force of law.

Continuing resolution (CR) - Legislation 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 – Federal spending controlled in annual appropriations acts. Housing programs are funded through discretionary spending. Most of the Federal Government's expenses go towards mandatory spending programs such as Social Security.

Fiscal year (FY) - The fiscal year is the accounting period for the federal government which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, fiscal year 2013 began on October 1, 2012 and ends on September 30, 2013. Congress passes appropriations legislation to fund the government for every fiscal year.

Floor - Action "on the floor" is that which occurs as part of a formal session of the full Senate or House. A senator or representative who has been recognized to speak by the chair is said to "have the floor."

Joint resolution - A legislative measure, (designated "S. J. Res." or "H. J. Res.") which requires the approval of both chambers of Congress and is submitted (just as a bill) to the president for possible signature into law. Joint resolutions are used to propose constitutional amendments.

Joint session - When the House and Senate adopt a concurrent resolution to meet together to conduct formal business or to hear an address by the president.

Markup - Process for amending and voting on bills at the committee level.

Obligation - legal liability to disburse funds immediately or at a later date as a result of a series of actions.

Omnibus bill - An omnibus bill is a single document that is accepted in a single vote, but packages together several measures into one or combines diverse subjects. Omnibus bills are sometimes used to package appropriations bills for different agencies into one large bill.

Outlays - Outlays are payments made (generally through the issuance of checks) to settle obligations. Outlays during a fiscal year may be for payment of obligations incurred in prior years or in the same year.

Subcommittee - Subunit of a committee established for the purpose of dividing the committee's workload into specialized areas. For example, the Senate Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Subcommittee reports to the Senate Appropriations Committee for T-HUD appropriations. Recommendations of a subcommittee must be approved by the full committee before being reported to the Senate or House.