CONGRESSIONAL REFORM AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES: THE 1974 BUDGET ACT IN THE U.S. HOUSE

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 UNDERSTANDING CONGRESSIONAL REFORM: EXTERNAL PRESSURES FOR CHANGE AND INTERNAL RESISTANCE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Rules</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Dimensions of Reform</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Case of the 1974 Budget Reforms</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 THE NIXONIAN CHALLENGE AND THE BUILDUP TO BUDGET REFORM</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Three Dimensions and Budgetary Reform</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting in the Prereform House</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stresses on the System, 1967-72</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Adversarial Executive and Budget Reform</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional Acquiescence and the Debt Ceiling Increase Bill, October 1972</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Debt Ceiling Increase Bill</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 CONGRESS RESPONDS: THE JOINT STUDY COMMITTEE AND ITS AFTERMATH................................................................. 72

The Joint Study Committee Reports, April 1973...................... 75
The Evolution of the Reform Coalition in the House,
July-December 1973............................................................... 79
The Impoundment Control Bill, July 1973............................. 80
The Rules Committee Negotiations................................. 88
The Rules Committee Bill....................................................... 91
Implications........................................................................... 102
Notes.................................................................................... 106

4 WAR ON TWO FRONTS: LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC IMPLEMENTATION, 1975-78...................................................... 108

The Dry Run of 1975................................................................. 114
House Budget Committee Consideration of the First Resolution.... 119
The First Resolution on the Floor........................................... 125
Implications for the Process in the House.......................... 128
Implementation, 1976-78......................................................... 134
Committee Conflict................................................................. 137
Floor Trouble........................................................................ 142
Notes.................................................................................... 148

5 DEMOCRATS UNDER PRESSURE: COLLAPSE AND CONSOLIDATION, 1979-83..................................................... 150

Committee Failure and Floor Chaos, 1979............................ 151
Strengthening the Process and Democratic Collapse, 1980........ 160
Cementing the Changes: The Arrival of the Reagan
Administration, 1981-82....................................................... 166
Partisan Consolidation.......................................................... 175
Notes.................................................................................... 190

6 CONSOLIDATION TO STALEMATE, 1983-1992..................... 192

Changes in Committee Composition.................................. 193
A Purely Partisan Affair: The Resolution After 1982............. 205
Other Influences and Developments.................................... 214
The President...................................................................... 215
Budgeting By Formula......................................................... 218
Notes.................................................................................... 227
7 REVITALIZATION AND REGRET: THE PROCESS IN THE 1990s.... 229

The Short-lived Return of Unified Control, 1993-94.........................230
Republicans and Surpluses 1995-99............................................236
The Budget Process and the “Revolution” of 1995..........................237
Republican Budget Committee Composition and Leadership ........241
A Rivalry Renewed: The House Budget and Appropriations Committees.252
Post-Deal Drift and Renewed Calls for Reform, 1998-99................257
Notes..........................................................................................263

8 REFORM AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES:
   CONCLUSIONS..........................................................................264

Timing and Motivation.................................................................265
The Consequences of the 1974 Act.................................................268
Other Considerations..................................................................272
Prospects and Conclusions........................................................274
Notes..........................................................................................280

APPENDICES

   A PERCENT SUPPORT FOR FINAL PASSAGE: HOUSE BUDGET
       RESOLUTIONS AND HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS BILLS,
       1975-98................................................................................281

   B INTERVIEW PROCEDURE AND INTERVIEWEES....................283

REFERENCES..............................................................................293

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH................................................................302
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Party divisions on the Debt Ceiling Increase Bill (HR 16810): The Mahon (D-Tx.) Amendment and Final Passage Votes, October 10, 1972</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2</td>
<td>Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables Regressed on Support for the Mahon Amendment (Logistic Regression)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>Party Divisions on the Impoundment Control and Spending Ceiling Bill (HR 8480): Final Passage, July 25, 1973</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-2</td>
<td>Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables Regressed on Support for Final Passage of the Impoundment Control Bill (Logistic Regression)</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3</td>
<td>Major Provisions of the Joint Study Committee Proposal and the Reported Rules Committee Bill</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Party Divisions on the Rules Committee Reform Bill (HR 7130): The Martin (R-Neb.) Amendment to strike the anti-impoundment provisions, December 4, 1973</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables Regressed on Opposition to the Martin Amendment (Logistic Regression)</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>Performance of Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables as Predictors of Support for the Reassertion of Congressional Control Over Federal Spending (Summary of Logistic Regressions)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1</td>
<td>Floor Amendments Offered to the First Budget Resolution, May 1, 1975...</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-2</td>
<td>Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1975-78</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-3</td>
<td>Total Years of Service, House Budget Committee Members by Party, 1975-78</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4-4 House voting on amendments and final passage; budget resolutions, 1975-78 .................................................. 145

5-1 Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1979-80............. 152

5-2 Floor Amendments Offered, Approved and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions, 1979-80............................................. 154

6-1 Difference in Mean Previous Year Party Unity Scores; all Democrats, continuing Budget Committee Democrats and new Budget Committee Democrats, 1975-1993...................................................... 196

6-2 Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1983-94........... 199

6-3 Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, 1983-94............................................ 208

7-1 Committee and Floor Amendments, (offered and approved) and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions, Unified Democratic Control, 1993-94.................................................... 233

7-2 Republican Budget Committee Assignments 1975-99, Difference in Mean Previous Year Party Unity Scores; all Republicans, Continuing House Budget Committee (HBC) Republicans and New HBC Republicans and Freshmen Assignments........................................... 242

7-3 Years experience of House Appropriations Committee (HAC) members on the House Budget Committee (HBC) and mean HBC seniority by party, 1975-2000............................................................... 243

7-4 Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1993-99......... 247
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>Median D-Nominate Scores for House Appropriations Committee members and non-members, by Party, 1961-73</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1</td>
<td>Percent Floor Support (of those voting) for Final Passage of House Budget Resolutions, House Appropriations Bills for FY 1976 (1975)</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-2</td>
<td>Percent floor support (of those voting) for Final Passage of House Budget Resolutions, House Appropriations bills for FY 1979 (passed in 1978)</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-1</td>
<td>Distribution of Support (percent of those voting) for 33 Floor Amendments to the First Budget Resolution, 1979</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-2</td>
<td>Distribution of Support (percent of those voting) for 48 Floor Amendments to the 13 House Appropriations Bills, 1979</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-3</td>
<td>Percent Support (among those voting) for Budget Resolutions, House Apps. Bills, 1979</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-4</td>
<td>Percent support (among those voting) for final passage of House Budget Resolutions, appropriations bills, 1980</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-5</td>
<td>Distribution of Support (percent of those voting) for 31 Amendments to the First Budget Resolution (on which recorded votes were taken, 1982)</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>Difference between Party Unity on Partisan House Budget Resolution Final Passage Votes and Mean Party Unity Score by Party, 1975-1994</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract of a Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

CONGRESSIONAL REFORM AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES:
THE 1974 BUDGET ACT IN THE U.S. HOUSE

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Chair: Lawrence C. Dodd
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This dissertation evaluates the mix of constituency, partisan and internal factors that led to the passage of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 and its consequences within the U.S. House. I hypothesize that the compromises necessary to get the Act approved by the chamber in 1973, combined with further shifts in external political and economic conditions immediately following its introduction, caused the reforms to have consequences within the institution that were largely neither foreseen nor intended by most of the members that supported the House reform bill in 1973. This study presents quantitative data on House Budget Committee and floor voting on resolution amendments and passage as well as key indicators of committee composition over time. These data are supplemented with qualitative evidence gathered
from congressional records and reports, journalistic sources, and over 40 original in-depth interviews conducted with past and present members of Congress and personal and committee staff members.

I conclude that while partisan and constituency factors were critical in the enactment of budget reform in 1974, powerful and enduring internal resistance to the new process, both before and after reform critically limited the scope of the original statute and its subsequent influence and operations in the House. It caused certain key provisions to be included in the 1974 Act that ironically helped maximize rather than minimize the disruptive impact of the new process on existing arrangements. This internal resistance (centered around the House Appropriations Committee) has proven to be both highly durable and surprisingly independent of the state of federal budget, the broader economy, and the congressional parties. In spite of the subsequent polarization of the parties, persistently high levels of member dissatisfaction with the process, the change in majority party control, and the transition from annual budget deficits to surpluses, neither party has been able to make substantial changes to the system established by the 1974 Act.
CHAPTER 1
UNDERSTANDING CONGRESSIONAL REFORM: EXTERNAL PRESSURES FOR CHANGE AND INTERNAL RESISTANCE

Introduction

The U.S. Constitution granted Congress the authority to make its own rules, and its members subsequently decided that these could be changed at any time by a simple majority vote. While minor tinkering with the rules has been virtually incessant, major changes in the organizing principles and basic procedures of each chamber have been remarkably rare. This enduring stability has long been a characteristic of great interest to political scientists, who have come up with a variety of explanations for it. The focus here, however, is on the periodic internal reforms that occasionally disrupt this otherwise highly stable set of rules and arrangements.

Specifically, this study examines what was arguably the most significant congressional reform of recent years--the changes mandated by the 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (CBICA)--and their institutional impact on the U.S House of Representatives. The objective is to shed some light on broader questions of why reform occurs when it does, what motivates it, and influences its consequences, through a rigorous evaluation of the mix of constituency, partisan and internal factors that
critically shaped the 1974 CBICA and its longer-term impact on the House as a whole. The case of the 1974 Act is of particular significance as one of the most dramatic and far-reaching set of changes in congressional rules and, as I will argue here, ultimately in institutional culture and norms that has ever been enacted.

Although the passage of the Act in 1974 is typically recognized as a watershed moment in congressional development, political scientists have found it difficult to pinpoint exactly what difference it has made. This is in part, because the Act was motivated by several different goals or expectations, few of which were actually born out by its consequences. Most of all, it was intended to permit Congress to produce its own budget (Schick 1980, 1990), an outcome that is very difficult to measure.

Studies that have sought to estimate its impact on outcomes generally do not find evidence of a strong effect, partly because of numerous methodological problems including the lack of a control group across the pre- and post-reform eras, and a potentially endless stream of independent variables. Even relatively straightforward measures of congressional compliance with, and enforcement of the Act since 1975, suggest a less than striking significance. The situation is further complicated by the fact that committee and floor roll calls are of no use after 1982; as described in subsequent chapters, party accounts for all the variance in both committee and floor voting on resolutions after that date, and amendments on the floor also become too scarce support any reliable conclusions.

The research questions of interest in this particular case clearly warrant the multi-method approach that is utilized here. The focus on both the causes and consequences of reform requires that the scope of the empirical inquiry extend from before the successful
budget reform movement of 1973-74 through its subsequent development and evolution in the House. Quantitative data and analysis are presented when available and appropriate and are supplemented throughout by qualitative evidence gathered from congressional records and reports, journalistic sources and over 40 original in-depth interviews conducted with members of Congress and personal and committee staff members (see Appendix B). As can be seen in the following chapters, the interviews in particular, provided critical insight into how rules changes can substantially influence not only outcomes but also, and perhaps just as importantly, the strategies, structure and culture of the institution itself.

The Importance of Rules

Internal rules and procedures have been widely recognized as important influences on congressional politics and outcomes; for as William Riker observed, governing institutions, “are simply rules about behavior, especially about making decisions” (1980, p. 432). These rules focus the attention of members in systematic and predictable ways and in doing so can have a strong influence on legislative politics and policy making (Rockman 1994). This influence is derived from their impact on such factors as the amount and quality of information or expertise available to members, member access to decision making across various policy areas, opportunities for, and barriers to, the accumulation of personal power, as well as the kinds of issues that will be regularly considered and those that will tend to be avoided or otherwise left out (Dodd 1986b; Krehbiel 1992; McCubbins and Sullivan 1987; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Weingast and Marshall 1988). Over time, rules and arrangements may also have an impact the political climate within Congress insofar as they—intentionally or otherwise—
serve to channel “political energies into certain kinds of conflict and away from others” (March and Olsen 1989, p.27).

Congressional rules, are therefore expected to effect the substance and parameters of the agenda, as well as patterns of member influence on its processes and collective outcomes or decisions. They can affect the content of the agenda by narrowing the boundaries of the institution’s ‘routine’ agenda to fit pre-conceived expectations of the government’s role and responsibilities and/or prevalent notions of appropriate or acceptable solutions (Hinckley 1971). As this ‘routine agenda’ is subsequently taken up, rules that permit key factions or leaders to limit the range of alternatives and/or, the format and sequence of internal action may be used by them to secure preferred outcomes (Baron 1995; Shepsle 1979; Shepsle and Weingast 1987).

Through a combination of substantive and procedural controls, internal rules and arrangements are expected to structure collective decision making to permit majority-rule legislatures to function in an effective manner. As Arrow (1963) and others have argued, as abstract entities governed solely by majority rule, legislatures would be plagued by problems of vote cycling and instability in the production of stable or nonrandom outcomes (Black 1948, 1958; McKelvey 1976; Plott 1967; Riker 1961, 1980; Schofield 1978). In his landmark 1979 article, Kenneth Shepsle demonstrated that these collective action problems could be reduced or offset by the addition of a committee system with ‘simple’ or monopolistic jurisdictions and an amendment control rule. By acting as gatekeepers for proposals within their own jurisdictions, such committees could support a set of “structure-induced” equilibrium outcomes regardless of whether or not a preference-induced equilibrium existed (Shepsle 1979). Rules and processes, he
persuasively argued, were not neutral aggregators of individual preferences but should advantage one set of proposals over others.

The other mechanism that is often credited with providing a stabilizing influence on the decisions and outcomes of majority rule legislatures has been strong and cohesive political parties. Party leaders are expected to internalize the interests of their respective membership and may periodically be empowered to alleviate collective action problems through their control of both the legislative agenda and the distribution of institutional resources among their members (Aldrich 1995b; Cooper and Brady 1981; Cox and McCubbins 1993, 1995; Dodd and Oppenheimer 1989a; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1992). The committee system, however, has generally been accepted as the primary stabilizing mechanism within the House as the influence and role of parties has been highly variable over time.

Given that internal rules and arrangements are assumed to have such far-reaching effects and important implications, congressional reform, or more specifically, major changes to the formal rules, procedures or structure of either or both houses of Congress, becomes an issue of particular interest and consequence. Although a great deal of theoretical and empirical research has demonstrated the significance of congressional rules and their tendency toward continuity over time, studies that explain why changes occur when they do, what motivates them, and how likely they are to be successfully integrated with existing arrangements have been considerably less numerous.

The broader congressional literature offers two distinct approaches to understanding congressional reform that reflect the broader debate over the balance of committee versus party control in the House. The first is suggested by individual-level
perspectives in which internal reform is periodically produced by the goal-oriented behavior of individual members. The second approach is that of institutional perspectives that emphasize the problematic nature of collective decision making and the tendency of internal rules and arrangements to become deeply entrenched within the legislature. Such perspectives typically contend that pre-existing or inherited rules are the strongest predictors of future rules.

These two camps offer almost entirely contradictory conclusions regarding the likelihood or frequency of major internal reforms. Individual-level perspectives suggest that rational member responses to external events and developments drive changes in internal rules and organization, and that institutions themselves are highly responsive and adaptable over time. Such understandings view collective decisions and decision making as a more or less straightforward summation of individual-level preferences and do not anticipate the rules under which this occurs to independently affect outcomes. Changes in the rules should be relatively frequent as members’ collective support for existing arrangements is only expected to last until a new majority emerges that favors a different set of policy goals and priorities.

It has been recognized, however, that such approaches seem to overemphasize individual-level influences to the point that they seem to suggest “there is no glue holding the atoms together, there is no society” (Shepsle 1989, p. 134). Institutionalist perspectives, however, take the opposite view, contending that the strength of the ‘societal’ glue actually makes movement (change) very difficult. They argue that the rules and arrangements of large and complex institutions--such as the U.S. Congress--are not easily affected by changes in their external environment and actually become more
insulated from its reformist pressures over time (Dodd 1986b; Huntingdon 1965; Polsby
1968; March and Olsen 1989). Membership turnover is still expected to provide some
impetus for reform but the conditions under which it might be expected to overcome the
entrenched internal resistance of more senior members has remained unclear.

Majority-rule control over congressional rules and arrangements suggests that
those in force at any given time must be those that best serve the interests of a majority of
members (Lowi 1979; Ripley and Franklin 1980; Krehbiel 1992). As member goals and
priorities shift over time, the assumption is that new majorities will emerge and will alter
or amend internal rules as necessary to facilitate the enactment of their agenda. To a
certain extent, then, the endogeneity of congressional rules also seems to anticipate
relatively regular reforms and adjustments to internal arrangements. That Congress has
the authority to make its own rules is clearly established under the Constitution. The key
to understanding change and continuity in these rules hence becomes the basis on which
members make calculations and decisions about existing rules and arrangements.

Individual-level perspectives suggest that such calculations primarily involve
members’ evaluations of the extent to which existing arrangements permit them to pursue
their own personal goals and self-interest. In many cases, however, the linkage between
rules, goals and actual outcomes may not be readily apparent, accurately perceived, or
even consistent over time.

Unless all members are in complete concurrence on every policy issue considered
by Congress, there will inevitably be some individuals whose goals will be frustrated by
the legislative process. Whether or not this frustration has anything to do with the
process itself is another question altogether; the individual’s goals or preferences may
simply be out of sync with those of most other members, or with the public as a whole. Yet it is also possible that it is the rules themselves may be the problem, as they inevitably do bestow a disproportionate amount of influence on a small minority of members, and often give their proposals an unfair advantage on the floor (Aldrich 1989; Riker 1980). If those members whose preferences or priorities are consistently ignored or excluded become sufficiently numerous as to constitute a “frustrated majority”, changing the rules to force a redistribution of power may become an increasingly attractive—if not a priority--option.

There are some very fundamental differences, however, between efforts to alter internal rules and those to change public policy that support institutionalist expectations that the former will consistently be far more problematic than the latter. Unlike policy change, internal reform is inherently zero-sum; policy initiatives may be extensively broadened or modified without necessarily undercutting the provisions or intent of the original approach. Changes in internal rules or arrangements, however, are much more likely to produce clear winners and losers and should hence provoke much greater opposition that most proposals for policy change. Specifically, reform movements should regularly encounter two considerable roadblocks to their success; the opposition of the many incumbents who benefit from the existing distribution of power and the more widespread hesitance of members to risk ‘tried and tested’ arrangements for unproven and unfamiliar new structures or procedures.

In spite of the considerable risks, uncertainties and opposition that reform efforts are widely expected to involve, major changes in internal rules and arrangements have periodically occurred in Congress. This study uses one empirical case of such change to
address a range of broader questions related to congressional reform and its consequences. The primary issues of interest are as follows; the kinds of factors that convinced members to give up on the pursuit of their agenda goals through existing rules and arrangements and to throw their collective weight behind structural or procedural reform; whether these same factors also ensured the effective implementation of the changes made; and the impact of subsequent developments on the new rules and arrangements within their broader legislative context. The observable implications of the individual-level and institutionalist approaches for such questions can best be empirically evaluated through the consideration of each of following familiar sources of influence on congressional politics and organization.

Three Dimensions of Reform

Existing studies suggest three dimensions or sets of factors that might be expected to encourage or constrain congressional reform efforts according to the individual-level and institutionalist perspectives described above. While it would be virtually impossible to identify and categorize every single empirical source of pressure for or against reform as individual-level or institutionalist, it is much more feasible to separate out and evaluate the relative weight and direction of constituency, partisan and internal factors on issues of congressional reform. Far from representing absolute or mutually exclusive categories, these dimensions are used here only as analytical constructs as there is clearly considerable overlap and interaction between them in an empirical setting. Taken together, however, they capture the range of interests and pressures that might influence the emergence and impact of reform movements. They also reflect the main categories of the existing congressional literature.
This study evaluates the relative weight of the pressures for or against reform across each of these three dimensions, and any changes or interactions that may have occurred between them over time. Reform does not occur in vacuum, and the endogeneity of congressional rules makes it reasonable to assume that the factors or pressures that produced reform must persist in the period following its enactment for the changes to endure. Extending the analysis of these three dimensions both backward into the prereform period and forward, beyond the moment of reform should help illuminate some of the more complex and dynamic aspects of internal reform and its consequences that are often lost or understated in the existing literature.

Constituency considerations clearly provide the empirical foundation for individual-level perspectives, though according to homogeneity-of-interest expectations of party strength, they also have important implications for the partisan dimension. The relevance of constituency considerations for issues of internal rules and arrangements, however, are much less obvious than they are for questions of public policy. Yet as reflected in the extent to which they encourage members to cooperate in pursuit of shared policy goals, constituency influences are considered most likely to produce pressure for congressional reform and the electoral connection also marks them as the most significant or meaningful source of such support. Partisan factors may be additionally important in helping create or intensify such pressure, but their independent influence is expected to be both less powerful and clear-cut. Finally, institutionalist perspectives lead us to expect that internal opposition to reform will be consistently high. Each dimension, however, also contains influences and pressures that may both work for and against efforts to secure congressional reform.
Constituency

Research that has emphasized the goal-oriented behavior of individual members has also tended to view the electoral connection as the dominant force in generating organizational and procedural change (Aldrich 1995a; Dodd and Oppenheimer 1989b; Rohde 1991). Although members are expected to possess variable combinations of goals and ambitions (Schlesinger 1966; Fenno 1973), they are assumed to be preoccupied with reelection as the one goal that must be fulfilled in order to facilitate the accomplishment of all others (Mayhew 1974). Conditions in a member’s constituency—or more specifically, their reelection constituency—are therefore regarded as the key to understanding their behavior and actions inside Congress.

If a particular proposal for internal reform were perceived as having significant constituency implications for a majority of members, it would almost certainly succeed. The electoral connection invokes the strongest incentives for members to respond and threatens the ultimate sanction for those who do not. As described above, constituency considerations seem most likely to generate support for internal reform during periods of national crises or upheaval, such as the Great Depression or the Vietnam War and the domestic unrest of 1960s. This is because such crises will often create a demand for dramatic policy change to which long-standing internal rules or arrangements may be unable to respond in a timely or effective manner (Binder 1997; Dodd 1986b). The broad impact of the crisis on constituents across the country and the potential for an electoral backlash if change is not forthcoming should produce the requisite support for any internal reforms aimed at expediting passage of the new agenda.
Under conditions short of national crisis, however, most issues of internal reform should be of little relevance in the electoral arena as they generally do not have the same direct and tangible implications for constituents as policy outcomes. If a majority of members find that the rules are obstructing the accomplishment of their common policy goals then those members might be expected to support a package of reforms in order to secure the enactment of their agenda. Yet their incentives to push through rules changes should also be considerably weaker than in the policy-specific context. Members may be rewarded (or punished) by constituents for their policy positions and activism (Arnold 1990) but the likelihood of blame or credit being assigned on questions of internal congressional rules or procedures is rarely significant. Voters may hold their representative to account for failing to channel a certain level of federal benefits and resources into their district, but they are highly unlikely to have the same level of interest or awareness on issues of internal rules or organization.

Finally, if constituency pressures for particularistic benefits were entirely dominant and static over time, any deviation from a decentralized system of specialized and semi-autonomous policy committees would be unlikely to occur. These arrangements appear to maximize a member’s influence over issues of greatest interest to her constituents. If the distributive priorities that the electoral connection is assumed to generate are both correct and constant, then sufficient support for reforms to establish more centralized controls should always fail because they would diminish the ability of individual members to secure particularistic benefits for their constituents.
Partisan

The partisan dimension is broadly defined here as anything related to the two major political parties; their performance and relevance in elections, their organizations and leadership in government, the balance of power between them, and their collective strength and activities in Congress. Most studies of the congressional parties conclude that their independent influence within the legislature is limited, in particular by the ex ante homogeneity of interests among members of the same party and the extent to which those interests differ between the parties (Aldrich 1995a; Cooper and Brady 1981; Cooper, Brady and Hurley 1977; Ripley 1967; Rohde 1991). In this respect, the partisan influence on issues of internal reform seems closely connected to the constituency considerations of the previous section.

When the level of agreement among members of each party is high and the differences between them distinct, the numbers and cohesion of the majority party alone may be sufficient to secure collectively preferred outcomes (Binder 1997). Yet the majority party may also act to strengthen its governing coalition through a more strategic allocation of key positions and other institutional resources (Cooper and Brady 1981; Jones 1968; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Cox and McCubbins 1993). It may even go so far as to propose changes in existing rules, particularly if they are being used aggressively by the minority party to obstruct passage of the majority party agenda and/or to develop and promote their own alternative agenda (Binder 1997; Dodd 1986a). Under the latter scenario, however, changes in congressional rules would be produced by a defensive reaction to a perceived procedural and/or political threat rather than by the proactive pursuit of the majority party’s own agenda goals. This suggests that partisan
incentives for reform may also be effected by such internal factors as the size and cohesion of the majority and the activism of their minority opposition.

While in principle, at least, the majority party in Congress appears to possess the numbers, the formal organizational capacity and the political interest to change internal rules, it should also be significantly constrained in its ability to secure and implement reforms for two main reasons. As previously noted, such changes require majority support and so the party must first convince its members that the proposed changes will secure the preferred policy outcomes without conferring excessive and unnecessary power upon a few individuals at their expense. Historically, formal delegations of power to party leaders have been tenuous if they have been made at all (Dodd and Oppenheimer 1989a). When party leaders have played an important role within the chamber, it has usually been as a result of external factors or the skills or abilities of the individuals leaders rather than to specific grants of institutional authority (Canon 1992; Jones 1968).

The second constraint on parties and partisan considerations producing a successful reform movement is that if party-driven reforms are approved as a means to a common policy ends (Cooper and Brady 1981; Rohde 1991), then once this agenda has been enacted or the demand for it subsided, it stands to reason that rank-and-file support for any rules changes made is also likely to diminish. Although reforms may increase the level of centralized leadership or control within Congress, changes that are made inevitably coexist with (and do not replace) the standing policy committees. Strong parties and autonomous committees have always been opponents in a zero-sum battle for congressional control; whenever one has increased its power it has been at the expense of the other (Weingast and Marshall 1988; Gilligan and Krehbiel 1995). Yet historically,
centralized party leadership has proven to be far more difficult to sustain than a system of strong and relatively autonomous committees.

Partisan factors, therefore, may periodically result in new rules that support more centralized leadership, but this does not mean that members no longer value the district and electoral benefits of the committee system. The diversity of district opinions and interests contained within each of the parties has led their members to place a high premium on freedom of individual action and loose party ties (Mayhew 1974, 99-101). When centralized leadership begins to infringe upon individual behavior or expectations—as it inevitably has appeared to do in the House—constituency considerations are likely to encourage members to limit or otherwise curtail their power. Any formal rules changes based on overtly partisan considerations therefore seem liable to be both temporary and conditional, lasting only until the underlying agenda is enacted or the collective demand for it has passed. Moreover, if members of each party represent districts with strongly divergent, or even contradictory policy interests or priorities, partisan considerations seem highly unlikely to produce any significant movement toward internal reform.

Internal

The internal dimension, for the purposes of this dissertation, is defined as pressures or problems originating within Congress. This includes members’ perceptions of their collective capacity for action, evaluations of recent institutional performance, support or opposition for the prevailing distribution of power, or a more general concern with building or maintaining institutional influence or prestige. Some of these factors may have a constituency aspect to them, but they are also expected to be strongly affected by Fenno’s second two sets of member goals; those of good public policy and power
within the House (Fenno 1973). While most internal considerations are expected to militate against change, existing studies do suggest two primary sources of possible support for reform; members’ individual level ‘quest for power’ (Dodd 1977; 1986b) and a more general sense of concern with institutional responsiveness to changing external conditions (March and Olsen 1989) and the shifts that they produce in “the policy agenda dominant among the nation’s citizens” (Dodd 1986b, p.31).

As previously discussed, rules inevitably bestow a greater degree of power upon certain members of the legislature than on others. If there were no positions of power or leadership within Congress, no one person or group could control the agenda and chaos would likely ensue. In order to provide for leadership and coordination, internal rules will inevitably create “undemocratic” concentrations of power within Congress (Dodd 1986b; Aldrich 1989). Members excluded from these positions, however, are expected to support new rules that give themselves a progressively greater share in that power. The resulting organizational fragmentation will lead to policy immobilism and the growing sense of crisis should serve to trigger recentralizing reforms (Dodd 1986b). This theory of organizational cycles suggests that careerism and the quest for power are among the most likely internal factors to create pressure for reform from within the institution.

Concern over the collective need to maintain institutional relevance and authority in the face of shifting external conditions may also encourage members to make changes to internal rules or structures. As March and Olsen (1989) contend, decisions about institutional choice may valued for their symbolism as much as for their potential to affect outcomes. By periodically supporting changes in the rules, members may seek to convey the impression that their collective choice was actively determined by “planning,
thinking, analysis and the systematic use of information” and responsive to “the right interests” (1989, 50).

Most internal pressures or influences, however, are expected to support stability and continuity in rules and to discourage or minimize the likelihood of reform. While a simple majority of members is all that is required to make changes in House rules, significant reform has generally been limited to general jurisdictional reorganizations or the addition or subtraction of various panels. Major innovation has been infrequent and unusual. Institutionalist approaches cite this lack of fundamental change as evidence of the inertial properties of established rules and structures, the cumulative nature of their development, and their growing resistance to reform over time. According to this perspective institutional development progresses along a certain ‘path’ from which it becomes increasingly difficult and unlikely to deviate (Aldrich 1994; Binder 1997).

Path-dependent development is anticipated in virtually any large organization where the conservative forces of established rules and norms should work strongly against the successful introduction of new processes or structures. Rules and other internal arrangements may be initially adopted in response to a certain set of external conditions or problems, but if they become institutionalized they are expected to become increasingly resistant to change and to persist “until the external demands for change are fairly substantial” (March and Olsen 1989, 106; also Huntingdon 1965).

The stickiness of path-dependency is also expected to become more acute in larger and more complex institutions, and especially those where “functions are internally separated on some regular and explicit basis” (Polsby 1968, 145). The steady growth in the size and complexity of the federal government since the New Deal combined with the
emergence of a strongly decentralized and specialized committee system and a careerist emphasis on gaining and maintaining power are also expected to have intensified a collective focus on “internal processes at the expense of external demands” (Polsby 1968, 166). Under such conditions, the level of pressure required to prompt reform is expected to rise in proportion to the degree of institutionalization.

Even if changes are made, if leaders are unable to gain acceptance of them among the rank-and-file, they may be discarded or ignored if deemed ineffective or overly disruptive by those charged with implementing and upholding them (North 1990). In order to endure, internal changes must be actively consolidated within the broader organizational environment after they have been approved and put in place (Davidson and Olesek 1976). House members, in particular, have historically been unwilling to “consolidate” major reforms that would cause them to deviate from the developmental path of the traditional committee system.

Discussion

While the various aspects of each single dimension alone do not seem capable of generating sufficient support and momentum for significant change, some combination of the three most likely explains the occurrence and consequences of reform. The three dimensions reflect the prevailing compartmentalization of the congressional literature and provide a useful empirical framework for mapping out and evaluating the competing pulls of expected individual-level and institutionalist pressures for and against internal reform. The three dimensions are not presented as competing or even conflicting explanations for reform; they are clearly interrelated and factors across each of the
different dimensions seem likely to play some role in the emergence of successful reform movements.

The constituency and partisan dimensions, however, must be regarded as distinct from the internal to the extent that they suggest a purposive, outcome-oriented intent to reform that needs to be evaluated against observable consequences. If members’ decisions to support reform _are_ based on certain expectations—to protect or facilitate passage of a common agenda or to force a broader distribution of power among members—it is important to compare these expectations with consequences, because what seems to have been facilitated by reform is all too often assumed to have been “the ex ante objective of the individuals involved” (Shepsle 1989, 140). It is quite conceivable that new developments or problems before, during, or after congressional consideration of reform, might cause what began as constituency demands for reform to generate strongly partisan consequences or, equally, for ambitious partisan reforms to produce only limited internal effects. If the intent of those instigating reform is not born out by its consequences then the distinction needs to be made between the factors that produce or create demand for reform and those that subsequently influence its effects.

As noted earlier, existing studies of reform have tended to emphasize one particular set of factors over the other two. I use all three to evaluate expectations of support for reform at the constituency and partisan dimensions against the strong resistance to change expected from within the institution. The individual-level pressures and considerations of the constituency and the partisan dimensions give the impression that internal arrangements are regularly adjusted in response to members’ shifting goals.
and priorities. Internal factors and conditions, on the other hand, are expected to act as largely as constraints on efforts to secure changes in the rules.

In this dissertation, I use the example of the 1974 budget reforms to explore how these contradictory pressures play out in an empirical setting. If both constant external pressures for reform and a steady buildup of internal resistance to change are present in the contemporary Congress, why and when might we expect reform to occur? And what are the prospects any changes made will be successfully integrated with pre-existing rules and arrangements if internal opposition remains high? The purpose of this study is two-fold; first, to explain and analyze the interaction of constituency, partisan and internal pressures that led to reform and to evaluate their continuing influence on the new process after 1974. Second, the broader intent is to facilitate some more generalizable conclusions regarding the two principle research questions that inform this study; why does Congress periodically enact major internal reforms in spite of an overwhelming body of theoretical and empirical research that suggests it is extremely unlikely to do so? And to what effect?

The Case of the 1974 Budget Reforms

There are several reasons why budget reform in the 1970s represents an appropriate empirical case through which to explore the various questions and issues raised in the above discussion of constituency, partisan and internal influences on the occurrence and long-term impact of congressional reform. Although the CBICA of 1974 established a budget process and Committees in both chambers, the analysis here is largely confined to the House. Its larger size and smaller member constituencies, combined with its constitutionally-stipulated control over revenue bills and dominant role
in the appropriations process should serve to produce a stronger clash of individual-level and institutional factors than might be found in the Senate. This clash should permit some tentative conclusions to be drawn regarding the relative strength of each set of factors and their respective influences through the different stages of reform.

Although there was no congressional budget process per se prior to 1975, the manner in which the House had long handled taxing and spending decisions seemed a particularly unlikely target for reform as these arrangements appeared to be both deeply entrenched within the institution and electorally advantageous for members of both parties. In the century following the Civil War, the House had become increasingly preoccupied with issues of federal resource allocation and distribution. As it did so, a certain set of rules and norms became deeply ingrained among its committees and in an informal system of budgeting that was recentralized in the House Appropriations Committee in 1920 (Fenno 1966; Stewart 1989; Wildavsky 1964). Operating without an overall budget, Congress would arrive at its spending total for the year simply by adding up the amounts that had been approved by the various Appropriations subcommittees for their separate jurisdictions. Fiscal decision making was portrayed as an inclusionary and highly consensual system of distributive universalism (Brady and Morgan 1987; Fenno 1966; Ferejohn 1974; Fiorina 1977; Ripley and Franklin 1980; Wildavsky 1964, 1974).

During this period, norms of committee specialization, autonomy, reciprocity and decentralization were strengthened as members increasingly viewed the delivery of divisible policy benefits to their constituents as the key to their electoral security (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978). This system was extraordinarily popular among incumbents who delivered concentrated benefits to constituents while dispersing the costs
across the general population, and avoided or postponed difficult or politically risky decisions while maximizing the likelihood of their own reelection (Fiorina 1981; Mayhew 1974; Weingast 1979; Wilson 1980).

Under such conditions, the emergence of a “frustrated majority” with both the numbers and the incentive to change the rules seemed unlikely. Members were supposed to be primarily concerned with their own reelection and if the flow of federal benefits and services to their districts did indeed serve to increase the electoral security of most members then they would have had little reason to support reform. Changes to existing rules or arrangements seemed likely to only introduce risk and uncertainty to a system that had exhibited very little of either. Furthermore, the long period of committee government and highly consensual fiscal policy making had all but eliminated any meaningful role or responsibility for the parties in Congress, who at that point in time, did not seem capable of generating and sustaining the considerable momentum required to overcome internal resistance and enact major internal reforms.

Finally, this prereform system of budgetary decision making was also consistent with the historical preference of members for decentralized committee government. As many scholars have observed, the single member district basis of representation and the traditionally weak congressional parties give members no incentives to pay any attention to anyone other than those citizens who directly elected them. This devotion of members to district interests and opinions above all else has generally predisposed the House toward the universalistic rules and norms of decentralized committee government (see Fiorina 1977; Lowi 1979; Price 1985).
It is also significant that the 1974 CBICA was the most recent and substantial change in internal rules and arrangements. This meant that the forces of institutionalization—that are generally associated with strong internal resistance to change—should have been at a maximum. The timing of these reforms makes them a good test of institutionalist expectations that the constraining influence of preexisting arrangements on reform is not constant over time but increases with the scale and complexity of governmental activities and with the size and professionalization of its staff and members.

The selection of the 1974 budget reforms was also influenced by the fact that the early 1970s was also a period in which the political pressures and policy problems caused by shifting external conditions were unusually strong throughout much of the country. This also allows for the possibility that internal resistance to reform—however substantial—may simply dissolve in the face of significant and persistent external pressures and crises.

In short, the changes made by the 1974 CBICA offer an ideal empirical example through which to assess the various and often contradictory expectations of constituency, partisan and internal influences on congressional reform and its consequences. While it is clear that no single dimension can fully account for the success of these—or any other major reforms—the goal is to shed some light upon the relative significance of each set of influences and interactions between them, in both generating support for reform and in determining its long-term impact on the institution as a whole.
Overview

The following sections are organized around an empirical examination of the stages of congressional budget reform as it was considered, enacted, implemented and consolidated in the U.S. House of Representatives. As will be shown in the following chapters, the 1974 reforms were not enacted by a cohesive majority in their proactive pursuit of common agenda goals, but instead were the product of short-term political pressures on a deeply divided majority party. A particular combination of constituency, partisan and internal factors led to the enactment of reform in 1974, but the compromises its passage required, combined with major shifts in political and economic conditions soon after reform, produced institutional consequences that had generally not been anticipated by members who had supported it in 1973. The central thesis is that in the case of the 1974 Budget Act, the majority party inadvertently set in place a process that they had neither the political will nor the institutional capability to control. Consequently, the introduction of this process went on to play an important--and largely unexpected--role in the subsequent disruption of the largely bipartisan status quo arrangements by helping to amplify and sustain partisan cleavages within the chamber after 1974.

This study utilizes a variety of qualitative and quantitative data related to the enactment and implementation of the budget process and Committee in the House. Roll call votes are analyzed in the first section to examine how the reform coalition evolved between when the issue first made it on to the congressional agenda in October 1972 and its final approval by the House in December 1973.
Quantitative data on HBC membership characteristics and patterns committee and floor amendment activity and final passage votes are presented for the years following 1974. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, roll call data after 1982 are limited use as party explains all the variance and the number of votes--on the floor, in particular--drops sharply to less than five a year. Comparisons of behavior and operations on the HBC are also made with the House as a whole as well as with the House Appropriations Committee (HAC), the panel whose jurisdiction was most affected by the new process. These quantitative data are supplemented throughout with qualitative evidence gathered from congressional records and reports, journalistic sources and over 40 original in-depth interviews with past and present members of Congress, and personal and committee staff.

The interviews were conducted between August 1997 and September 1999. Most were done on a face-to-face basis in Washington D.C. though phone interviews were relied upon in cases where the individual no longer maintained an office in the D.C. area. The interviews were semi-structured though their length and scope varied a great deal according to how much each individual had to say about the process. Where possible, personal recollections were cross-checked against those of other interviewees, secondary sources and/or archival material. The experience of the interviewees extended from well before the enactment of reform (several had first been elected in the early 1960s) through the late 1990s (see Appendix B).

Chapter 2 examines how and why budget reform finally reappeared on the congressional agenda at the end of 1972, in spite of the fact that most members continued to reap the material and electoral benefits of the distributive status quo arrangements. Chapter 3 focuses on the internal reaction to the first comprehensive budget reform
proposal after it was introduced in bill form in April 1973. A series of three critical floor
votes related to the reassertion of congressional control over the budget are analyzed to
show how the reform coalition evolved in the year preceding House approval of the
CBICA. This chapter highlights the critical influence of the lengthy and highly-charged
internal divisions and negotiations over the reform bill that would ultimately be signed
into law.

The chapters dealing with the implementation and consolidation of the CBICA
are presented in a chronological order that emphasizes key moments in its evolution and
development in the House. Chapter 4 deals with the early efforts of House Democrats to
implement the process in the years following 1974. This required the majority party to
fight a war on two fronts; an internal struggle against senior members of their own party
who would have liked nothing better than to see the new process fail, as well as an
ideological battle against conservatives of both parties who immediately and consistently
condemned House budget resolutions for the liberal policies and priorities they espoused.

Chapter 5 describes how the external political and economic pressures of the
times had led to increased leadership intervention in the process by 1979 and to efforts to
strengthen its precarious internal position the following year. It also explains how the
political and procedural shocks of the 1981 and 1982 conservative coalition budgets
forced Democrats to complete their consolidation of the process within the chamber on a
partisan basis.

The partisan consolidation of the process is described in depth in Chapter 6. After
1982, the resolution effectively ceased to be a committee-based responsibility and was
consolidated within the institution as a purely partisan process. This, however, did little
to bridge the gap between the resolution and its legislative implementation that, in tandem with rising deficits, continued to cause severe problems for the process through the remainder of the decade. Chapter 7 examines the changing role and influence of the process in the 1990s when it was briefly revitalized by both parties in their efforts to significantly alter policy outcomes in the wake of their respective electoral triumphs. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the findings of the empirical inquiry and discusses the more general conclusions regarding the institutional roots and consequences of congressional reform suggested by this particular case.
CHAPTER 2
THE NIXONIAN CHALLENGE AND THE BUILDUP TO BUDGET REFORM

In the following two chapters I examine the key events leading up to the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (CBICA) of 1974 and assess the relative significance of each of the three dimensions discussed in Chapter 1. There were two distinct stages on the congressional road to reform; the first was for a majority of members to accept that there was a need for reform, and the second, for them to come up with a proposal that could prevail on the floor. In this chapter I examine the first stage and focus on questions of motivation, intent and expectations. I identify the main pressures and influences across each of the three dimensions and assess their relative weight in convincing members to support budgetary reform at this particular point in time.

Chapter 3 deals with the second stage on the road to reform and explains how the extensive efforts that were made to come up with a compromise measure produced the key provisions of the bill that would ultimately be signed into law by President Nixon in 1974. While most accounts of the reforms emphasize the significance of the first stage, I argue that the events and heated disagreements of the second exerted a critical influence,
not only on the reform bill, but also on its long-term political and institutional consequences.

As far as the first stage is concerned, however, the evidence considered here suggests that internal resistance remained high--as anticipated by the institutionalist perspectives discussed in the previous chapter--through much of 1972. As Nixon stepped up his criticism of existing arrangements and his calls for reform, the issue became an overtly partisan one in spite of its ostensibly organizational nature. This early pressure from the White House decisively propelled Congress through the first and into the second stage of reform, a transition marked by the establishment of the Joint Study Committee (JSC) on Budget Control in October of 1972. Presidential pressure had this effect because it raised the possibility of electoral repercussions for continued congressional inaction in a sufficient number of districts to temporarily overcome internal resistance to the issue and force it onto the congressional agenda. With elections less than three weeks away and concern over unchecked government spending running high, a popular president effectively maneuvered Congress into a position where most members felt they simply could not avoid the issue any longer.¹

I argue that without the highly critical and relentless pressure from the White House, members would never have agreed to such sweeping changes as were eventually enacted under the 1974 Act. Although the partisan tensions with the White House became less important than divisions among House Democrats after October 1972, they remained a powerful reminder to Democrats throughout 1973 as to why it was so important that they get a budget reform package through the Congress. The early pressure from Nixon forced the issue onto the congressional agenda and helped push
Congress into making changes that were essentially antagonistic to the interests of the titular majority and strongly supported by their partisan and ideological opponents.

Partisan pressure from the White House may have been decisive in terms of getting the issue onto the congressional agenda, but once there, strong internal resistance quickly enveloped the issue again, and muddied both the intent and direction of the movement toward budget reform. As Congress moved into the second stage of reform--that of formulating a proposal that could prevail on the floor--the same problems that had kept the issue off the agenda for so long in the past resurfaced with a vengeance. The temporary and indirect intervention of constituency factors in October 1972 had left the tensions between partisan pressures for reform and internal disincentives for change intact, and these tensions returned to consume congressional consideration of budgetary reform through much of 1973, and came close to derailing the process altogether.

The Three Dimensions and Budgetary Reform

The events and developments that occurred as Congress progressed through both stages of reform in 1972-73 demonstrate how and why the various partisan, internal, and constituency pressures that got reform on the congressional agenda interacted to cause the bill to take the shape it ultimately did. If the case of budget reform is examined from the perspective of the three dimensions--the constituency, the partisan, and the internal--factors across all three dimensions certainly contributed to the demand for reform, but strong countervailing pressures were also present within each.

On the constituency dimension, few districts had escaped the effects of the economic downturn of the early 1970s. By the summer of 1972, the proportion of the public that identified inflation and the high cost of living as “the most important problem
facing this country today” was roughly equal to those that named Vietnam (Gallup 1978). For all members of Congress, the recession had forced the difficult problems of inflation and unemployment to the forefront of the national agenda--issues that have long been regarded as among the most potent politically as they touch the everyday lives of huge numbers of voters in a way that very few others can or do. Such conditions put tremendous pressure on politicians to secure increased levels of program or benefit funding to their districts in order to mitigate the economic hardship being suffered, to show their constituents that they care about their plight, and to portray themselves as doing everything they can to generally get the economy back on track.

Yet according to individual-level perspectives, the problem of inflation and other economic issues might also have served to undermine confidence that the unrestrained pursuit of district benefits represented the same risk-free route to reelection that it had long been assumed to be. Prior to the 1970s, a prolonged period of economic growth combined with the broad and dominant New Deal coalition had all but removed serious constraints on the pursuit of particularistic benefits; the resources were available and there was overwhelming public support and demand for the funding and provision of a wide array of policy programs and initiatives (for example, Key 1958).

After 1970, however, growing popular concern about the economy and high levels of government spending, along with the steady stream of warnings from conservative politicians and economists about the dangers posed by excessive governmental spending to the economy, may have suggested to some members that the interests of their constituents were no longer as straightforward or as unidimensional as had been previously supposed. This may have encouraged members from certain
districts or areas to support reform efforts as a way of emphasizing interests or priorities other than those of local-level spending. New pressures for constraint clearly conflicted with a more entrenched demand for district-level benefits; even members who most strongly felt the former scarcely sought to eliminate or even significantly disrupt arrangements that catered to the latter.

From the constituency perspective, then, budget reform may have presented members with the opportunity to show their support for efforts to constrain governmental spending in order to minimize further damage to the national economy. Yet at the same time, most members should have been equally, if not more, mindful of the need to protect programs and services for which there was high demand in their districts. It seems likely that changing district-level conditions may have created some pressure for reform in certain constituencies, but this pressure may often have been countered in many cases by the continued appeal of the electoral benefits available under existing arrangements.

The pressure for governmental action (to either constrain spending or increase countercyclical aid) that is assumed to follow from adverse economic conditions should also exacerbate partisan and/or ideological divisions among members. If worsening conditions do create pressure for positive governmental action then members on both sides of the political spectrum should cooperate more closely with their ideological allies (in pursuit of shared policy goals) and increasingly find their efforts obstructed by their ideological opponents. In the context of the 1970s, this meant that liberal members became more ardent in their efforts to secure relief for poor and low-income constituents whereas conservative members became more concerned with fighting inflation—in particular by constraining government spending. Depending on the range of economic
interests at the district-level, therefore, constituency conditions should have pushed members more clearly to one side of the ideological spectrum or the other.

Yet a member’s ideology in the 1970s did not necessarily ‘push’ that member closer to mainstream opinion in their party, particularly in the case of many conservative southern Democrats for whom the issue of budgetary reform appeared particularly problematic. Republicans had long been recognized as the party of “economy and budget reduction and cutbacks in the bureaucracy” (Fenno 1966, p.244), and insofar as a comprehensive new budget process was expected to constrain the free-spending committees, reform seemed very much “in line with their general ideology”-as one Republican member put it. While most Republicans supported congressional budget reform based on the expectation that it would constrain spending, Democrats struggled with the multiple and contradictory positions evident among their members.

Given its strongly conservative undercurrent, the issue of budget reform might have been expected to divide congressional Democrats along ideological lines. Ideological tensions within the party had already been strained to new heights by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war in the 1960s, and the rise of deficits and general economic problems of the early 1970s represented another major issue on which the two sides were sharply divided. Many liberal Democrats had supported the Great Society’s dramatic expansion of federal programs and commitments only a few years previously and saw demands for spending constraint/ budgetary reform as threats to those programs. This resistance was likely reinforced at the district level as traditional Democratic clientele groups were also most likely to have been hit the hardest by the recession, creating pressure for more, not less, countercyclical aid.
In 1972-73, however, significant numbers of House Democrats were still southern conservatives, and these members often sided with their Republican colleagues to deny the liberals a working majority in the House. This conservative coalition had bounced back from its lows of 1965-66 and appeared stronger than ever, winning a full 79 percent of the votes on which it appeared in the House in both 1971 and 1972. Given the dominance of the coalition in the House in the early 1970s, it seemed as if the conservatives should have been able to shut out the liberals and dominate the debate over, and ultimately, the shape of congressional budget reform.

Yet if the reform movement in Congress had been dominated by the conservative coalition, it would have unquestionably produced a far tighter process and more powerful new committees than it eventually did. One of the primary reasons why this did not come to pass was that conservative southern Democrats were also over-represented among the party’s most senior members, many of whom held powerful committee chair positions and who stood to lose the most under any major reforms. The Democratic leadership had previously considered including a budget process as part of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, but the strength of the opposition it was expected to generate--from the other committees whose autonomy would be constrained and, in particular, from the committee chairmen whose power would be reduced--caused party leaders to shelve the idea.

Budget reform--again to the extent that it was expected or intended to constrain spending--should also have divided Democrats along generational lines as the more junior Democrats tended to be the most liberal. To many of these members budget reform represented an opportunity to break up the conservative oligarchy that had controlled the
key House Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees for so long. Ever since
the formation of the Democratic Study Group (DSG) in 1959, the liberal faction had been
increasing in numbers and influence and had become more willing to take on some of the
most conservative southern chairmen who opposed them. In many respects, then, budget
reform seemed an ideal vehicle for the liberal cause as a new committee could potentially
undercut the money committees that were then stacked with conservative southerners.

While the most of the liberals seemed strangely unaware of the possibility that
superimposing a comprehensive new process over a fragmented, decentralized committee
system might strengthen the hand of their conservative opponents, some did perceive
long-term partisan benefits to reform. David Obey, in particular, was cited by several
interviewees as having recognized that the process would be inherently partisan and
could not operate on the same consensual basis as the rest of the committee system. As
one senior staff person explained, he “understood and argued that the nature of the
process was to bring forth the party’s budget, and that it could not be a bipartisan
process.” 5 This notion that it would have to be “the party’s budget”, however, did not
seem to discourage the deeply divided Democrats from pushing reform through the
House.

Part of the reason that the partisan and ideological implications of a centralized
budget process were not central in the prereform debate was that a group of influential
members framed budget reform as an organizational or internal issue. This group was
referred to by various interviewees as consisting of “good-government types” on both
sides of the aisle. Liberal Richard Bolling (D-Mo) and the more conservative Bernie Sisk
(D-Ca.) seemed to fall into this category--as did their Rules Committee colleague John
Anderson, who described his support for budget reform as motivated by the desire to improve institutional performance through the establishment of a more “rational, orderly” system.\textsuperscript{6}

While a great deal of support for budget reform was based on similar organizational concerns, liberals and conservatives alike also came to favor reform based on their expectations regarding its substantive, though indirect, policy implications for their constituents and clientele groups. While conservatives expected the new process to constrain spending, many liberals hoped that a comprehensive new process would become a forum through which they could better present arguments in support of their spending priorities as well as bring greater public and congressional scrutiny to bear on the tax side of the budgetary equation.\textsuperscript{7}

Although conservative Democrats generally wanted to see spending constrained as much as their Republican peers, many did not support budget reform as the means to that end, and it had been their institutional power that had kept the issue off the congressional agenda in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Seniority as the singular criteria for advancement had been firmly entrenched for decades, and those who had risen to pinnacles of the committee system had both the power and the electoral security to mount a rigorous defense of status quo arrangements. Nowhere was this more true than in the case of the “money” committees--the House Appropriations and Ways and Means Committees--which had dominated the House since the 1920s through their comprehensive control of fiscal policy. Prior to reform, these members quite clearly benefited from an “undemocratic concentration of power” (Aldrich 1989) that they had accrued under existing House rules.
The preferred outcome of most money committee members with respect to budgetary reform was little or modest change in existing arrangements. Appropriators generally favored efforts to control the “backdoor” spending practices that had become increasingly common in the years prior to reform, and with good reason; as HAC chairman George Mahon never tired of pointing out, his Committee could not be held responsible for higher levels of federal spending as every year for the past 20 years, they appropriated less than the president’s request “without exception” (quoted in *CQWR*, February 10, 1973, p.289).

Few members denied the need for more detailed and independent information-gathering and greater coordination between committees and individual members on all aspects of budgetary policy, but this did not necessarily translate into support for any major new measures or processes. As appropriator Neal Smith (D-Iowa) explained, the money committees originally conceived of budget reform as little more than requiring regularized joint meetings between their members:

> The idea was that Ways and Means and Appropriations were pretty much acquainted with the needs in their particular areas—if you had to raise money, where it might come from, and what the needs were going to be for Appropriations… the idea to start with was that the two would get together and talk these things out early before they marked up their bills.

Apprehension about the proposed Budget Committees was widespread within the House in 1973. Aaron Wildavsky expressed a commonly-held view when he wrote in that coordination in this context was another word for coercion and that a new budget committee would inevitably weaken the autonomy of all the other standing committees (Wildavsky 1974, p.152-153). Such fears, however, seemed disproportionately concentrated among appropriators, whose control of spending was most likely to be...
impinged upon by such a committee. Throughout 1973, senior appropriator Jamie Whitten (D-Miss) regularly declared that no-one would be setting up a “super-duper” committee that would take over everything (CQWR, July 21, 1973, p.1991). Fellow appropriator Tom Bevill (D-Ala.) also recalled being singularly unimpressed by the proposal of new committees “I felt like Appropriations was the most qualified to handle it [and that] we never accomplished anything by setting up a Budget Committee.”

Ways and Means Committee member James Corman (D-Ca.) recalled a similar lack of enthusiasm for the proposed changes based on his feeling that it “would hurt the system” and make decision-making harder by introducing a “whole new layer of jurisdiction” run by less experienced members.

The committee ‘barons’ at this time were still very powerful and none seemed ready to voluntarily weaken their own positions by ceding power or authority to some new, centralized “super-committee” with far-ranging responsibility for devising and implementing a congressional budget. Like Smith and Bevill, many of the chairmen and money committee members favored minor changes within the existing congressional framework and believed that an entirely new process and committee were neither warranted nor workable. Furthermore, their opposition should have presented a major obstacle as these members were key players in the House, controlling access and outcomes on taxing and spending issues, as well as--in the case of Democratic Ways and Means members--to committee assignments. Their combined influence had helped sink the previous attempt to establish a legislative budget under the 1946 Legislative Reorganization Act and had successfully kept similar proposals off the agenda as recently as 1970.
In sum, the three sets of factors described above—the constituency, and partisan and the internal—collectively suggested only stalemate on the issue of congressional budgetary reform in the early 1970s. The money committees and the committee chairmen carefully guarded their considerable institutional power, and none of the various factions that favored reform seemed large or stable enough to guide their proposal through the legislative process and into law. Yet some significant support for reform did emerge within the institution in the early 1970s, as the long-standing system under which Congress handled its budgetary responsibilities came under increasing levels of duress that facilitated the completion of the first stage of reform—recognition of the need for change—in spite of the deep divisions that remained over the exact form that the reforms should take.

Budgeting in the Prereform House

The HAC has long been considered the engine that drives congressional budgetary decision-making. Since its creation in 1865, virtually every member of the House has had a strong interest in its activities, most often in terms of making sure their districts received a steady and substantial share of federal largess (Fenno 1966). Many scholars have observed how the narrow geographic basis of representation in the House provides a steady upward pressure on spending with no obvious political or institutional incentives for constraint. Yet if restraint was not induced by electoral pressures, members had long supported efforts to encourage it from within the institution. For almost half a century prior to reform the HAC consistently scaled back spending requests or authorizations through what became known as their “guardianship of the Treasury” role.
In the decades preceding reform, the HAC had actively and consciously sought to absorb, aggregate, and constrain the claims of 435 members and their constituents on the resources of the federal government. The tendency of Appropriators to specialize in areas in which they had a strong personal or constituency interest inevitably exerted some upward pressure on spending, but in the prereform era the Committee leadership went to great lengths to minimize this effect, in part by sticking closely to the requests of the authorizing committees, in part by constantly and aggressively promoting a norm of constraint among its members, but also by appointing individuals to subcommittees who had no apparent interest in or connection to the jurisdiction in question (Fenno 1966). Discretionary spending still grew steadily during this era but probably not as fast as it would have done absent the ‘guardianship’ efforts of the HAC. As Fenno explained, the Committee performed an important function for the institution as a whole, through its guardianship role, which at the same time, allowed it to consolidate and entrench its own power and authority within the House.

This guardianship role had implications for the entire chamber; it set norms and parameters for other committees in terms of their behavior and responsibilities. For example, as appropriator Elford Cederberg (R-Mich.) explained, authorizing committees routinely scored political points with their various constituency and clientele groups by requesting overly generous levels of funding, secure in the knowledge that “the Appropriations Committee will take care of it anyway.” Appropriators, for their part, consistently approved funding at levels slightly below the amount requested by the authorizing committees, and the more they did so, the more routine it became for
authorizers to inflate their requests, and the more dependent they became on appropriators to scale these back.

In performing their guardianship role, the HAC subcommittees and the ‘cardinals’ who chaired them operated in ways that maximized and protected their power in the House. Realizing their extraordinary influence over spending decisions, the subcommittees tended to close ranks and report legislation unanimously in order to minimize opposition both in the full Committee and on the floor. In the House, all committees of jurisdiction are advantaged in taking their bills to the floor on account of their members’ access to meetings, information and expertise, but a unified Committee should be particularly difficult to defeat as it offers no grounds for opposition to committee outsiders. It also minimizes opposition by strengthening appeals to the principles of specialization, deference and reciprocity on which the entire committee system rests; if a committee of experts can reach unanimous agreement on action within their policy area then these principles should encourage non-Committee members defer to their judgment. In the prereform years, Appropriations subcommittees consistently reported bills with the unanimous support of their members and at the full committee level, members generally respected norms of deference and reciprocity and reported subcommittee bills to the floor unchanged.

At both the subcommittee and full committee stage of the process, panel unity was critical in protecting the Committee’s bills on the floor as well as its considerable power and prestige within the chamber. The Committee’s jurisdiction made its work extraordinarily important to most non-Committee members, and few were expected to risk support for future requests by organizing or supporting opposition to Committee
recommendations on the floor. This set of arrangements generally minimized political conflict on Appropriations and the high levels of consensus left the parties with little role or function in this critical area of congressional decision making.

Although Appropriations only controls the spending side of fiscal policy, it was this side that dominated congressional decision making throughout the prereform era. Then, as now, the House Ways and Means Committee (HWMC) handled the revenue side of congressional budgetary process, though its role was not as central as that of Appropriations. The HWMC has never been required to make decisions on the tax code every single year, and prior to reform it was often much more preoccupied with its power to make committee appointments and frequently reported no substantive tax legislation.14 Furthermore, the post-war economic boom of the decades prior to reform meant that the nation’s revenue base grew steadily with few major changes to the tax code. When it did act, the Committee was considerably less consensual in its operations than Appropriations, but a norm of “constrained partisanship” tended to dominate its proceedings (Manley 1970).

The restrained partisanship norm of the prereform Ways and Means Committee was based upon the same rationale that promoted consensus-building and unanimity on HAC; the panel’s broad jurisdiction gave it a tremendous amount of power within the chamber, but this power had to be guarded and exercised carefully. The far-reaching responsibilities that made both committees powerful also made them very wary of any behavior or actions on their part that might make them vulnerable as they take their bill to the floor. For as Fenno explained, “in the accumulation of House prestige and influence,
nothing succeeds like success and nothing is so damaging as egregious or repeated failure.” (1966, p.416)

Although the HAC achieved a much higher degree of unity in reporting its legislation to the floor, members of the HWMC also regularly worked together prior to final committee votes for many of the same reasons. Both committees benefited from the privacy of closed meetings that kept information from nonmembers and prevented them from exploiting committee points of contention on the floor. Most Ways and Means bills were further protected by closed rules on the floor but of course these rules required the approval of the House which could be withdrawn--as it subsequently was--if members became sufficiently unhappy with the legislation being reported by the committee.

With respect to both the HAC, the HWMC and the authorizing committees then, the norms, rules and procedures of the prereform budgetary system in the House effectively limited and restrained political conflict, both in committee and on the floor. For the money committees, the broad and central nature of their respective jurisdictions combined with norms of closed committee meetings, regular bipartisan cooperation between their members and chamber-wide acceptance of norms of specialization, reciprocity and deference helped minimize conflict on HAC and keep it low on HWMC. This was a system based on internal incentives related to the demand for district level benefits and the accumulation of personal power within the chamber, and sustained by the external conditions of strong economic growth and a broad (New Deal) political consensus. The pattern of behavior on these committees was broken periodically, most significantly during periods of recession or when Republicans controlled the House in the mid-late 1940s, but generally prevailed in the Congress in the years after 1945. By the
early 1970s, however, a series of critical internal and external developments had led
an increasing number of members to question the wisdom of continuing to deal with
budgetary issues in this manner.

**Stresses on the System, 1967-72**

By the beginning of the 1970s, the system described above had come under
growing pressure across all three dimensions, much of which was attributable to sharp
increases in federal spending after 1964 produced by the dual stresses of Johnson’s
ambitious Great Society domestic programs and escalating American involvement in
Vietnam. Politically, these two issues reinforced the ideological divisions within the
Democratic party that had been reopened over the civil rights movement, but their
budgetary implications also marked the emergence of another difficult and enduring
issue—that of annual budget deficits and what to do about them—and one that finally
destabilized the cooperative system of budgeting described above. Internally, the
increased use of “backdoor” spending channels by liberal Democrats to get around the
conservative Appropriations Committee was indicative of the mounting pressure on the
prereform system.

After posting annual increases in the 5 percent range through the early part of the
decade, total discretionary spending shot up by an average of 15 percent per year between
fiscal year (FY) 1966 and 1968, leaping from $77.8 to $117.9 billion by FY 1968. This
1968 total represented 13.6 percent of GDP, and a high that has never been exceeded.18
Much of this increase represented spending on Great Society programs, many of which
had been strongly opposed by conservatives of both parties. The large liberal class of
1964 had weakened the hold of the conservative coalition long enough for these
programs to pass, but after almost half of these freshmen were defeated in 1966, the Democratic majority in the House was reduced to its lowest level in a decade.\textsuperscript{19}

This more modest majority returned effective control to the conservatives who remained deeply opposed to much of the Great Society legislation and were committed to reversing or scaling back many of its provisions. John Anderson (R-Ill.) described a conservative backlash to the Great Society and its “Democratic emphasis on the redistribution of wealth” in terms of a renewal of conservative beliefs in “the idea that tax less and spend less and you will have a healthier economy and that one tide will lift all boats…”\textsuperscript{20} The fallout from the Great Society seemed only to unify the resolve of congressional Republicans at the same time as it added to tensions among Democrats.

The ‘guns and butter’ commitments of the Johnson administration made it progressively more difficult for the HAC to continue to internalize the conflicting spending and economy pressures that they had managed for so long. The steady growth of the liberal wing of the party—that tended to favor high levels of domestic spending—after 1959 had eroded rank-and-file support for the Committee’s essentially conservative guardianship role, and as Fenno (1966) had observed, that role could not long be sustained without it. The change of leadership from old-school conservative Clarence Cannon of Missouri, who had basically ignored the liberals and ruled his committee with an iron fist, to the more “cooperative” George Mahon of Texas in 1965 seemed to usher in a new, more liberal era on the Committee. In many ways, however, Mahon’s style represented more of an attempted—and overdue-correction than any major or radical innovation. By working more closely with party leaders, Mahon may have temporarily protected his committee by neutralizing the inclination of non-HAC members to support
wholesale reform, but there was only so much he could do to relieve the mounting pressures on the committee.

Figure 2-1: Median D-Nominate Scores for House Appropriations Committee members and non-members, by Party, 1961-73

Figure 1 uses median D-Nominate scores\textsuperscript{21} to compare the ideological center of Appropriations Democrats with that of the rest of the party, and includes the equivalent indicators for Committee Republicans and their Conference. The ideological distance between Democratic Appropriations members and nonmembers remained virtually unchanged narrowed between the 88\textsuperscript{th} and the 89\textsuperscript{th} Congresses, Cannon’s last and Mahon’s first as chair, respectively. But as the larger gaps for the 90\textsuperscript{th} and the 91\textsuperscript{st} Congresses suggests, Mahon’s leadership style could not change the fact that his Committee was much more conservative than non-Committee Democrats and this
distance peaked during the 90th Congress, the one after Mahon assumed the HAC chairmanship.

At the same time as the distance between the Democratic House Appropriations Committee contingent and their party peaked during the 90th and the 91st Congresses (1967-71), Committee Republicans began a path of near-perfect convergence with non-Committee members of their party. It is important to note that the biggest shift on the Democratic side seems to have had very little to do with membership turnover—the Committee was more conservative relative to other House Democrats in 1967 in spite of the fact that all but 3 of the 11 new members appointed in 1965 returned, and only 2 new appointments were made. Instead, this telling shift likely reflected the impact of the 1964 and 1966 elections on the party rank-and-file, a comparatively smaller and less ambitious legislative agenda in the years that followed the Great Society, as well as HAC efforts to maintain its guardianship role by constraining the continued increases in spending sought by its party’s more liberal mainstream.

The Committee membership was a relatively constant factor in this otherwise combustible mix. When Johnson’s Great Society programs sailed through the Congress in the wake of the 1964 elections, many conservative members of the HAC likely had strong reservations about pushing spending to such high levels but must have also realized that were clearly outnumbered. Faced with such conditions, it was not part of the Committee’s culture (as it had been on the Rules Committee under Colmer, for example) to blatantly obstruct the will of the House. They went along with the 1965-66, agenda but as the tide turned against Johnson and the Democrats in 1966, the Committee seemed
to simply revert to its traditionally more conservative guardianship role, in spite of its change in leadership.

In this manner, the deepening of the long-standing ideological divide among House Democrats had significant structural implications, primarily by weakening rank-and-file support for the guardianship role of the HAC without establishing any new institutional rules or mechanisms to take their place. The HAC’s struggle to constrain spending culminated in the late 1960s with a series of annual attempts to impose overall ceilings on spending that were enacted but not adhered to. These actions clearly reflected concern among some members about the widening gap between revenues and expenditures—which showed no signs of abating—but also a clear lack of political will or consensus regarding what should be done. The fact that members limited themselves to such short-term fixes reflected their deep-seated unwillingness to confront the longer-term implications of the fragmented and piecemeal fashion in which Congress considered the component parts of the federal budget.

As the Committee sought to return to its guardianship role after the heavy liberal losses of 1966, many of the more liberal authorizers that remained found and exploited ever more creative ways to bypass the appropriations process. Various forms of “backdoor spending” had been around for a long time, but the overall proportion of federal funds allocated through such channels had risen steadily through the late 1960s and into the early 1970s. Entitlements and other mandatory spending (i.e., that not subject to the annual appropriations process) totaled less than half of discretionary spending in FY 1962, but the two categories were fast approaching parity ten years later, and mandatory spending finally surpassed the discretionary total in FY 1975. This
dramatic increase in spending through channels other than the HAC created
tremendous internal pressures and tensions at precisely the time that the impact of
external electoral and economic changes were being brought to bear on the institution.
By 1970, spending decisions were clearly no longer the exclusive domain of the HAC but
were being made on an apparently ad hoc basis by almost every other House committee
(Schick 1990). Under such conditions it became difficult for members’ to dispute
Nixon’s definition of the problem as one of congressional structure rather than fiscal or
political priorities. The more Congress struggled with the Nixon administration for
control of the federal budget, the more it drew attention to its own “endemic”
organizational weaknesses in that area (Sundquist 1981, p. 158-60; also Schick 1981,
p.294).

Although several members were willing to acknowledge that existing
arrangements were weak or inadequate, the considerable electoral benefits that existing
arrangements made available to incumbent Representatives appeared to insulate the status
quo from major reform. Prior to 1972, however, these internal problems and pressures
failed to generate the momentum require to fuel a successful reform movement. The
benefits of majority status, combined with firm hold of southern conservatives on the
reins of institutional power, encouraged most Democrats to defend the internal status quo.
There was evidence of growing public concern with deficits and impressions of runaway
spending but these were scattered across various constituencies and difficult for any
single member of Congress to respond to, given the political context and institutional
arrangements of the time. Budget reform in the early 1970s, in other words, presented
Congress with a classic collective action problem that was compounded by the risk and
uncertainties associated with the introduction of new rules and procedures. Institutionalist perspectives predict that the momentum necessary to overwhelm the status quo rules and arrangements in any organization is always considerable (March and Olsen 1989), but with respect to congressional budget reform in the early 1970s, the bar seemed particularly high as prereform arrangements appeared to work to the electoral benefits of all incumbents, regardless of party.

Although the various stresses on the system had become clear by 1970, internal resistance to reform remained high and for most members, and the issue was of little interest to their constituents. Unlike issues of public policy, questions of internal rules and structure are not likely to be seized upon and championed by individual members. The strong stake that most members are expected to have in the maintenance of the status quo should have been sufficient to prevent such efforts from ever getting off the ground. The costs and benefits to individual members of internal reform are difficult to foresee, and the issue unlikely to be of much interest or relevance to voters. When it finally began to build, the strongest pressure for reform came from partisan forces outside the institution; namely from divided government and the steady pressure for reform applied by Richard M. Nixon from the bully pulpit of the presidency.

The Adversarial Executive and Budget Reform

The precipitating factor that finally pushed Congress and into the second stage of budgetary reform was President Richard Nixon and his relentless criticism of the ad hoc congressional budgetary process and the Democratic majority that ran it. The problems that had plagued congressional budgeting since the mid-1960s could conceivably have dragged on interminably without members ever feeling sufficiently pressured to make
substantial changes to internal rules and structure of their own volition. Indeed, the case of budgetary reform shows how members of Congress, particularly in the House, strongly resisted all pressures for change until Nixon’s actions and rhetoric--added to the combustible mix of the changing political and economic environment--forced them to respond and come up with some kind of reform proposal.

The enduring resistance of House Democrats to budget reform is difficult to overstate and raises some interesting questions about conventional assumptions regarding the origins and nature of internal reforms. It has been suggested--and indeed it often seems the case--that changes in the rules occur when they help an otherwise ‘frustrated’ majority to secure their preferred policy outcomes. For example, if a majority of members wanted to make it more difficult to raise taxes, they might alter the rules to require a two-thirds majority for the approval of tax increases. It is far less clear-cut, however, in the case of budgetary reform what the Democratic majority expected to gain from the changes that were ultimately made, other than to reassert their budget-making authority vis-à-vis the executive and to create a platform from which they could politically compete on the national stage. Nixon’s actions may have provided Democrats with the political motivation for reform but in 1973 they clearly did not possess the substantive consensus on agenda goals or priorities that the new process would demand of them.

Far from being the proactive, outcome-oriented decision of a frustrated majority, Democratic support for internal reform in this case, appears as a forced, defensive decision driven by short-term political considerations. Some individual members like David Obey (D-Wi.) understood the issue in terms of future outcomes and agendas, but
many more members seemed constrained by the historical path of institutional development on which centralized authority had been consistently eschewed in favor of a strongly decentralized system of specialized policy committees. The historical record attests that many more members of the Democratic majority saw budgetary reform as a risk rather than an opportunity, and one that they carefully avoided until the last possible moment. Existing arrangements certainly appear to have frustrated the goals of some of the more liberal members of the party from time to time, but these same liberals simply did not have the numbers to alter the rules to suit their purposes. Liberal Democrats had been much more inclined to pursue internal reform through other, less direct channels—such as backdoor spending and changes in Caucus rules—specifically because they knew they could not prevail on the floor of the House (Bolling 1966).

The passage of budgetary reform was anything but a purposive, deliberate attempt on the part of a frustrated majority to facilitate the achievement of shared agenda goals. Members resisted the pressure for change for as long as possible and when they finally did capitulate, they came up with a bill that gave no single faction what they wanted with an effect that few at the time would have predicted. The turning point on the congressional road to budgetary reform came in the struggle with the Nixon administration over spending decisions.

As many authors have pointed out, the turning point on the congressional road to reform was provided by Nixon’s efforts to wrest greater control of federal spending decisions from Congress. His unprecedented use of the impoundment power24 alienated many Democrats, increasing numbers of whom came to see his actions as not only a threat to their policy goals but also to their constitutional power of the purse. Presidents
had been impounding funds with no clear statutory or constitutional authority since the earliest days of the Republic and Congress had failed to challenge their actions, often because they seemed justified by events that occurred after Congress had acted. An oft-cited example of a justified impoundment was Jefferson’s 1803 decision to defer spending $50,000 that Congress had appropriated for gunboat construction some months before the Louisiana purchase had removed the immediate threat of war with France. The anti-Deficiency Act of 1905 (as subsequently amended in 1950) formally granted the executive to establish reserves to meet future contingencies or for savings if goals or programs can be achieved for less than the expected cost or if the appropriated expenditure later becomes unnecessary.

In the years following 1905, successive presidents began to more broadly interpret their authority under the anti-deficiency Act. Yet Democrats in the 1970s contended that none had used it to the extent or with the intent that Nixon did. They claimed that previous presidents had either restricted their actions to postponing spending or to adjusting defense policy, which had long been recognized as an area of executive responsibility. Congressional Democrats in the early 1970s based their opposition to the administration’s unilateral efforts to control spending on the argument that the impoundment power had never before been used to permanently overturn congressional decisions. Republicans countered that the only reason that actions of previous presidents had gone unchallenged was that Congress had generally been controlled by the same party. They further contended that Nixon was only acting in the national interest and had no choice but to impound due to the failure of the Democratic Congress to minimize
inflationary pressures on the economy and constrain spending during a period of economic crisis.

While the showdown over spending is often portrayed primarily as a clash of competing institutions, it was a strongly partisan or ideological struggle that would set the tone and parameters for the long era of divided control that lay ahead. It also marked the beginning of the end for the norm of “presidential followship” that had dominated congressional-presidential relations since 1921, and this decline inevitably required an adjustment in congressional process and organization.

Prior to the onset of divided government in 1969, members of Congress of both parties had typically seen it as their duty and responsibility to follow the lead of the executive branch, implicitly—if not explicitly—accepting the president as legislative leader (Ripley 1969; Sundquist 1981). Congressional consideration of the budget had clearly reflected this ethos; since 1921, presidents had prepared an annual budget, submitted it to Congress where, after some minor adjustments, most of it would be enacted. The president set the agenda as well as many of the political parameters and Congress had little choice but to go along with much of what he proposed as its options were limited to following or obstructing, and the latter could not be sustained for very long. 25

This followship norm was strained to breaking point by the substantial ideological distance between Nixon and the Democratic-controlled Congress. Congressionally approved bills and presidential proposals increasingly contained provisions that ran contrary to the preferences of the opposing branch. The differences were especially strong in the area of budget politics and economic policy. The norm of presidential
followship had also been complicit in the institutionalization of a decentralized system of specialized and largely autonomous policy committees and some degree of recentralization was clearly required for the Congress to formulate and pursue its own agenda and priorities in opposition to those of the president. Members of Congress continued to resist the centralization of power that a comprehensive budget process would inevitably require, but Nixon’s criticism of existing arrangements as inadequate continued unabated.

To paraphrase Samuel Kernell, Nixon ‘went public’ on the issue of congressional budget reform, making numerous and often detailed statements about the shortcomings of the existing system and the need for change. His arguments about budget reform and charges of congressional irresponsibility were given additional significance by the worsening economic conditions and the conservative protests that federal budget deficits were adding to inflationary pressures on the national economy. As early as January of 1971, he began pushing the need for budget reform in the general context of the “Federal” system, though he placed blame for current problems squarely on the Congress:

The system was a major step forward in 1921. Because of congressional inaction, it has become a travesty a half-century later…. Enactment of Appropriations 6 months or more after the start of the fiscal year they are supposed to cover is evidence of a major weakness… we must seek a more rational, orderly budget process. The people deserve one, and our government, the largest fiscal unit in the free world, requires it.  

In his Budget Message for 1972 he repeated much of the same criticism, charging that “the uncertainties and hesitation caused by these delays in congressional [Appropriations] action have hindered the orderly management of the Government.” He also condemned “individual irresponsible acts of spending”—presumably by members
of Congress--and pointedly added that “[a]ny procedural reform that encouraged
Congress to be aware of the overall effect of their individual actions would have
substantial benefits for all of us”. 28

While he strongly disagreed with many of the policy outcomes of congressional
budgetary decision making, in none of these messages did he single out the individuals
nor the political party responsible for them. Instead, he focused squarely on the process,
stressing the objective fact that Congress enacted the budget in a piecemeal and
haphazard fashion, while carefully avoiding any mention of the substantive policy
differences between his administration and congressional Democrats. His focus was
structural but his goals were strongly partisan; by altering the structure of the institution,
he sought to affect the outcomes produced by the Democratic majority.

In this respect, his approach to the issue provides a far better fit than Congress’s
with the rational choice expectation of changing the rules to secure preferred policy
outcomes. He did not, of course, possess any formal authority over congressional rules,
but he was clearly in a strong position from which to push for reform. Unlike members
of Congress, if Congress obstructs or opposes his agenda, the president has nothing to
lose by pushing for reform as he has no personal stake in the maintenance of status quo
arrangements. By speaking in a single voice, he can also make a strong and persuasive
case as to why proposed changes are necessary in a way that would be close to
impossible for members of Congress to do so.

Nor does the president need to directly educate the voters on the issue of reform
or convince them that proposed changes will provide a significant and tangible
improvement over current arrangements. His target audience is much smaller; a majority
of the 535 men and women, whom he must cajole into changing internal rules or arrangements. As in many issues of public policy, the president’s case will often be strongly affected by his popularity and visibility relative to that each individual incumbent, often over and above the merits of the particular proposal in question. Through his frequent and highly critical public statements regarding the need for budgetary reform, Nixon connected the issue of budgetary reform to the constituency level for sufficient members to thrust it onto the congressional agenda,

Nixon not only sought to place the blame for existing problems on Congress but also set members up to take the fall for forcing a tax increase in the future. The tendency of the electorate to vote ‘with their pocketbooks’ is a well-documented one, and rising inflation has the potential to significantly affect the pocketbooks of millions of constituents across the country. Inflation consistently topped lists of voter concerns in 1970-71, and Nixon argued that if Congress failed to rein in federal spending, a tax increase would become necessary to control the deficit. Congressional inaction would only strengthen Nixon’s claims (and those of congressional Republicans) that a spendthrift and irresponsible Congress was to blame for the worsening economy.

By publicly advocating congressional budget reform, Nixon claimed the issue as his own and linked it to economic conditions, setting up the possibility of double electoral jeopardy for those who opposed it, based on either opposition to a popular president and/or contributing to the economic downturn. His highly partisan criticism was effective in pushing reform, because it resonated in districts across the country, providing a strong and critical link to the constituency dimension, and triggering a congressional response that would culminate with the CBICA of 1974.
Congressional Acquiescence and the Debt Ceiling Increase Bill, October 1972

Persistent presidential criticism and a string of unilateral administration actions on budget issues may have helped carry Congress through the first stage on the road to reform, but congressional debate of the second stage was far less concerned with the president’s authority to take such action (most members agreed he had no such authority) and much more focused on how Congress could effectively reassert its own control over the nation’s purse strings. There was little disagreement about the fact that Nixon had gone too far in his efforts to unilaterally control spending, both in a political and a constitutional sense. Several prominent Democrats--including a group of Democratic Senators led by Sam Ervin (D-NC)--had filed lawsuits charging that the President had overstepped his constitutional authority. Many Republicans did not actively defend their President’s actions but rather agreed with his position that current congressional arrangements were inadequate and that changes would have to be made before Congress would be capable of responsibly exercising control over the nation’s fiscal policy.

Between April and September 1973, the courts ruled against the administration in all but five out of some thirty impoundment cases (1973 CQ Almanac, p.253), making it likely that Nixon’s impounding activities would have been curtailed even without congressional action.

Congress, however, was clearly not content to leave the issue to the courts. The political staying power of issues related to the appropriate division of budgetary power between the two branches, in spite of repeated court rulings in Congress’s favor, testified to the seriousness with which members had accepted the basic thrust of Nixon’s criticism and had become determined to enact some kind of budget reform. As the title of the final
statute attests, the issues of restraining the executive and congressional budget reform were inextricably linked from the very beginning because congressional action on the former seemed to require, for many members, congressional resolution of the latter.

Al Ullman (D-Ore.) spoke for many of his colleagues, Republican and Democrat alike, when he declared that:

The only way we can solve the problem of impoundment is for Congress to set its own priorities. The answer to impoundment can’t be merely political… It’s got to be structural in the Congress. If Congress can’t set its own House in order, it can’t be too upset about the executive moving in and setting priorities. 29

The implication was that as long as Congress declined to take any formal action to constrain the executive, budgetary reform could be postponed. Given the state of the economy in the early 1970s and divided partisan control, there were strong political incentives for Democrats to continue to abdicate authority in this area to the president, perhaps most of all, to be “absolutely clear that the Republican executive…was responsible for the state of the economy” (Sundquist 1981, 87). Budgetary authority continued to ebb away from the Congress and toward the president due to the various partisan, constituency and internal considerations discussed above. Members—and especially those in positions of power within the House—were simply unwilling to confront the difficult issues and tensions that would have been aroused by the issue of internal budgetary reform. This strategy of avoidance—and with it, internal resistance to reform—was pushed to breaking point in October 1972 when the HWMC included in a debt ceiling bill provisions to grant Nixon the authority to make cuts as he saw fit in order to keep total federal spending below $250 billion for FY1973.
The Debt Ceiling Increase Bill

On September 27, 1972, the HWMC reported a bill to provide for a temporary increase in the public debt ceiling (HR 16810; H. Rept. 92-1456). The legislation also set a $250 billion limit on spending through the remainder of fiscal 1973, and concluded that because the Congress had failed to come up with areas in which reductions could be made, “it would be better to ask the President to indicate the areas of expenditure which can appropriately be reserved for this one year rather than facing the additional problems of increased inflation or increased taxes.”

On each of the three dimensions of reform, there were many reasons to expect that the formal delegation of power contained in the 1972 debt ceiling bill should never have been approved. Many presidents had asserted an expansive impoundment power, but no such authority had ever been formally recognized or granted by Congress. On a partisan dimension, it seemed ridiculous that a sizable Democratic majority would willingly delegate such broad authority to a Republican president whose fiscal views and priorities were so strongly at odds with those of so many of its own members. Concern about high spending may have been substantial in many Democratic constituencies, but the party as a whole continued to place a high priority on providing federal assistance to alleviate the worst effects of the economic downturn. Left to his own devices, these were precisely the programs that Nixon was determined to cut back on as he saw them as wasteful, inefficient and an inflationary pressure on the economy. In order to better defend their priorities, constituents and clientele group interests, most congressional Democrats should not have supported this unprecedented delegation of authority to the president.
On an internal dimension, this proposal should have been rejected as a threat to the power and credibility of Congress as a whole, and hence something that incumbent members of the institution would not support. Their individual power has always depended on the institution collectively maintaining and protecting its influence and credibility relative to the other branches of government. The proposed delegation of power to the president might have been appealing on the grounds that could in the short-term prevent a major disruption to existing arrangements (and hence the internal distribution of power), but over the long-term it should have been opposed as a threat to the prestige and influence of the Congress as a whole.

At the constituency dimension, members in general seemed unlikely to support this delegation of power on the grounds that it would curtail their influence over issues of direct interest to their constituents and had the potential to disrupt the flow of district benefits that were assumed to be so central to most of their reelection campaigns. It also would have created the opportunity for the political blackmail of individual representatives by the president, to the extent that he could threaten or guarantee funding for projects of interest to such members in exchange for their support or opposition on votes that were important to him. By agreeing to delegate unlimited power to cut spending above a certain level, members risked having the president cut programs or projects affecting their district, a proposition that most members should have found unappealing at best.

Worsening economic conditions, however, combined with internal divisions among Democrats and Nixon’s strong approval ratings, resulted in the proposed delegation of power being approved by the House. The bill was reported unanimously by
the HWMC in a clear attempt at once blame and constrain the HAC. The rationale offered by Chairman Mills and the HWMC was that the delegation of budget-cutting authority to the president was required to hold spending down and hence avoid blame for “detrimental effects on the domestic economy” in the coming elections or, in particular for forced a tax increase upon the voters. In seeking to avoid such outcomes, the committee position resonated with many members anxious about electoral repercussions if their inaction was seen as adding to the economic hardships already being suffered by their constituents.

This anxiety appears to have been very much driven by members’ anticipation of potential or latent policy preferences among inattentive publics (Arnold 1990), as general concern over the economy was only beginning to mount and there was little evidence in public opinion polls or the press of any significant public debate or even awareness over the issue of congressional budgetary procedures. The fight over the debt ceiling/ spending ceiling bill (HR 16810) was a last-ditch attempt by the House to fend off difficult budgetary choices by temporarily giving the authority to make spending cuts to the president. By shifting the responsibility, they also hoped to avoid any electoral fallout that might result from unpopular spending cuts or the continued economic decline.

On the floor, a string of prominent members argued that Congress had “lost control” of fiscal policy and that significant authority to limit spending simply had to be delegated to the president; they argued that they had no choice, and that the politics seemed “with” the president on the issue. HWMC chairman Wilbur Mills--who had personally cut a deal with the president earlier in the year over the indexation of
entitlements--forecast dire electoral consequences for Democrats who refused to go along with his Committee’s proposal:

I believe the American people are aware of what is going on. I know the American people want something done about it. If they cannot get it out of this Congress, my guess is that they are going to elect a Congress on November 7 they think will work in the direction of containing inflation, containing federal spending. 34

Although the opposition of the Democratic leadership resulted in the bill being denied the closed rule under which HWMC legislation was generally considered, only one amendment came to a vote on the floor. The HAC chairman, George Mahon (D-Tx), offered an amendment in the nature of a substitute for the second title of the bill that granted broad cutting authority to the president. Mahon’s substitute proposed that the president submit his “suggestions” for cuts to the Congress for their consideration. The floor action either caught the leadership off guard, or they never seriously considered the possibility that the Ways and Means bill might pass.

Table 2-1: Party divisions on the Debt Ceiling Increase bill (HR 16810); The Mahon (D-Tx.) Amendment and Final Passage Votes, October 10, 1972.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FOR</th>
<th>AGAINST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Dem (ND,SD)(a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahon Amendment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>159 (121, 38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Passage</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>80 (35, 45)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\) (Northern Democrats, Southern Democrats).

The vote on both the Mahon substitute and passage of HR 16810 show the major congressional divisions on the question of congressional versus presidential control over the federal budget at this critical moment on the road to reform. Mahon’s amendment was easily rejected 167-216. The Democratic majority suffered some 60 defections, two-thirds of them from the South (see Table 2-1). Region, however, does not account for all
the non-party variation on the vote, as southern Democrats were themselves almost evenly split on the bill; 38 of them initially supported the Mahon substitute.

Table 2-1 also provides the divisions on the final passage of HR 16810, though the first vote on the Mahon amendment must have been the most difficult for defecting Democrats. Perhaps uncertain of the outcome, some members may have initially hedged their votes on the substitute. When it was defeated by such a wide margin, however, and it became obvious that the Committee bill was going to pass, some members seem to have reevaluated their positions, producing still greater cross-regional and cross-party divisions on the final passage vote.

While southern Democrats provided the bulk of the defections on the Mahon amendment, the 17 northern Democrats who had joined them in opposing the substitute more than doubled to 35 who supported the bill on final passage. Similarly, the 8 Republicans who had supported the Mahon amendment nearly tripled to 21 who voted against final passage of the Committee bill. The partisan and regional lines were distinct but not definitive, and on this vote, at least, the coalitional lines on the issue lacked clarity and consistency.

As a test of additional influences beyond regionalism and party on this critical vote, the following table (Table 2-2) presents the results for a logistic regression of support for the Mahon amendment using a set of independent variables to represent each of the three dimensions of reform—the partisan, the constituency and the internal. Although, as expected, party accounts for most of the variation, variables representing the other two dimensions of reform—the constituency and the internal—were also significant influences on this watershed vote. Perhaps most unexpected, however, was the
insignificance of members’ personal vote in the last election in predicting their votes on the Mahon amendment, a result that suggests that the influence of the forthcoming presidential elections on members decisions at this time was quite overwhelming.

Table 2-2: Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables Regressed on Support for the Mahon Amendment (Logistic Regression)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient (s.e)</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARTISAN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican (^a)</td>
<td>-4.44</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSTITUENCY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Vote (%), last election</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Vote (%) for Nixon, 1972</td>
<td>-.164</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority (^b)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.087*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of HAC (^c)</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.016**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of HWMC (^d)</td>
<td>-2.04</td>
<td>.010**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Coded 1 for Democrat, 2 for Republican  
\(^b\) Equals the number of years served by each member in office in January 1971  
\(^c\) Coded 1 for a member of the HAC, 0 otherwise.  
\(^d\) Coded 1 for a member of HWMC, 0 otherwise.  

* \(p \leq .05\); ** \(p \leq .01\); *** \(p \leq .001\); two tailed tests.

In spite of the fact that voting on HR 16810 took place several weeks prior to the 1972 presidential election, I use district vote for Nixon in 1972 as a measure of presidential popularity for two principle reasons. Firstly, the 1968 vote was of questionable relevance to the situation in October 1972, in part because of the amount of time that had elapsed and because of the considerable advantages that accrue an incumbent president during his first term. Furthermore, the 1968 results would also have been highly inaccurate as a proxy for Nixon’s popularity in 1972 because of George Wallace's third-party candidacy in 1968 and his particularly strong showing in the South. Finally, Nixon’s re-election was widely predicted by mid-October\(^{35}\), and so it seems
likely in most cases, that his district level popularity did not vary a great deal between October 10 and the election on November 7.

The results in Table 2-2 show that, based on Nixon’s district level share of the 1972 vote as a proxy for his popularity in the district prior to the election, his popularity swamped the member’s personal vote in 1970 as a predictor of their votes on the Mahon amendment. The greater Nixon’s personal popularity in a district, the more likely its Representative was to vote against the Mahon amendment, irrespective, it seems, of their personal electoral security.

Internal considerations such as seniority and membership of HAC or HWMC also had a significant influence on support for the Mahon amendment. The seniority and HAC variables performed as expected; both more senior members and members who served on the HAC were significantly more likely to support the Mahon amendment and oppose ceding further institutional authority to the executive branch. By ceding control over spending to Nixon, the institution as a whole stood to lose significant power and influence to the presidency and for these reasons, senior members—who disproportionately held positions of the greatest power within the institution—should have been among the measure’s strongest opponents. This should have been especially true of members of Appropriations as it was their jurisdiction that the proposed delegation of power infringed most directly upon. As Table 2-2 shows, even controlling for party, personal electoral security, presidential popularity, and seniority, members of HAC were still significantly more likely than other House members to support their chairman’s amendment.
Members of the HWMC on the other hand, had unanimously reported the bill out of their committee and were significantly less likely than other members to support the Mahon amendment. The support of HWMC members for this measure was highly ironic given that the Committee had actually remained consistently more liberal than the HAC and much closer to the Democratic ideological median after 1965. Yet they unanimously approved an increased delegation of power to a conservative president and sent it to the floor. It is likely that their position reflected the Committee’s strongly conservative orientation to issues that fall under their own jurisdiction, an attitude that would not necessarily have been reflected in broader ideological measures. Their conservatism also seemed to have escaped the widespread criticism and resentment attracted by the HAC and its annual proceedings, perhaps for no other reason than the Committee acted less frequently and dealt with issues of less direct import to as many members. Nixon’s threat that a tax increase would become necessary if Congress could not hold down spending may also have played a role in galvanizing support for the proposal among Committee members who were not already concerned by the president’s popularity in their districts.

It seemed that members of the HWMC essentially bought the president’s argument about congressional irresponsibility and acted on it, in part because it resonated with their ideological orientation toward fiscal policy but also because it allowed them to blame Appropriators while ducking their own responsibility for the current situation. Tensions between chairman Mahon of the HAC and chairman Mills of the HWMC clearly ran high during the floor debate on HR 16810. Mahon charged that while Mills “talks about economy and points the finger at the Appropriations Committee”, he had
personally “led the fight over the last 10 years that has reduced the revenues of this
government by over $50 billion for the forthcoming fiscal year.” Without those
reductions, Mahon concluded, “we would be in the black….” He also repeatedly
condemned Mills for his Committee’s proposal that Congress simply turn the country’s
fiscal policy over to the executive for resolution:

I just hope that never again will my friend from Arkansas bring in a bill in
which authorization is given to the executive branch to amend existing
law. Congress should not surrender the power to legislate or the power of
the purse. We should not abdicate the authority of the legislative branch,
our power of the purse. That is the way we find ourselves under the
gentleman’s bill.  

Mills did not respond directly to these charges except with general statements that if the
House did not approve of his committee’s actions, they would surely be voted down on
the floor.

This first formal battle for budgetary control had split the House roughly along
partisan lines, but ideological and internal divisions among Democrats, combined with
the impending presidential election and Nixon’s widespread popularity, gave the
president the victory in this instance. The House approved the bill and its unprecedented
transfer of authority on October 10, 1972, by a comfortable margin of 221-163. John
Anderson (R-Ill.) recalled its impact in the following terms:

I think it was just a case of the pot boiling over. a genuine milestone in
solidifying support for budget reform and crystallizing an issue in an way
that brought it front and center in people’s minds. Until then they had
lived in their own little worlds of the committee system where what
happened in their committee was really their business and nobody else’s
and they would take care of it as they saw fit.

Although a comfortable majority of House members supported the delegation of
power to Nixon, it also marked the peak of their acquiescence. The controversial Title II
was later dropped in conference, but the debt ceiling bill that was ultimately signed into law retained provisions for a Joint Study Committee on Budget Control to draw up proposals for budgetary reform and report back to the main chamber by February 15, 1973. Congress had come close to formally ceding broad discretionary control over spending decisions to the executive, but instead it finally set in motion the process to reform its own budget-related rules and procedures.

**Notes**

1 For example, in December 1972, Gallup reported that 54 percent of those surveyed supported Nixon’s proposals to hold down spending and taxes, while only 39 percent agreed with the congressional position of spending more on social programs (Gallup 1978, p.81).

2 John Anderson (R-Ill.), interview with author, May 25, 1999.


4 Democratic staff, interview with author, September 8, 1999.

5 Democratic staff, interview with author, June 1, 1999.

6 Interview with author, May 25, 1999.

7 Several interviewees referred this to as an argument often made by Bolling. Phil Burton (D-Ca.) and Henry Reuss (D-Wis.) had led DSG efforts to push the issue within the House prior to reform and it was often debated and considered by the House Budget Committee during the first few years of its existence.

8 Interview with author, June 10, 1999.

9 Interview with author, May 11, 1999.

10 Interview with author, April 21, 1999.

11 This “inefficiency” argument has its roots in rational choice assumptions of member behavior and priorities-Mayhew (1974) articulates the basic premises and Ferejohn (1974) provides an illustrative case study. For more formal discussions see (among others) Baron and Ferejohn 1989, Baron 1995.

12 This role was described in detail in Fenno, 1966, but was also a common observation across many empirical accounts of the HAC in the prereform era.


in 1977 as his main purpose previously had been “to project Mayor Daley’s power into the committee appointment process” (Barber Conable, interview with author, July 7, 1999).

15 The Committee position prevailed on all 72 of their bills considered under closed rules between 1947 and 1965. In the same period, it was defeated once under a modified closed rule and once out of the 16 occasions on which their bill was considered under open rules. See Manley, 1970, p. 221.

16 Scholars have also emphasized that the prolonged postwar period of economic growth was critical in its stability and entrenchment. See Ellwood 1985, Gilmour 1990, Mansfield 1973.

17 Events that Fenno (1966) describes as having triggered ‘economy moods’ in the House that caused the breakdown of regularly observed norms and a high level of conflict and disagreement on Appropriations legislation.

18 Figures are from historical data presented in the 1999 CBO Report “The Economic and Budget Outlook: Fiscal Years 2000-2009.”

19 The size of the Democratic majority jumped from 258 members in the 88th Congress (1961-63) to 295 after the 1964 elections, and fell back to 247 in the 90th – their smallest majority since the 85th (1957-59).


21 Poole and Rosenthal 1997. D-Nominate scores are calculated from all nonunanimous roll calls in a Congress and place a legislator on an ideological scale where 1 is the most conservative score, -1, the most liberal.

22 See Schick 1981 for a detailed description of these battles and their implications. The surtax of 1968, the increasing use of continuing resolutions provide further examples of the congressional preference for temporary fixes over longer term solutions to growing fiscal problems.

23 Backdoor spending refers to any allocations not subject to the annual appropriations process. Entitlement programs are one example; authorizers have been able to spend money using contractual authority. Once they have contracted for services or materials, they create a legal obligation that must be fulfilled. Backdoor spending has been around for a long time; Fenno reported that $81 billion in federal spending was allocated through such channels between 1947 and 1960 (1966, p.46).

24 Congressional Quarterly reported that Nixon had impounded some $40 billion in congressional appropriations during his first term (1973 CQ Almamac, p.245). He added substantially to this as Congress considered reform through 1973.

25 See James Sundquist 1981 for a more detailed discussion of the implications of the 1921 Act for Congress.


28 Ibid., p. 97-98.

Prior to the 1974 Act, the federal fiscal year began on July 1.


Ibid.

The Gallup poll reported that by the end of September 1972, concern about the economy had drawn even with that over the war in Vietnam, with 27 percent of respondents naming each as “the most important problem facing the country today” (Gallup 1978).

Congressional Record, Volume 118, October 10, 1972, p. 34596.

By October 1, 1972, Gallup estimated that Nixon had a 61-33 percent over the Democratic nominee, George McGovern (Gallup 1978).

As Barber Conable succinctly put it, “Ways and Means is bound to make people more conservative because you have to look at the price tag on everything and you have to raise the money. If you want to be popular you get on the Appropriations Committee and spend money.” Interview with author, July 7, 1999.

Congressional Record, October 10, 1972, p. 34599.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Interview with author, May 25, 1999.
CHAPTER 3
CONGRESS-responsiveS:
THE JOINT STUDY COMMITTEE AND ITS AFTERMATH

The establishment of the Joint Study Committee on Budget Reform (JSC) under the 1972 debt ceiling increase bill of October 1972 marked the completion of the first stage on the congressional road to reform. The release of its recommendations early in 1973, however, underscored the difficulties that still lay ahead in the second stage--that of coming up with a proposal that could prevail on the floor. The 1974 Act was the product of a series of major compromises that were made after the JSC had submitted its recommendations in April and as the Rules Committee marked up both impoundment control and budget reform legislation through the summer and fall of 1973. In this chapter, I summarize these compromises and argue that while politically essential, they guaranteed the structural problems that would plague the early years of the new process and a great deal of its unexpected political impact.

In the aftermath of the October 1972 debacle on the House debt/spending ceiling bill, and as Nixon stepped up his impounding activity in the months following his reelection, most members had come to accept the fact that budget reform simply had to
happen. Nixon’s single-most effective criticism of the process was simple and especially
telling given the economic slow-down that was continuing to plague the country:
Congress had no process by which it could decide between competing programs and even
attempt to bring spending more in line with revenues. Despite the heavily ideological
motivation behind Nixon’s attacks, he emphasized that Congress was irresponsible
because it did not have a system by which to construct, enact and enforce a budget.
While he strongly disagreed with congressional policy decisions, this obvious
organizational shortcoming helped take the ideological edge off his criticism by shifting
the focus away from politics or policy preferences and toward the more neutral territory
of process and organization.

The fact of this organizational shortcoming helped make the case for reform on
both sides of the aisle. Following Nixon’s lead, many conservatives understood
“irresponsibility” in terms of outcomes; Congress was behaving recklessly by spending
too much and a new process would constrain spending. Liberals, on the other hand,
could concur that the process was “irresponsible” to the extent that Congress lacked the
capacity to plan or coordinate fiscal policy decisions and priorities. Those who supported
reform did so largely on the grounds that congressional decisions to spend or tax more or
less had to be arrived at through a more rational, formal process. Even those who had
most stridently opposed the delegation of power contained in the spending ceiling bill--
Mahon foremost among them--had generally accepted this outcome-neutral argument for
reform.

While Nixon had succeeded in forcing a response from Congress, the majority
Democrats were still in no position to respond in anything resembling as coherent or
effective a fashion. A major part of the problem was the party’s southern conservatives who, once again, found that they had more in common with their Republican counterparts than their fellow Democrats. But there were also deep divisions between Democratic HAC and HWMC members that had boiled over on HR 16810 and that needed to be addressed before the chamber could proceed with budget reform.

It should also be recalled that by the time the JSC reported back to the House in April 1973, conditions had changed a great deal since the struggle over the spending ceiling bill and the presidential elections of the previous fall. In particular, conservative Democrats were under increasing pressure from reformers within their own party and their institutional authority was under attack from several different fronts, a couple of which seemed to present far greater threats than that of budget reform. In January 1973, the Democratic Caucus approved several major changes in its rules that directly threatened the power and positions of the southern conservatives. The first was to extend Caucus voting on committee chairmen at the beginning of each Congress from an on-request to an automatic basis. No incumbents were unseated under the new rule in 1973 but it sent a strong message to the southerners that their party’s patience with their obstructionist behavior was wearing thin.

A second development that curtailed the power of the chairman was the adoption of the “Subcommittee Bill of Rights” by the Caucus, also in January in 1973. This reform package specifically removed significant organizational powers from the chairman and distributed them more broadly among other panel members. Instead of allowing the chairmen to unilaterally appoint subcommittee chairmen, for example, a new procedure under which members would bid for subcommittee assignments and
chairmanships in order of seniority was established. Subcommittee chairs were also granted significant independence in the areas of staff, resources and specific policy jurisdictions (see Rohde 1991; Smith and Deering 1990).

At the same time, committee chairmen and their allies were also concerned by the formation of a bipartisan House Select Committee on Committees in January 1973, led by the consummate reformer, Richard Bolling of Missouri. This committee was set up to study the basic structure and jurisdictions of the committee system and report back to the full chamber with recommendations for reform. Although the proposals of the Committee were eventually (and narrowly) voted down by the Democratic Caucus in 1974, this panel met throughout the period during which budget reform was being considered and unquestionably diverted considerable attention from the issue of budget reform.

On top of all this internal upheaval, the Watergate scandal took several serious and disturbing turns in the course of 1973, at once diminishing Nixon’s popularity and hence leverage, and increasingly consuming the Congress. Several congressional staffers interviewed for this project strongly suggested that this chaotic context was at least partly responsible for the passage of budget reform as, under such conditions, the issue simply did not attract the scrutiny it would otherwise have received. This is not to suggest, however, that the JSC report to the House in April 1973 was received without controversy.

The Joint Study Committee Reports, April 1973

The Joint Study Committee on Budget Control was made up of thirty-two members, almost entirely drawn from the House and Senate Appropriations and revenue
Committees. Only six members, however, were responsible for drafting the preliminary report that was unanimously approved by the full committee a week before it was sent to the floor on April 18. Among these six members, the House was represented by Democrats Jamie Whitten (Miss.) of the HAC, Al Ullman (Ore.) of the HWMC along with Republican Herman Schneebeli (Pa.), also of the HWMC. Whitten likely exerted a strong influence over these proceedings as, at that point in time, he was a 31-year veteran with more seniority than Ullman and Schneebeli combined and a year ahead of the most senior Senator (McClellan, D-Ark) on the Committee.

The brief amount of time it took this panel to produce (and approve) both the preliminary and the final report suggested a high level of agreement about what needed to be done among members of this elite and powerful group and no real effort to produce a consensus bill that members of any other committees would have any reason to support. The Committee began their deliberations at the opening of the 93rd Congress in January 1973, their six senior members submitted their draft report on April 10, and the full Committee unanimously approved their recommendations and sent them to the floor in bill form (HR 7130) on April 18. While these members did not dispute the need for some kind of reform, their vision of the new process was more along the lines of a mechanism to bring their two committees together to discuss their plans and reach agreement on aggregate-level totals before returning to their separate committee to write up their bills as usual.

The JSC proposed new Budget Committees in both the House and Senate that would be charged with producing a budget resolution at the beginning and end of each session that would set overall limits on budget outlays and authority, determine the level
of revenues and arrive at an “appropriate level of deficit or surplus and debt” (HR 7130). It also provided for a highly centralized process that would be tightly controlled by these new committees. They even went so far as to require “consistency” with the totals of the first budget resolution throughout the process. This meant that if a member wanted to offer an amendment on the floor to introduce new spending, they also had to propose an offset elsewhere in the budget or include language to formally increase the budget resolution ceiling on spending (an early variation on the pay-as-you-go formula that would finally be approved under the Budget Enforcement Act (BEA) of 1990). Unlike most other members of the House, the JSC clearly had little problem with the idea of a powerful, centralized process--as long as it was almost entirely controlled by the HAC and HWMC.

The JSC proposal also contained specific rules related to the membership and leadership of the new budget committees, and which basically ignored all other members and committees except for the HAC, the HWMC and the Speaker. They proposed a House Budget Committee of twenty-one members, with seven being selected by HAC from its own membership, seven to be selected in the same way from the HWMC, and the final seven to be appointed by the Speaker. Only members of the HAC and the HWMC would be eligible for the chairmanship of the new Budget Committee, with an HAC member holding the position during even-numbered years an HWMC member during odd-numbered years (HR 7130, as introduced April 18, 1973).

Not surprisingly, their proposal received a less than enthusiastic reception when it was introduced in bill form on April 18. The most scathing criticism came from the liberal Democratic Study Group which quickly denounced it as a blatant power grab by
the money committees that would “lock the process into a conservative mold for
generations to come” (DSG Staff, 1973a). These charges were vehemently denied by
JSC leaders who argued that their proposal was an honest effort to make the existing
system work better. Of course, because the money committees felt that they were the
existing system, their members would naturally be central to any effort to improve it. As
far as the JSC was concerned, the new budget committees were intended to function as a
formal channel for communication, dialogue and cooperation between the taxing and
spending committees and the process, and would strengthen their ability to impose their
decisions on the rest of the chamber.

The (largely) more junior liberal Democrats naturally did not share this view.
Since the establishment of the Democratic Study Group (DSG) in 1959, these members
had been seeking to break the hold that the party’s senior and highly conservative
southern members had developed upon the institution and its clusters of committee
power. Yet the floor was a difficult venue for them because of the strength of the cross-
party conservative coalition. Writing on congressional reform in the 1960s, Rules
Committee member Richard Bolling recognized that party divisions worked against
Democratic efforts to pursue reform “in study commissions or on the floor of the House”
and argued that liberals should instead concentrate on the arena they did have the
numbers to control; namely the party caucus (Bolling 1966, p. 238)

Nixon had forced the Democratic majority into undertaking reform through
formal study commissions and floor action, yet these were venues in which liberals nor
conservatives could fully control either the process or the outcome. The conservatives
could have conceivably ignored the liberals and pushed reform through with Republican
support but such action would likely have irrevocably alienated the liberals, without whose support the process would have soon foundered. The liberals, on the other hand, lacked both the numbers and the institutional clout to secure their ideal outcome. Compromise was essential to getting some form of budget reform through the House. Yet the JSC proposal had something to alienate virtually everyone; the membership rules would have specifically excluded authorizers and most liberals, and the centralized, unforgiving process would have made it almost impossible for any non-budget committee member to have a substantive effect on taxing or spending decisions. There seemed to be very little common ground between the various factions as the House Rules Committee convened its hearings on the JSC proposal (HR 7130) on July 19.

The Evolution of the Reform Coalition in the House: July-December 1973

The three month delay between the introduction of the JSC proposal in April and the beginning of Rules Committee hearings in July suggested a prolonged behind-closed-doors campaign by the Democratic leadership to patch up internal divisions over the JSC report and negotiate an alternative that could unite the party and prevail on the floor. Rules Committee member Richard Bolling, who led the Democratic reform effort, had also been behind many of the recent efforts to strengthen the role and influence of the party Caucus, and Democratic debate on the issue of budget reform was likely confined to this venue during the extended period of Committee inaction. Still, the prospects for consensus among Democrats appeared low throughout most of the summer.

In a move that suggested the strength of the backlash in the House against the JSC recommendations, Bolling himself publicly backed away from the whole idea of new budget committees, presumably on the grounds that they would be too powerful and too
dominated by conservatives under the JSC proposal. During June hearings of the House Select Committee on Committees that he chaired, Bolling heard testimony from HAC chairman George Mahon, and surprisingly agreed with Mahon’s assessment that budget control could just as well be tightened by strengthening the HAC instead of weakening it by handing off some of its power to the new budget committees (CQWR, June 16, 1973, p.1530).

The Impoundment Control Bill, July 1973

Before the Rules Committee hearings on budget reform finally got underway, the same Committee reported an impoundment control bill to the floor in June 1973. Although impoundment control seemed as if it should have been an easier issue than budget reform for House Democrats to deal with, an early leadership version of the bill (HR 5193) that had been introduced in early March still languished in the Rules Committee in early June. While the issue was stalled in the House, however, the Senate had pushed ahead and passed the Ervin Impoundment Control bill (S 373) on May 10, increasing the pressure on the House to act. A new House bill (HR 8480) was subsequently introduced by Rules Committee chair Madden (D-Ind), and while it retained many of the same provisions as the earlier leadership bill, a second title was added that set a spending ceiling for the coming fiscal year and granted limited executive impoundment power to the executive through the same time period. These changes were clearly intended to address the continued--and apparently considerable--sensitivity among Democrats over the appearance of a pro-spending bias if they voted to limit presidential impoundments without providing for some check on congressional spending.
The decision of the Democratic leadership to bring this bill to the floor at this particular point in time is difficult to comprehend. Not only was it substantively inconsistent in that Title I sought to permanently limit the presidential impoundment of funds while Title II specifically granted him authority to make impoundments through new fiscal year, but it was also all but guaranteed a presidential veto in the unlikely event that it was approved by both chambers. The inconsistency of its provisions and the near-certain veto that awaited it, however, may have given the leadership confidence that they could force something through on the floor and that its passage might help renew the party’s flagging commitment to budget reform. The addition of Title II seemed specifically aimed at placating the party’s fiscal conservatives who should also have been particularly heartened by the prospect of the veto for anything that did pass.

In spite of its symbolic nature, floor voting and debate on the Impoundment Control Bill (HR 8480) in July offers further quantitative evidence of the evolving reform coalition in the House at this significant mid-point in its deliberations. The bill was reported by the Rules Committee on June 22 and revisited many of the same issues as the Debt Ceiling bill of the previous fall. Once again, the primary focus was to constrain the efforts of the executive to circumvent congressional spending decisions. The direction of the proposal was now reversed as, in spite of the second title, the thrust of the legislation was to establish a permanent procedure by which the Congress could make presidential impoundments conditional on its own independent judgment.

Title I of the House bill proposed that the president be required to formally notify Congress within 10 days of impounding funds and that a simple majority resolution of either chamber would be sufficient to overturn the impoundment. Title II of the Act
stipulated a spending ceiling for FY1974 and required the president to make an across-the-board reduction in all but a few exempted programs to hold spending to that level. As in October 1972, the delegation of power would expire at the end of the fiscal year as the new impoundment controls came into effect.

The focus of debate this time this around was less on the temporary delegation of authority to the president and more on the provisions for impoundment control and the wisdom setting up of such a system without a new congressional budget process in place. On the floor, Republicans made many of the same arguments against impoundment control that had been used to successfully defend the Ways and Means bill in October 1972; that it was irresponsible to constrain the executive without having created a congressional budget process in the House; that due to the failure of the Congress to act, the executive had no choice but to try and control spending, and that Congress, not the executive was the problem. The proposal might therefore have been expected to divide members along roughly the same lines as the Debt Ceiling bill of October 1972; those who felt that Congress was not capable of making such decisions and those who believed that the president had to be restrained, by statute from making further unilateral impoundments in order for congressional power to be successfully reclaimed.

There was considerable discontent among Republicans that the measure had not been combined with budget reform legislation. John Anderson had led efforts to join the two issues during Committee deliberations but his amendments failed and his proposed floor amendment to do so was not made in order. Republican pressure had been instrumental in getting the Impoundment Bill to the floor, as a way to both draw attention to Democratic inaction on budget reform and to increase pressure on the House
leadership to bring the JSC proposals to the floor. Their sense of urgency likely stemmed from two principal sources. The first was that they were fully aware of the in-fighting that had broken out among Democrats in the wake of the JSC report and that if it was left to the majority party to work out a compromise amongst themselves, they were likely to make dramatic changes to the JSC proposal and its tight controls on spending which most Republicans would have preferred to remain unchanged. The original JSC proposal was a good fit with the fiscal conservatism long espoused by congressional Republicans. The longer the delay in bringing a reform package to the floor, the more compromised that original proposal was likely to be.

House Republicans appeared well aware of this and almost every one of them who spoke during the floor debate on HR 8480 repeatedly emphasized their strong support for the JSC version of budget reform and their eagerness for an immediate vote on it. The ranking member of the Rules Committee, Dave Martin (R-Neb.), set the tone for the impoundment control debate by declaring that he and his four Republican colleagues on Rules were “most anxious to proceed expeditiously with reporting legislation to set up a legislative budget and a budget committee in the House.” With a 10-5 majority-minority ratio on Rules, the Republican minority had to win over only three committee Democrats in order to take the original JSC proposal to the floor where the conservative coalition could presumably have controlled the outcome.

While Republican after Republican rose on the floor to declare their support for budget reform and the irresponsibility of seeking to constrain the president before providing for a congressional budget process, the Democrats tried hard to refute the administration’s argument that a spendthrift Congress was to blame for the current crisis,
and to frame impoundment control as a nonpartisan constitutional issue. Above all else, the decision to take the bill to the floor appears to have been primarily seen as a test run for budget reform. Although the leadership still ran the risk of being outmaneuvered on the floor by the conservative coalition, the contradictory provisions of the bill and the certain veto that awaited it afforded them a valuable and relatively low-risk opportunity to probe the parameters of a possible floor coalition before moving the budget reform bill forward. Its consideration also prompted many members to go on the record in support of budget reform, pronouncements that could conceivably have provided the leadership with some additional leverage when it came time to push that bill through the House.

Table 3-1 shows the party divisions for the floor vote on passage of the Rules Committee Impoundment Control and Spending Bill. As discussed above, this bill basically asked the same question of members of Congress as the debt ceiling bill had in October 1972: should Congress reassert its control over federal spending or should it continue to allow the president to circumvent their decisions in this area? The November 1972 elections had not drastically altered the partisan division of the House, though the Democratic majority had been slightly strengthened by a net gain of eleven seats. As this table shows, members reversed their October 1972 position by voting 254-164 for the bill.

Table 3-1: Party divisions on the Impoundment Control and Spending Ceiling bill, HR 8480; Final Passage. July 25, 1973

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>FOR</th>
<th>AGAINST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Dem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Passage</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>218 (144, 74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Dem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>14 (10,4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Northern Democrats, Southern Democrats)
Voting on the Impoundment Control Bill was just as partisan as on the Mahon amendment, though the advantage was now in the opposite direction. Democrats presented a surprisingly united front as 94 percent of their members who voted supported the bill (compared to the 73 percent of those voting who had backed the Mahon amendment). Republican unity, on the other hand, dropped sharply from 95 percent against the Mahon amendment to 81 percent in opposition to the Impoundment Control bill.

Several key considerations likely made it easier for Democrats to rally around this bill than it had been for them to support the Mahon amendment. First among these was likely the distance from the election and Nixon’s lame-duck status, not to mention some damaging developments in the Watergate scandal. Second, were the leadership’s considerable efforts to appease the party’s conservatives, in particular through the inclusion of the second title as a stopgap measure. Finally, however, the leadership ultimately caved in completely on Title I when they went along with an amendment by Rep. Heinz (R-Pa.) that limited the anti-impoundment provisions to the same time span as the spending ceiling—until the end of fiscal 1974 on June 30, 1974. Although this amendment destroyed any pretense of substantive significance to the legislation, the response from Rules Committee Democrats was limited to an inquiry from Spark Matsunaga as to whether Mr. Heinz would support the bill if his amendment was adopted, followed by a brief statement by Bolling that he had “canvassed” a number of Rules Committee members and found “that the amendment is acceptable to them.” The amendment was then agreed to without dissent.
By considering impoundment control separately from budget reform, the Rules Committee managed to bring the various party factions together in this largely symbolic vote. As Republicans charged, the bill was going nowhere fast, but for the purposes of the Democrats who were struggling with deep internal divisions over budget reform, it may have served to reaffirm the party’s commitment to reining in the executive and to remind all its members why it was so imperative that they pass a budget reform bill. This reminder was helpfully underscored by Republicans who protested loudly throughout the floor debate that impoundment control was meaningless, if not dangerous, without budgetary reform.

As part of a consensus-building strategy, the impoundment control bill worked well for Democrats. Table 3-2 shows the results for the same logistic regression model used to analyze the Mahon amendment vote, applied to the Impoundment Control bill. These results show that while members of Ways and Means remained significantly more likely than other members to vote against restraining the president, support for impoundment control—albeit in principle—was no longer disproportionately concentrated among senior members and members of Appropriations, as it had been on the Mahon amendment. As noted in the discussion of the defeated Mahon amendment, this shift may have been at least partly attributable to the distance from the fall elections, though the district vote for Nixon in 1972 did remain a strongly significant predictor of members’ votes on this bill. What had most likely happened was that concerns had grown among Democrats about the Nixon administration, both in terms of its continued efforts to circumvent congressional control and the growing scandal surrounding the
Watergate burglary. Furthermore, these doubts seem to have spread to House Republicans who suffered a large number of defections on this largely symbolic bill.

Table 3-2: Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables Regressed on Support for Final Passage of the Impoundment Control Bill (Logistic Regression)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient (s.e)</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARTISAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican a²</td>
<td>-4.1 (.39)</td>
<td>.000 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONSTITUENCY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Vote (%) last election</td>
<td>.015 (.013)</td>
<td>.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Vote (%) for Nixon 1972</td>
<td>-.054 (.02)</td>
<td>.007 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERNAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority b</td>
<td>.0315 (.022)</td>
<td>.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of HAC c</td>
<td>-.599 (.48)</td>
<td>.217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of HWM d</td>
<td>-1.4 (.7)</td>
<td>.046 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² Coded 1 for Democrat, 2 for Republican
b Equals the number of years served by each member in office in January 1971
c Coded 1 for a member of the HAC, 0 otherwise.
d Coded 1 for a member of HWMC, 0 otherwise.
* p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001; two-tailed tests

Throughout the floor debate, Democratic leaders repeatedly emphasized their commitment to the reform package and made it clear that they accepted the linkage between the two issues and would do everything possible to bring that bill to the floor before the end of the session. This emphasis, combined with the fact that the Rules Committee hearings on reform had finally got underway the week before, must have helped reassure many members that reform would be forthcoming and that the necessity of such action was no longer in any doubt. While reform had been discussed in general terms during the debate over the establishment of the JSC as part of the debt ceiling bill the previous October, the level of commitment toward internal reform had remained an unknown quantity at that point in time.
The continued resistance of members of the HWMC--even to the symbolic Impoundment Control Bill--is difficult to explain, though several possible motivations related to preserving their power and autonomy may have been at work. First and foremost, HWMC members may have been suspicious of reform as a vehicle for liberals and their tax reform agenda, though as discussed in the previous chapter, there was no significant ideological distance between the median HWMC Democrat and the median House Democrat (Cox and McCubbins 1993). Existing arrangements had helped confine debate to the spending side of the budgetary equation, a focus that had recently helped shelter HWMC members from criticism over their decisions not to raise taxes and to approve the costly revenue-sharing program through backdoor spending channels.

Second, beginning with their proposal of the presidentially-enforced spending ceiling in October 1972, the HWMC had consistently shown that it had no qualms about ceding control over spending to the executive. In their view, the president’s efforts to control federal spending were a threat only to the HAC, and his opposition to tax increases was entirely consistent with the HWMC position. The fact that members of these two repositories of congressional power held completely opposing views on such a fundamental question showed how deeply entrenched the principles of committee ‘fiefdoms’ had become.

The Rules Committee Negotiations

The fact that there are no recorded votes on the resolution of differences among Democrats over the issue of budget reform only adds to the impression of strong leadership agenda control and extensive behind-the-scenes negotiations with the party rank and file. As the Rules Committee took control of the JSC bill in April 1973,
divisions among Democrats regarding the composition of these new committees and how much power should be bestowed upon them were considerable. The more senior and conservative members who had produced the JSC report wanted a tightly controlled process, and committees dominated by their members. The strong reaction against this proposal by the DSG suggested that many liberals, more junior members and authorizers were just as firmly committed to the opposite outcome; an open and permeable process that would be responsive and accountable to all members. As Congress began formal consideration of budget reform in the spring of 1973, these internal divisions soon all but overwhelmed the external partisan motivations that had led to the establishment of the JSC the previous fall. The balance of pressures for reform clearly shifted during this period and the final product would be dramatically different as a result.

The challenge for Democratic leadership was to somehow bridge these difficult divisions without emasculating the process and leaving the Congress open to the same kinds of executive pressure that Nixon had applied so successfully. There appears to have been very little awareness or discussion of any potential partisan effects of reform over the longer term, especially among Democrats. Any benefits that were anticipated were more along the lines of reinforcing the “democratization” movement that was then approaching its zenith in the Democratic Caucus, and politically, in establishing a platform from which the party as a whole could compete with the Nixon program on the national stage.

One of the co-chairs of the JSC, Al Ullman, opened the Rules Committee hearings with a conciliatory speech that emphasized the need for compromise and once more refuted the DSG accusations that the JSC plan was a simply a grab for power on the
part of the money committees (CQWR, July 21, 1973, p.1991) He also reported that the Committee had reconvened since the introduction of its proposal in bill form in April and had agreed on nine modifications to their earlier plan that they felt would respond to most of the objections that had been raised since. First and foremost among them was lowering the required representation of Ways and Means and Appropriations members from 66 percent of the new committee’s membership to less than 50. They also suggested that these members be selected and appointed by the relevant party caucus or conference instead of by the other members of the HAC and HWMC. The JSC also backed away from its controversial proposed consistency requirement for individual amendments. Ullman also proposed a greater majority-minority ratio, dropping the rotating money committee control of the chairmanship, and various other concessions including giving Congress more time to produce and consider the budget resolution as well as guarantees of universal access to budget office staff (CQWR, July 21, 1973, p. 1991)

All of these compromises were specific responses to liberal criticism of the original proposal. These were offered by Ullman but unlike the original recommendations, they had not been unanimously approved by the full Committee. Nor did they manage to mend the major divisions within the party. The Rules Committee took an additional four months to report a budget reform bill and one of its most critical provisions--the term limit for budget committee membership in the House--was not announced until shortly before the bill was reported in November 1973. Efforts (such as Ullman’s) to placate the liberals quickly alienated the more senior conservatives whose threats to withdraw their support most likely prompted the last-minute inclusion of the
highly significant and unprecedented limit on the term that members of the new HBC would be permitted to serve.

The Rules Committee Bill

After four months of hearings and a full seven months after the referral of the JSC proposal, the Rules Committee finally reported a budget reform bill on November 20, 1973 (H Rept 93-658). Except for the basic components of a comprehensive process and separate budget committees in each house, the Rules Committee bill had little in common with the original JSC proposal, which was reprinted at the beginning of the new bill with a line through it. Table 5 lists the major differences between the initial JSC proposal and reported Rules Committee bill in italics in the Rules Committee column. The most significant changes were clearly concentrated in the provisions for committee membership and in the details of the new process.

Just as with the impoundment control legislation of the summer, a sense of urgency and need for action dominated the Rules Committee report on HR 7130, its report on the rule for the bill, and the subsequent floor debate and voting. In none of these proceedings were serious challenges presented to any of the major provisions or assumptions behind the reported legislation. The leadership campaign to present the bill as nothing more than a workable and very necessary starting point was finally starting to pay off for reasons than had a lot more to do with the continued decline in economic conditions and the mounting legal and political problems of the Nixon administration than it did with any serious commitment to major institutional change among members of Congress.
The primary points of contention among Democrats had largely been dealt with before HR 7130 was finally sent to the House floor, either through compromise or simply by refusing to make destabilizing amendments in order. The Rules Committee had already demonstrated its commitment to a Democratic reform bill by turning back Republican efforts to secure the early release of the bill from the Committee and by defeating John Anderson’s efforts to win a floor vote on the JSC proposal as part of the Impoundment Control legislation in July.

The Rules Committee bill certainly seemed to have struck the right balance as member after member rose in its support when it went to the floor on December 4, 1973. There were a few notable exceptions, however, of members who continued to voice strong opposition, even at this late stage. Rep. Gonzalez (D-Tx.), for example, bluntly criticized the bill as the result of “congressional self-flagellation” and predicted that it was going “to further erode the prerogatives of Congress and vastly undercut the authority of many of our committees, and will contribute to the aggrandizement of power by the executive.” 4 Gonzalez was unusual in that he did not preface his remarks with a general statement of support. Among most members who did voice criticism, it tended to be along the same lines conceded by the leadership--that the bill was not perfect but that it represented a reasonable starting point.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>JOINT STUDY COMMITTEE BILL (APRIL 1973)</strong></th>
<th><strong>RULES COMMITTEE BILL (NOVEMBER 1973)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>House and Senate Budget Committees charged with producing two resolutions each year.</td>
<td>House and Senate Budget Committees charged with producing two resolutions each year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>To set limits on outlays and new budget authority (by Appropriations subcommittee jurisdictions), the level of national revenues and debt, and an appropriate level of surplus or deficit.</td>
<td>To set limits on outlays and new budget authority (by functional categories), the level of national revenues and debt, and an appropriate level of surplus or deficit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership</strong></td>
<td>House Budget Committee of 21 members; Senate, 15 members. One third of each committee appointed by HWMC/Finance from their respective memberships; one-third from the Appropriations Committees and one-third appointed by leadership.</td>
<td>House Budget Committee of 23 members, 5 from HAC, 5 from HWMC; 11 from “other” committees; 1 from the majority leadership, 1 from the minority leadership. No member to serve more than 2 out of any 5 successive Congresses. Appointments to be made “without regard for seniority.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chairmanship</strong></td>
<td>To be held by an Appropriations members during even-numbered years; a HWM/Finance member during odd-numbered years.</td>
<td>No provision made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>All amendments, changes to be “consistent” with the totals of the first resolution; offsets or totals adjustment required for amendments that would raise or reduce spending or revenues. A tax surcharge whenever the deficit is greater or the surplus smaller than that called for in the resolution. Neither chamber shall consider appropriations, debt limit legislation until a First Resolution is approved.</td>
<td>Revised resolution may also call for adjustments in appropriations or tax legislation and direct the relevant committees to report such legislation (reconciliation). Additional revised resolutions permitted at any time during the fiscal year. Neither chamber shall consider appropriations, debt limit legislation until a First Resolution is approved. Committee action on all Appropriations bills to be complete before the first one is considered on the floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deadlines</strong></td>
<td>Appropriations, HWM/Finance Committees and the JEC to submit views and recommendations by March 1. First Resolution due by May 1 for fiscal year beginning July 1. Revised resolution must be adopted before adjournment.</td>
<td>Appropriations, HWM/Finance Committees the JEC shall, and any other committees may submit views and recommendations by March 1. Authorizing legislation to be complete by April 1. First Resolution due by May 1 for fiscal year beginning Oct 1. Appropriations to be completed by August 1 and to be held pending conformance with revised resolution. Revised resolution due on or before September 15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Backdoor spending</strong></td>
<td>All new spending authority subject to approval by the Appropriations Committee.</td>
<td>All new spending authority subject to approval by the Appropriations Committee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The only serious challenge to the Committee bill on the floor came from the efforts of Spark Matsunaga to strike all provisions related to committee membership and composition from the bill. The DSG had continued to oppose any statutory provisions on budget committee composition or membership on the grounds that they would “intrude upon and override rules and prerogatives…of the respective party caucuses” (DSG Staff 1973b). Rep. Matsunaga attempted to press their case on the floor, supported by David Obey, among others, but these liberals were opposed by a string of congressional heavy-hitters, including Martha Griffiths (D-Mich) and Jamie Whitten (D-Miss.), along with the most ardent advocate of caucus renewal, Bolling himself. Bolling’s opposition to the Matsunaga amendment demonstrated the depth of his commitment to the committee bill as, in spite of his well-known dedication to the revitalization of the Democratic Caucus, he explained that he could not support the amendment because it threatened the key provisions “that made it possible to arrive at a compromise.”

Floor debate was permitted on Matsunaga’s amendment but his demand for a recorded vote was flatly refused. With such a strong level of leadership and Rules Committee commitment to the keeping the bill intact, the prospects for successful floor amendments were low.

In contrast to refusing a recorded vote on the Matsunaga amendment, the Rules Committee did permit a final effort, this time by the ranking Rules Republican, Dave Martin (Neb.) to strike the impoundment control provisions of Title II in their entirety. This vote represented the third major floor attempt over a period of thirteen months to defeat a proposed reassertions of the congressional power of the purse by restricting the President’s ability to impound appropriated funds. The first, the Mahon amendment to the debt ceiling bill of October 1972 had failed to do so, though the watered-down
Impoundment Control legislation of July 1973 had been approved by a comfortable margin.

Consistent with their July position that budget reform would make the impoundment control issue moot, the Republicans offered an amendment on the floor to strike those provisions from the bill. The vote on this amendment provides a final snapshot of the reform coalition as the House moved to create a new budgetary process and committees. Budget reform itself may have been a foregone conclusion, but Democrats clearly felt that some kind of statutory impoundment control was still required whereas Republicans did not. The Democratic position was that without statutory restrictions on the use of presidential impoundment power, Congress could conceivably again return to its previous preference of having the president make difficult spending cuts and reduce the new budget process to a rubber stamp for decisions made elsewhere.

The impoundment control provisions effectively closed off this option and gave unequivocal responsibility for budgetary outcomes to the Congress. If the deficit was high, it would be because Congress had budgeted for it and not because the president had failed to cut or impound. Conservatives opposed the impoundment control provisions, presumably because they felt that Congress would not--could not--budget responsibly and that it was important to maintain the presidential impoundment power as a safeguard. Liberals, on the other hand, simply felt that the impoundment provisions were essential as they guaranteed full congressional authority to budget as they saw fit—and without any further interference from the president.

The Martin amendment therefore provides a final snapshot of congressional divisions on the question of presidential versus congressional control of the federal
budget, even as congressional budget reform was about to be approved. As Table 3-4
shows, in contrast to the final vote on the budget reform bill (386-23), partisan divisions
on the issue of impoundment remained substantial. Once again, however, Republican
unity in supporting the amendment was significantly higher than that shown by the
Democrats in opposition. Among Republicans who voted, 96 percent supported the
amendment while 87 percent of Democrats who voted did so in opposition.

Table 3-4: Party divisions on HR 7130; The Martin (R-Neb.) Amendment to strike the
anti-impoundment provisions to the Budget Reform bill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>For</th>
<th>Against</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Dem. (ND, SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Amendment</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>30 (4, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep.</td>
<td>Dem. (ND, SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>199 (149, 50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (Northern Democrats, Southern Democrats)

While Democratic unity had slipped somewhat from the 94 percent that had
supported the largely symbolic Impoundment Control bill in July, it was also
significantly--and critically--greater than the 72 percent showing that had allowed the
defeat of the Mahon amendment back in October of 1972. Democratic unity on this
issue, however, belied the deep divisions the party had had to overcome in negotiating a
compromise over details of the new system. The 26 southern Democrats who supported
striking the impoundment control provisions likely did so out of misgivings that the new
system would either work or make any difference. Given how long and how difficult the
road to reform had been for the Democrats, it is surprising that such doubts were not
more widely voiced.

Table 3-5 shows the results for the partisan, constituency and internal variables
regressed on opposition to the Martin amendment. Opposition to this amendment
interpreted here as a proxy for member support for reasserting congressional control over
the budget--the same principle that had also been involved in the Mahon amendment and the Impoundment Control bill. The three level model correctly predicts 85 percent of the cases.

Table 3-5: Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables Regressed on Opposition to the Martin Amendment (Logistic Regression)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient (s.e)</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARTISAN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-4.1 (.52)</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONSTITUENCY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Vote (%) last election</td>
<td>.036 (.015)</td>
<td>.018*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Vote (%) for Nixon, 1972</td>
<td>-.1 (.024)</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority</td>
<td>.07 (.024)</td>
<td>.003***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of HAC</td>
<td>-.33 (.48)</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of HWMC</td>
<td>-1.21 (.78)</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[a\] Coded 1 for Democrat, 2 for Republican
\[b\] Equals the number of years served by each member in office in January 1971
\[c\] Coded 1 for a member of the HAC, 0 otherwise.
\[d\] Coded 1 for a member of HWMC, 0 otherwise.
p ≤ .05; ** p ≤ .01; *** p ≤ .001; two tailed tests.

Most of the coefficients in Table 3-5 are in the expected direction; Republicans and members from districts where Nixon had done well in 1972 were the strongest supporters of the Martin amendment against statutory limitations on presidential impoundments. On the electoral front, however, the Personal Vote variable finally shows a positive and significant effect on member votes--even though it had not done so on either of the two previous occasions. What this suggests is that even controlling for the district vote for Nixon in 1972, members who had themselves won by larger margins were more significantly more likely to vote for this effort to restrict the president’s
impoundment power. Again, this turnaround was most likely attributable the deepening Watergate scandal, though the loss of presidential leverage it implies may also be common to any lame-duck administration.

The most striking result among the internal variables is perhaps the insignificance of membership of the HAC and the HWMC. These two committees had taken opposing sides over the Mahon amendment, and members of the HWMC had remained strongly opposed even to the highly symbolic Impoundment Control bill of July. The insignificance of membership on either committee as a predictor of opposition to the Martin Amendment is difficult to interpret as it suggests several possibilities. The fact that there was no significant difference between the propensity of the Democratic rank-and-file and members of the two money committees to defend the impoundment control provisions of the Budget Act could equally have been the result of an increase in rank-and-file support or a decrease in opposition among Ways and Means members, though it seems likely that both these shifts occurred.

The near-simultaneous demise of HWMC chairman Wilbur Mills and his erstwhile alliance partner, Richard Nixon must have greatly diminished the inclination of Democratic Ways and Means members to oppose the leadership on the issue of impoundment control. As the crisis surrounding the administration deepened, it is also likely that the Democratic rank-and-file became generally more supportive of impoundment control. By the final vote on the reassertion of congressional power vis-à-vis the president, the votes of money committee members did not differ significantly from non-money committee members in spite of the fact that theirs were going to be the primary committees affected by the proposed changes.
It is also interesting to note that although it is not significant, the coefficient for HAC committee membership is now negative. During the early stages of the reform debate Mahon had succeeded in mobilizing his entire Committee behind the cause of budget reform on the grounds that the drastic action was required in response to the executive encroachment of their spending authority. During the course of the congressional debate, however, the threat posed to the power of the HAC by the executive had receded though, in the meantime, appropriators had also been defeated in their joint effort with the HWMC to dominate the new HBC. The relatively high levels of Committee unity that had been based on defending their power against executive encroachment soon dissolved leaving internal resistance to reform as the dominant influence on the proceedings.

Jamie Whitten (D-Miss) of the HAC had been one of the six members who had put together the stringent JSC proposal at the beginning of the year but by the fall, he was busy doing everything he could to weaken the new committees. He seems to have been the key figure behind the last-minute inclusion of the two-term limit for members of the House Committee—a provision that had made its congressional debut in his own budget reform bill (HR 10961) that he introduced that September. After the representation of the HAC on the new committee had been so dramatically scaled back, perceptions of the new committee as a threat had apparently become more widespread among appropriators, and they sought to weaken the new committee perhaps in part to safeguard their own personal power, but also to minimize the potential for paralyzing conflict between the two panels.

Reform-era appropriators as well as those involved in the process today seem to share a strong conviction that the one of the main reasons that the reform could not and
“has not worked” is because “you have non-Appropriators trying to decide what the appropriation will be…” The examples of Whitten and the above-quoted Neal Smith (D-Iowa) suggest that the old-school appropriators were clearly unhappy with the range of compromises that were initially made with the liberals, and their reservations, the likely explanation of the negative coefficient for the HAC variable in Table 3-5.

Table 3-6: Performance of Partisan, Constituency and Internal Variables as Predictors of Support for the Reassertion of Congressional Control over Federal Spending (Summary of Logistic Regressions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OCT. 1972</th>
<th>JULY 1973</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARTISAN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Party a</td>
<td>-SIG</td>
<td>-SIG</td>
<td>-SIG</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONSTITUENCY</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Vote (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>INSIG</td>
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<tr>
<td>last election</td>
<td>INSIG</td>
<td>INSIG</td>
<td>+SIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Vote (%)</td>
<td>-SIG</td>
<td>-SIG</td>
<td>-SIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Nixon, 1972</td>
<td>INSIG</td>
<td>INSIG</td>
<td>+SIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority b</td>
<td>+SIG</td>
<td>INSIG</td>
<td>+SIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of HAC</td>
<td>+SIG</td>
<td>INSIG</td>
<td>INSIG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c c                | +SIG      | INSIG     | INSIG     |
| Membership of HWMC d | -SIG      | -SIG      | INSIG     |

Note: Cell entries reflect if the variable was significant (SIG) or insignificant (INSIG) at the .05 level on each of these votes. Where the influence was significant, the direction of the effect is also indicated.

a Coded 1 for Democrat, 2 for Republican
b Equals the number of years served by each member in office in January 1971
c Coded 1 for a member of the HAC, 0 otherwise.
d Coded 1 for a member of HWMC, 0 otherwise.

Table 3-6 recaps the pattern of results for all three levels of variables across theMahon amendment, the Impoundment Control bill and the Martin amendment and shows the shifting basis of the reform coalition between October 1972 and December 1973. The significance of the seniority and the HWMC variables illustrate the influence of internal considerations on support for efforts to reassert congressional control of spending.
decisions. Support was initially concentrated among senior members and those of the HAC, but the compromises made on the road to reform in order to win the support of the party rank and file diminished the strength of HAC members support for reform. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this decrease was to have major and enduring implications for the new process from the very first year of its operation in the House.

There was unquestionably persistent and substantial internal resistance--albeit from different sources and on different grounds--both to the JSC proposal and the subsequent modifications that were made to it. It is very doubtful that budget reform would ever have come to pass had it not been for the strong partisan pressure for it first generated by Nixon and sustained by a unified Republican minority in the House. As is evident in Table 3-6, *Party* and *District Vote for Nixon*, were the only two variables that had a consistently significant effect across all three of these key votes in the buildup to reform.

The strong and consistent performance of the party and district vote for Nixon variables across all three vote suggests that a combination of partisan and constituency pressures both created and sustained the pressure for budget reform throughout this period. It is also significant that district vote for Nixon provided the sole constituency link in the case of budgetary reform but its effect was almost entirely indirect to the extent that very few voters seemed particularly supportive or even aware of the issue at the time. Concern over runaway spending, however, was strong in some southern districts. For example, Tom Bevill (D-Ala.) recalled that at town meetings in his district during this period, Nixon’s criticism of the free-spending, ‘credit-card’ Congress seemed to have struck a chord with his constituents as “people brought up the budget deficit to
me every time for a while there." Bevill’s district seemed typical of the times; though Nixon’s attacks may not have generated direct popular support for budget reform, the more general concerns over fiscal policy that they seem to have heightened likely helped convince enough members to support reform, either out of concern over the potential for negative electoral consequences from opposing a popular president, or alternatively from being complicit in governmental inaction in the face of a serious economic crisis.

Nixon’s popularity back home appears to have been a significant factor in convincing a sufficient proportion of members to support budget reform—in spite of the considerable constraints of existing arrangements and a deeply divided majority party. It was also important that the partisan pressure for reform had not come from within the institution—internal support for reform had been mobilized as a response to the presidential threat and was not associated with any particular agenda goals or priorities of a cohesive majority. As the new process began its so-called ‘dry run’ in 1975, it quickly became apparent that the disappearance or reversal of virtually all the pressures and influences that had led to the Act had left the Democratic majority with a complicated yet fragile process on its hands, one that most of its members neither wanted nor supported and that no-one could fully control.

**Implications**

As discussed above, the budget reform bill that was approved by the House on December 5, 1973—and ultimately signed into law by President Nixon on July 10, 1974—was the end result of a series of compromises that were necessary to get reform through the House but also to ensure that the new process would not simply be ignored by
members (as the previous experiment with a legislative budget had been in the 1940s). The big problem for the Democratic leadership was that objections to the new process were rooted in two very distinct camps; the conservative institutional ‘old guard’ of senior committee chairmen and the liberal reformist wing of the party. While most of the former sought to safeguard their own power and prestige within the House, the liberals sought to maximize the involvement and access of all members to the new process and committee.

The politics of the moment clearly favored the liberals as can be seen by the broader ‘democratization’ reform movement that was then transforming the Democratic Caucus. The speed with which the JSC backtracked on the issue of committee composition was a clear acknowledgment on their part that it would be futile to fight the reformers on this front. Accepting the liberals’ argument that the process should be as open and permeable as possible, however, should not necessarily have been a difficult pill for members of the money committees to swallow as, after having failed to dominate the new Committee they had done their best to ensure that it would simply be too weak to ever compete with them.

The compromise that was arrived at may hence have appeared close to ideal in some respects for both factions; liberals got their open and accessible process and conservatives secured a watered down process and a weak committee that seemed unlikely to pose a threat to their institutional power for the foreseeable future. Yet, as will be shown in Chapter 4, the constraints that the more senior conservatives placed upon the committee would backfire to a large extent precisely because they guaranteed that the House Budget Committee (HBC) would not--could not--function according to the
same principles and on the same basis as all the other standing committees of the House. This inevitable failure at the committee level would critically provide the rationale for a stronger party role in this key policy area.

Without a grant of institutional authority and rights comparable to that of the other standing committees, the HBC and its operations were highly dependent on the voluntary cooperation of those committees, none of whom could realistically have been expected to roll over and willingly cede power to the new panel. The term limit meant that there was no incentive for members to aggressively assert and expand the panel’s power or influence in the House as they personally would never benefit from such efforts, and the lack of direct control over policy outcomes made many members reluctant to serve in the first place. Over the long-term members who did serve on Budget and who tried to build it up might even suffer negative consequences if their major committee was subsequently constrained or targeted by a newly empowered Budget Committee.

The absence of any individual-level incentives under the 1974 Act to support or maintain the new committee and process in the House, however, meant that if it was going to survive at all, it would have to be as a tool for collective action, i.e., as an institutional counterpoint to the parochial focus and individualistic power structure traditionally associated with the committee system. In some respects, this conditionality seemed in line with the various party-based reforms of the times that created a framework for a more centralized process that could only be made to work if the political will was there to support and sustain it (Cooper and Brady 1981; Rohde 1991). A former Committee staff person interviewed for this project argued that it was precisely this
“flexibility” in the budget process that allowed it to survive its first few years of operation.

Yet there were two principal reasons why the conditional framework established under the 1974 Act could not work in the same way for the House that the expansion of the Speaker’s and party leaders’ authority did for the Democratic Caucus (Rohde 1991). First, the new process was not a tool or option that could be employed on a periodic or discretionary basis; the 1974 Act demanded that the House produce a budget resolution each and every year and linked it to the chamber’s defining responsibility of enacting annual appropriations bills. Second, the unified and comprehensive nature of the process itself—regardless of the effectiveness with which it was implemented or the seriousness with which it was taken—ran contrary to many of the existing rules and norms of the traditional committee system, and introduced an element of conflict and uncertainty to a system that had previously exhibited very little of either.

The requirement of a unified plan was bound to create more conflict, as it could not support the same outsize coalitions that had characterized spending decisions in the prereform Congress (Arnold 1990, p. 171-175; Gilmour 1990; Patashnik 1999). The emphasis on totals made it particularly difficult to accommodate extensive member demands for higher spending as they could quickly wreck both the coherence of the plan as well as the integrity of the process. The production of a comprehensive budget plan was simply impossible under the norms of deference, reciprocity and universalism that had dominated budget politics and decision making in the prereform House.

The previous system had served to minimize political conflict by breaking fiscal decisions down into a multitude of separate policy areas and allocating them among
specialized policy committees that were electorally predisposed to increase spending in these areas (Wildavsky 1964; Fenno 1966). While earlier arrangements had strongly encouraged members to avoid zero-sum decisions, the new process would force members to confront these pressures head on, and on an annual basis (Ellwood 1985; Gilmour 1990; Thurber 1995). In this manner, the debate over a budget resolution was also bound to become strongly ideological as the production of a unified plan would cause members to focus on overall goals, directions, and priorities, and encourage them to question the value or effectiveness of entire programs that were inconsistent with their broader belief system and/or whose elimination would help the committee to reconcile their totals and minimize any projected deficit (Schick 1990, 1995).

As the new budget committees struggled with a ‘dry run’ of the process in 1975, the destabilizing implications of the system established under the 1974 CBICA quickly became clear. It was evident from the outset that if the new process was to survive, it would do so at the expense of the other standing committees and many of the rules and norms that had dominated congressional budget politics and process prior to 1975.

Notes

1 Congressional Record, July 24, 1973, p. 25543.


3 Democratic staff interviewees from this era generally agreed that both Mahon and Bolling were personally committed to getting reform passed for two primary reasons; to control entitlements and to ensure that the Congress would never again have to go through what had happened with Nixon. Republicans tended emphasized the liberal cause of tax reform and their hatred of Nixon.

4 Congressional Record, December 4 1973, p. 39362.
Constitutionally, the numerous court rulings against administration impoundments meant that such actions would have to be dramatically scaled back in the future. Politically, the administration also lost considerable leverage in Congress as Nixon’s approval rating dropped like a stone from a 1973 high of 68 percent in February 1973 to 31 percent by the end of the year (Gallup 1978).

Rep. Neal Smith, interview with author, June 8, 1999. These sentiments were repeatedly echoed in interviews with contemporary participants in the appropriations process. They are also evident in the recent Nussle-Cardin Budget Committee bill to establish a permanent automatic continuing resolution which, if successful, would mean that Congress would never need to pass another appropriations bill.

Interviews with author, various sources.

Interview with author, May 11, 1999.

The new system did not fully take effect until 1976 due to problems stemming from switching to a fiscal year that began on October 1 instead of July 1, as well as the need to establish and staff the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).
CHAPTER 4
WAR ON TWO FRONTS: LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC IMPLEMENTATION (1975-78)

The provisions of 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (CBICA) did little to relieve any of the contradictory pressures or expectations that had been associated with the issue throughout the buildup to reform and the congressional debate and negotiations of 1973. The one point that most members could agree on—that some kind of comprehensive budgetary process was necessary—allowed the bill to pass, but with little consensus on details, the new system had to be left flexible and open-ended in order to win support from the various Democratic factions. No single party or faction got what they wanted, but nor did the provisions of the Act prevent them from doing so as the process was implemented. As a result, the Democratic majority that was charged with integrating the new process with existing arrangements faced a war on two fronts; an internal struggle against the senior conservatives who would have liked nothing better than to see the process fail, and an ideological battle between their factions over the content of the resolution.

By the time that the 94th Congress convened in January 1975 and prepared to make the transition to the new process and the new fiscal calendar, two out of the three key conditions that had produced the 1974 Act had already disappeared; Nixon had
resigned less than a month after the Act was signed into law, and the subsequent fall elections had produced the famous Watergate class--the largest freshman class since 1949. This influx of freshmen transformed the balance of power between liberals and conservatives in the Democratic party as the expanded majority dramatically reduced the leverage of the remaining southern conservatives. The arrival of the new class quickly destabilized the existing internal power structure, beginning with their successful removal of three of the most senior and conservative committee chairmen in January of 1975. The third condition that had not significantly changed, however, was that of economic crisis. Following some tepid signs of recovery in mid-1974, the economy once more took a nose-dive in the last quarter of 1974, implicitly keeping the pressure on members to follow through on their commitment to budgetary reform in 1975.1

The dramatic changes in the first two (political) conditions greatly increased the pressure on the fragile Democratic reform coalition that Bolling et al had coaxed and cajoled into approving reform in 1973. As discussed in the previous two chapters, Nixon’s politicization of OMB, his attacks on existing arrangements and congressional ‘irresponsibility’ had been the key partisan force in convincing the disparate elements of the Democratic party to unify behind the Rules Committee bill. The need to defend policy and political goals against the Nixonian threat had pushed the Democratic majority toward reform, and had encouraged many of them to set aside whatever reservations they continued to hold regarding its internal implications and viability. More senior conservatives such as Tom Bevill (D-Ala.), Neal Smith (D-Iowa) and Elford Cederberg (R-Mich) all recalled a fairly widespread recognition of the need for some kind of internal coordination of fiscal policy in the early 1970s but also stressed the role of
Nixon’s actions and the external political and economic context or “mood of the times” in giving the reform movement momentum, by making it “sound good” at that particular point in time.²

Democratic policy goals at this time, however, had been defined in opposition to Nixon and would not likely have emerged without the various pressures from his administration. Democrats had sought to constraint Nixon’s ability to unilaterally reverse or negate spending decisions made by the Congress, but to do so they also required an institutional platform from which they could challenge his dominance on the national political stage. As one Democratic staff person described it, reform was “an effort to change the terms of debate”, and was primarily supported as “a political adjunct to impoundment.” The Democrats “needed the process to counter the influence of the president…and change the way that the media portrayed the fragmentary process and outputs of the separate congressional committees.”³

As the Congress moved to implement the new process in 1975, however, Nixon had been replaced by a vulnerable, unelected president who was seen as far less of a threat by congressional Democrats and who, as a result, greatly weakened the sense of crisis that had critically helped hold their fragile coalition together through the enactment of reform. Most of significantly of all, Nixon’s resignation removed the potential constituency link or electoral consequences that certain members had associated with the issue and reduced it once more to the same impossible partisan-internal tensions that had kept it off the congressional agenda prior to October 1972 (see Chapter 2). Without such galvanizing pressure from the White House, the prospects for the successful
implementation of the new process--particularly in the House in 1975--appeared less than promising.

Compounding the political problems caused for House Democrats by Nixon’s departure, the election of the freshman class of 1974 had shattered the uneasy peace between liberal and conservative Democrats that had barely survived the prolonged budget reform negotiations of 1973. Prior to reform, the liberals had represented an important bloc within the majority, but they had not had the numbers to fully realize their preferred version of budget reform (which included such provisions as no statutory term limit for members of the House Committee and no guaranteed representation for the HWMC and the HAC). While more senior and conservative members may have felt compelled to accommodate liberal demands as they considered reform, they did not necessarily feel directly threatened by them.

The 1974 election changed all that by installing seventy-five new Democratic House members (as well as seventeen Republicans) all determined to shake things up and to dislodge the conservatives from their positions of institutional dominance once and for all (Loomis 1988). This large freshman class seemed to finally tip the balance of institutional power away from the senior conservatives, many of whom retired or were defeated. In the new House of the 94th Congress, more than one-third of its members had been elected in 1972 or later (1974 CQ Almanac, p. 852).

The new class made their intentions abundantly clear when they dispatched three incumbent committee chairs in January of 1975. They also voted to expand the Budget Committee from twenty-three to twenty-five members (hence increasing the proportion of non-money Committee members), and saw their preferred candidate for Budget
chairman, Brock Adams of Washington, secure the position after Al Ullman resigned in order to assume chairmanship of Ways and Means after the Mills scandal. Regardless of the compromises made on the road to reform, this freshman class threw their collective weight behind the new process and many of its members soon sought--and received--assignment to the new committee. Many of them were drawn to the new process, partly because they had run on reform platforms themselves, but also because the economy and the deficit had been big issues in their campaigns. While its more liberal members such as Tom Downey (D-NY) and Stephen Solarz (D-NY) continued to be advocates for high levels of countercyclical aid, the class also included more centrist Democrats such Butler Derrick (D-SC), Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.) and William Brodhead (D-Mich.) who had sensed an interest “even among Democratic voters…in a balanced budget.” The more centrist freshmen generally joined with the 1973 class in supporting the process as providing a more efficient and intelligent allocation of resources than had occurred under the previous system.

The numbers and activism of the Watergate class, however, not only threw many of their party’s remaining conservatives on the defensive, but they also helped solidify the opposition of House Republicans, particularly with respect to the budget process. As one Democratic staff member described it, many of the new Democrats “were so ideological all they wanted to do was stomp on Republicans…the moderate Republicans became alienated, and the people that they would not normally have been willing to go along with--guys like Latta [ranking on HBC]--they were in charge.”

As had occurred in the early years of the decade, these ideological pressures were again reinforced by broader economic concerns that pushed members to choose between
conservative policies of greater fiscal constraint and the high levels of countercyclical aid favored by many of the party’s liberals. The process itself may have been outcome-neutral (Penner and Abramson 1988; Schick 1980a, 1986, 1990), but the battle over outcomes that its comprehensive structure ensured was greatly intensified by this dramatic shift in the distribution of internal and partisan power and economic conditions that had occurred by the time that congressional Democrats unveiled their implementation plan for the new process on March 3, 1975.

The plan called for a ‘dry run’ of the process through FY1976, with it to be fully implemented for the first time in 1976 for the FY 1977 budget. The dry run would allow for the shift in the beginning of the fiscal year from July 1 to October 1, for the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to be fully set up and staffed, and would waive some of the process’s most demanding deadlines in order to alleviate some of the tension and uncertainty that was expected to accompany its introduction. Some members felt that the immediate introduction of the process—even in this limited version—was too risky, based on its inherent fragility and the possibility that the sum of budgetary actions might end up so far removed from the resolution totals as to discredit the process before it could get off the ground. Elford Cederberg voiced precisely such concerns when he commented that congressional action might only highlight the fact that the CBICA “doesn’t mandate that we stick to the total.” (CQWR, Sept. 7 1974, p.2418)

Former OMB assistant director Sam Cohn took the argument one step further when he predicted that if the gap between the resolution totals and those produced by congressional action was seen as excessive, the process would quickly “be forgotten.” (CQWR, Sept. 7, 1974, p. 2418). The possibility that the new process could be ignored or
repealed if sufficient numbers of members felt that it was not in their interests to support it weighed heavily on the minds of many staff and members in 1975 and continued to be a concern for some through the entire transition period.

The dry run went ahead, however, primarily driven by concerns over a presidential power vacuum after Watergate and Nixon’s departure, as well as in response to the sudden deterioration in economic conditions in the last quarter of 1974. It offered the Congress the chance to test the new process and presumably, to make any additional changes or adjustments deemed necessary before fully implementing it for the first time for the FY 1977 budget. Yet the fact it was a dry run appeared to make little difference as Congress struggled to produce its first budget resolution in the spring of 1975. Even though it was a very difficult and controversial process, no significant procedural changes were made in its wake. What it did do, however, was establish a pattern of behavior and outcomes that would plague the new process throughout the early years of its operation in the House and in some cases, for decades to come.

**The Dry Run of 1975**

From the very beginning of the dry run, most members of Congress were under few illusions about its prospects. As the Budget Act’s key House author and proponent Richard Bolling (D-Mo.) was quick to observe, “To make this design work is going to be just as onerous, perhaps more onerous and more difficult than coming up with the design” (quoted in *CQWR*, Sept. 7, 1975, p. 2415). It was immediately obvious that the process was going to be difficult for a number of very different reasons including; the organizational adjustments required to implement and adapt to an entirely new process, its demanding deadlines, the division of responsibilities between the HAC and the new
HBC, and the political difficulties inherent in coming up with a single comprehensive plan.

While these problems all had some connection to each of the three dimensions of reform--the constituency, the partisan and the internal--they were disproportionately related to internal pressures and problems. The constituency connection presented by Nixon’s popularity and his advocacy of budget reform may have seemed real enough to members in late 1972-1973, but it had never really touched down to produce strong individual-level commitments to the new process and its long-term future in the House especially among many of the more senior members. Similarly, the partisan pressures that had motivated reform had all but vanished with the succession of the unelected Ford and the decimation of Republican and conservative Democrat ranks in the 1974 elections. Without Nixon’s strong opposition pushing Democrats to define and defend their common priorities and interests, the most salient partisan pressure for House Democrats soon became the pervasive divisions and tensions within their own ranks.

Even if members had been strongly unified in support of the new process, it would still have required a significant period of individual and organizational adjustment; the internal resistance to reform anticipated by institutionalist perspectives is not necessarily caused by political opposition alone. Under the reforms, Congress had added central permanent committees to existing arrangements for the first time since the establishment of the Appropriations Committees over a century beforehand. Senate Budget Committee (SBC) chairman Edmund Muskie of Maine summed up the problems anticipated by institutionalist approaches when he remarked that, “What we’ve got here is a kind of timetable that nobody’s ever lived by before, the kind of process that was never
created before, and an attempt to impose this on an institution that’s generated
considerable momentum and habits over those years.” (quoted in CQWR, March 22,
1975, p. 594).

The production of a comprehensive budget plan clearly had the potential to affect
virtually every committee and to disrupt a wide array of existing habits and expectations
(Copeland 1984; Gilmour 1990). As Jim Mattox (D-Tx.) noted, one of the biggest
concerns in the early years was that the HBC not take “too draconian a position relative
to the other major legislative committees,” as it was clear that would provoke a “lack of
cooperation” among those committees. Mattox was one of several members interviewed
for this project who felt that it could very easily have been disregarded--primarily for
organizational reasons--during these first few years. Even without the partisan and the
internal struggles that its implementation provoked, it still would have been a formidable
task to smoothly integrate the new process with existing rules and arrangements.

The most obvious problems were clearly going to come from the tight deadlines
of the new process, particularly those set for the authorizing committees. The
requirement of a first, comprehensive resolution so early in the calendar year put
tremendous pressure on the authorizing committees who were given a deadline of April 1
under the Rules Committee bill (HR 7130) to complete all action that authorized new
appropriations. Several complaints regarding this early deadline were heard during the
general floor debate on December 4. Rep. Gonzalez (D-Tx.), for example, argued that it
would “simply emasculate and make meaningless the entire authorizing process. It might
as well just throw the whole process out and leave the whole legislative burden of
Rep. F. Edward Hebert (D-La.), the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee brought an amendment to the floor to push the deadline back to July 1, but was convincingly beaten back on a 106-300 recorded vote (1973 CQ Almanac, p.144-H). Though the amendment was defeated, the divisions on the vote were telling; support for the Hebert amendment came in almost equal parts from Republicans, Northern Democrats and Southern Democrats, suggesting that it split the chamber along internal rather than partisan lines. The authorizing committees had been an important particularistic lynchpin in the constituency service culture of the prereform years and many of their members were clearly concerned that their influence would be diminished under the new system.

In the final compromise version of the CBICA, the authorization reporting deadline was pushed back slightly (to May 15), and the Rules Committee was given the authority to grant waivers to any legislation brought to the floor after that date. Yet enforcement of this deadline was considered critical if the Appropriations Committees were to make their own deadline of mid-September, which was also considered tight. Prior to reform, even when the HAC had operated without the constraints of any kind of budget process or structured timetable, Appropriations bills had become increasingly late, if they had been enacted at all. Foreign Aid, for example, had been maintained for many years as a continuing appropriation, and in the early 1970s, another four or so bills were regularly not in place by the beginning of the fiscal year, a figure that climbed to ten in 1973 (Ornstein et al. 2000, p.183)

Another area that many members considered highly problematic was the division of responsibilities between the HAC and the HBC. The expectation of the ‘good-
government’ types who had spearheaded the reform effort seems to have been that Budget would provide a strictly macro overview, leaving appropriators to continue putting together the micro-level component parts as they had always done. As the dry run approached in 1975, however, the worsening state of the economy and the prospect of more and bigger deficits seemed to set the two on a collision course. With their concentration on the totals, it seemed inevitable that Budget Committee members would be pressured to try and constrain spending in order to arrive at a smaller deficit. As one staff person explained, the problem for members of the HBC was that inevitably, “you have to have some basis for making your macro projections--you don’t get there out of thin air. You’ve got to look at the programs…” 9 As soon as it began to do this, however, it seemed unavoidable that the new committee would be drawn into conflict with the still-powerful HAC and trigger an internal struggle that it appeared ill-equipped to survive.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the survival of the process came from the kinds of decisions it required of members, difficult decisions that had long been avoided under the specialized and particularistic basis of the traditional committee system. Problems were bound to follow from the fact that, “five hundred and thirty-five legislators will have to make the same kind of politically sensitive judgments on which parts of the budget to cut and which to increase that one highly centralized agency [OMB] makes in December as it prepares the administration’s budget.” (CQWR, March 22, 1975, p.594)

The future of the new House Committee, however, did appear somewhat rosier if its membership was taken into consideration. In spite of the resignation of Al Ullman to assume the chairmanship of HWMC in the wake of the Mills incident, both parties
selected a range of experienced and respected members to serve on the new committee. The Republicans appointed their ranking members from both Appropriations and Ways and Means, and while the relatively junior appropriator Louis Stokes (Ohio) was appointed by Democrats, the other two Democrats from Appropriations--Giaimo and Smith--were both sixteen-year veterans. The three Ways and Means Democrats were equally experienced; Gibbons (Fl.), Landrum (Ga.) and Burleson (Tx.) had a total of 62 years service between them. There was only one freshman on the entire Committee as the dry run got underway--Butler Derrick of South Carolina.

In 1975, the twenty-five members (17 Democrats and 8 Republicans) had an impressive 325 years of previous experience between them, a figure that suggested a strong level of commitment to the new process by both parties, and one that should have greatly increased its chances for successful integration with existing arrangements, in spite of the long list of problems and difficulties described above. In addition, the membership of HBC was not exactly “stacked” with unusually partisan supporters. Of those appointed to the Committee at the opening of the 94th Congress in January 1975, Democratic members had posted a average party unity score only 5 points above the House party average of 62 percent for 1974. Committee Republicans, on average, had posted Party Unity Scores 6 points above their 1974 House party mean of 63 percent.  

House Budget Committee Consideration of the First Resolution

House Democrats had managed to bridge their considerable differences long enough to push budget reform through in 1975, but the widespread uncertainty over its impact and implications had greatly helped rather than hindered its passage. The vagueness of the electoral implications threatened by Nixon had encouraged many
members to support reform for reasons that were more symbolic than substantive. The leadership had sold reform as a way to make Congress look more responsible and many members had embraced it on precisely that basis. Barber Conable suggested that it had been “an easy out” for many members who could point to their vote for the 1974 Act as evidence that “they were really trying. It didn’t prove that they were really committed to it though.” Or as a staff person put it in late 1974, “there are a lot of guys who voted for this thing (budget reform) who don’t really believe in it.”

The emphasis on symbolism, combined with the endogeneity of House rules (i.e., the principle that the process could always be revised or removed at a later date), had naturally helped minimize the intensity of the struggle over details while reform was being considered. When it came to the content of the first resolution, however, the intense interest of virtually all members in its details made compromise among the Democratic factions impossible. The process that had been created primarily in response to broad political (i.e., partisan, constituency) pressures was quickly overwhelmed by policy-specific conflict and internal power struggles.

The HBC’s response to President Ford’s FY 1976 budget showed at once the disarray of the Democrats and the broader ideological debate and divisions that would become the norm on the Committee. Reflecting its inability to force the House into reducing spending and the influence of the newly-installed large and predominantly liberal freshman class, the HBC reported a resolution on April 14, 1975 (H Con Res 218-H Rept 94-145) that called for a $12.6 billion increase in budget outlays, a $9.1 billion increase in budget authority, and $2.5 billion less in revenues than the totals most recently proposed by President Gerald Ford (CQWR, April 19, 1975, p. 781).
Although most Democrats supported the additional spending as necessary to promote economic recovery, many on the committee clearly had problems with condoning such a large ($73.2 billion) deficit. Among those who supported the resolution, Majority Leader Wright (Tx.), Ashley (Ohio), Giaimo (Conn.), and Leggett (Ca.) all filed Supplemental Views registering their “serious” and even “profound” concern with the size of the projected deficit. The more liberal Mitchell (Md.) and Stokes (Ohio) also reluctantly supported the resolution, but their reservations were in the opposite direction; they argued that given the depth of the economic crisis, the proposed stimulus was insufficient and the defense budget excessive.

While eleven Democrats supported the first resolution in Committee, albeit with strong reservations, five voted against it, ironically motivated by many of the same concerns as those who had supported it. The conservative trio of Landrum (Ga.), Runnels (NM), and Burleson (Tx.) were opposed on the grounds that the deficit was too high and suggested that, by projecting it at this level, the Committee was providing “encouragement for the Congress to go far beyond this figure.” The freshman Butler Derrick of South Carolina concurred and added that the stimulus, if approved, would not arrive in time to provide the intended relief and that the resulting deficit would put further pressure on the nation’s already tight credit markets. From the liberal side, Elizabeth Holtzman (NY) opposed it on the grounds that tax loopholes and the defense budget had not been subjected to sufficient scrutiny as did James G. O’Hara (Mich), who also cited its limits on cost-of-living increases (COLAs) for various federal benefit recipients.

The same liberal-conservative divisions that had made it so difficult for the leadership to unite the party behind a single reform proposal remained strong on this first
attempt to produce a resolution. As noted above, the uncertainty and symbolism that had helped keep the reform coalition together were no longer present. While members’ awareness of some level of constituents’ concern with general issues of spending and deficits had previously encouraged members to support reform, many soon withdrew their support as it threatened a very different—and negative—set of constituency implications if it was allowed to disrupt the flow of federal benefits and services to their districts.

The Democratic majority had established a institutional process and forum in which overall fiscal policy could be considered, but as this dry run made quite clear, they were entirely unable to agree on what that policy should be, in part because they had never had to consider such broad goals before, but also because of significant differences in policy goals and political priorities within the party. Thomas Ashley wryly summed up the dilemma that would plague both parties for years to come, when he observed in his Supplemental Views to the Committee Report (H Rept 94-145) that:

Support for a reduction in the size of the projected FY1976 deficit is easy to agree on in principle but difficult to achieve in the legislative arena. The re-ordering of national priorities is a laudable pursuit until it’s my priority that’s being re-ordered. Yet if none of us is willing to yield on our priorities then the flow of our dollars continues undiminished, at the price of certain inflation and joblessness.  

There was no bringing the sides together, as it was simply not possible to increase social spending, maintain a high level of defense spending, and reduce the deficit. Without the new budget process, this debate over priorities and defense/social spending divisions would have remained isolated and sporadic in the relevant appropriations and authorizing committees. The comprehensive nature of the plan required members to consider these different priorities simultaneously for the first time, and the economic
pressures of the times increased the competition between them. The fact that they had to be accounted for within a single plan and reflected in its aggregate-level totals made the log-rolling and reciprocity of the prereform years all but impossible, and the rising deficits guaranteed conflict as they kept the pressure on the Budget Committee--through its macro-level focus--to do something about them. As one staff member interviewed for this project explained, the budget resolution stands apart from most House business because “it’s got be to a unified plan and, unlike a lot of those which can pretty easily be put in or taken apart without destroying the whole, it’s very hard to get a budget resolution to fit together right if you’re negotiating all of it.”

The high levels of spending and deficit recommended by the Committee also guaranteed the en bloc opposition of Committee Republicans, who had strongly supported budget reform for years based on the expectation that it would constrain--not increase--the level of federal spending. Out of the seventeen Democrats on the Committee, only eleven voted to report the proposed resolution, and they were defeated by the opposition of all seven Republicans and six dissenting Democrats. In spite of the fact that the Democrats held an overwhelming two-thirds majority in the House as a whole, they were so deeply divided that they could not even muster the votes to get this first resolution out of Committee.

Interviewed separately, almost twenty-five years after these events, both Elford Cederberg (R-Mich) and Barber Conable (R-NY) both brought up this initial impasse, and recounted the story of how Committee Republicans had caucused and debated two options:

One was to acquiesce in the demise of the Budget Committee by its own hand, since we were unable to agree on a final report. Two, an alternative
would be for the Democrats to go back and sweep more of their intentions under the rug in order to get the budget down to a figure so phony that the credibility of the committee would have been demolished, if not the Committee itself. We thought neither prospect was potentially rewarding so Cederberg and I announced we would change our votes in order to get a $73 billion deficit report to the floor of the House where at least we could debate the fiscal consequences of our act and if the House wanted to kill the Budget Committee on the basis of that frightening deficit figure, so be it.  

Elford Cederberg (R-Mich) similarly recalled that Republicans didn’t want “to be in the position of saying that we were the obstructers in this thing and not give it a chance to work.” When the Committee reconvened that afternoon, Cederberg and Conable switched their votes and their action, combined with the abstinence of one of the dissenting Democrats, resulted in the resolution being reported out on a 13-10 vote (Democrats 11-5; Republicans 2-5). The resolution survived but this episode and its aftermath demonstrated the extent to which the new process unified Republican opposition and pushed that party further to the right at the same time as it collectively pushed House Democrats to take positions to the left of center, heightening ideological tensions, particularly within the majority party, but also to a lesser extent within the Republican minority.

Although they had acted in a manner consistent with the norms of the consensual, constructive prereform House, Cederberg and Conable were lambasted in a Wall Street Journal editorial the following day for abandoning their party and its conservative principles. The editorial criticized the two for their ”last-minute attack of prudence” and concluded that “it would give us greater faith in the future of the country and its government if someone in Washington would some day stand up and act on the basis of principle, rather than on prudence” (Wall Street Journal, April 10, 1975). The editorial was subsequently reproduced in full and sent out to the mailing list of the conservative
Republican Study Group. Conable, who was well known for his pragmatic centrism at the time, was not surprised to find himself the target of such attacks, but as he reflected in his journal, “there is no more staunch and effective a conservative than Al Cederberg and I find myself constantly wondering what the right-wing is headed for if they single out for scolding to their membership a person like him.”

The First Resolution on the Floor

Although the resolution had survived the committee stage, from the very first year of the process floor consideration proved just as difficult and controversial as the Committee deliberations described above. The liberals who had opposed the plan in Committee were sufficiently numerous on the floor to defeat the measure if combined with the near-unanimous opposition of House Republicans. In the same way that the unity and cooperative norms adhered to by the HAC and the HWMC in the prereform House had helped protect their proposals on the floor, the deep HBC divisions helped ensure problems and challenges on the floor. In 1975, the first of these was an amendment offered by Phil Landrum (Ga.), a majority member of the HBC, to cut the deficit to $66 billion through a 2 percent across-the-board cut in outlays. It was easily approved by a 227-180 margin.

The Landrum amendment highlighted the vulnerability of the Committee proposal and forced the leadership’s hand in terms of making concessions in order to gain majority support for the resolution. The unified opposition of the Republicans made it unlikely that any of them could be won over and so—as they had done in Committee—the Democratic leadership concentrated on building a winning coalition among members of their own party. Even in this first year, it is interesting to note that the HBC (unlike most
other committees in the House) was unable to produce a proposal that could survive on
its own merits on the floor. It was left to the leadership to come up with changes that
would allow it to pass.

Table 4-1: Floor Amendments Offered to the First Budget Resolution, May 1, 1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landrum (D-Ga)*</td>
<td>To reduce the projected deficit by $9.2 billion through a 2 percent reduction in outlays.</td>
<td>227-180 (R125-12; D102-168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuss (D-Wisc.)</td>
<td>Raise revenue target by $3 billion by closing a range of unspecified tax loopholes.</td>
<td>277-128 (R56-80; D221-48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rousselot (R-Ca.)</td>
<td>To eliminate the deficit and balance the budget</td>
<td>94-311 (R75-60; D19-251)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latta (R-Ohio)*</td>
<td>To reduce the projected deficit by $19.1 billion, in part by freezing federal pay levels.</td>
<td>159-248 (R113-22; D46-226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holtzman (D-NY)*</td>
<td>To reduce defense spending an additional $1.1 billion over the $4.3 billion cut proposed by the Committee.</td>
<td>Defeated by voice vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Neill (D-Mass)*</td>
<td>To adopt the substitute removing the limits on COLA increases and incorporating the Reuss amendment</td>
<td>234-171 (R17-118; D217-53)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*House Budget Committee member.
Source: 1975 CQ Almanac

The limits on COLA increases that liberals Holtzman and O’Hara had strongly
criticized in their Dissenting Views filed with the Committee report were lifted in a floor
amendment offered by Majority Leader Tip O’Neill. The leadership also backtracked on
the issue of tax loopholes, which had been a favorite cause of the liberals for a long time
prior to reform. By adopting a Reuss (D-Wisc.) amendment to close a range of
unspecified tax loopholes, the resolution was made more palatable to liberals and
provided a lower deficit figure to placate the more conservative members, who were most concerned about that.

The six amendments offered on the floor (shown in Table 4-1) were particularly notable in two respects; first, fully two-thirds of them were offered by members of the HBC, reflecting the fact that the Committee had not settled any major disputes before going to the floor and further attesting to the problems caused by its failure to do so. In particular, it was impossible to expect other members to defer to the Committee on the floor when it had not taken a clear position. Second, the level of conflict reflected in the recorded votes on the amendments was relatively high, reflecting the divisiveness of the plan and the disarray of the Democrats who suffered 53 defections on the final amendment offered by their own Majority Leader.

Even after these further compromises had been made on the floor, opposition to the resolution was still considerable, but the leadership moved to shut down debate and appealed for support for the amended resolution, if for no other reason, than to protect the infant process. In a Congress in which the Democrats held a 291-144 majority over Republicans, the first budget resolution produced by the new HBC was approved on a 200-196 vote. Sixty-eight Democrats defected on the vote and only three Republicans voted in favor of the resolution. The Democratic defections reflected the dissatisfaction of both liberals and conservatives; a little over half of those voting against the resolution came from southern states but the other half consisted of more liberal members drawn from such states as New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan and Maryland.
Implications for the Process in the House

The dry run of 1975—even though it did not represent a full test of the new budget process—established a broad set of behaviors and problems in the House, many of which would be repeated throughout the remainder of the 1970s and into the early 1980s. First and foremost, it showed that there was little agreement among House Democrats on the overall direction of fiscal policy and that to consider all priorities simultaneously was far more difficult and contentious than it had been to decide on spending levels for each separate policy area as the prereform House had done. The contentious nature of the debate that the resolution provoked also made it impossible for the HBC to function on the same basis as most of the other policy committees as the comprehensive nature of the plan and the high levels of conflict made adherence to such norms as deference, reciprocity and universalism all but impossible.

It also became clear that the debate over the overall direction of fiscal policy was inherently more partisan than it had been under previous arrangements (Center for the Study of American Business 1980; Copeland 1984; Schick 1995). The ideological nature of the debate was strongly reinforced by the economic pressures of the times, but this first year established a highly partisan tone to the proceedings that was quickly institutionalized along with the process itself. The Democrats had long been divided along ideological lines and had often experienced significant tensions and conflict between the two wings of the party. Until 1975, however, such tensions had been largely contained within certain policy-specific areas (i.e., defense, civil rights), which had helped the party as a whole to manage them.
Beginning in 1975, the process of producing a budget resolution forced these tensions into open conflict in a central institutional setting and on an annual basis. In response to the question, ‘why is the process/Committee so partisan?’, virtually all members and former members interviewed for this project suggested that the issues involved are inherently partisan. Charlie Stenholm (D-Tx.) referred to the resolution as “the party message, the message-board’ that conveys what “the majority of each party believes is the right thing to do.” Bill Frenzel (R-Minn) and William Brodhead (D-Mich.) agreed that the resolution “gave the parties their first chance to display their economic philosophy in bill form,” and that as Republicans “are going to be expressing a moderate to conservative philosophy and [Democrats] are going to be expressing a moderate to liberal philosophy…never the twain shall meet.” Or as one Republican chief of staff put it, the macro focus of the Committee leads members to a broader debate based on “what makes a Republican a Republican and a Democrat a Democrat.” In the case of the Democrats, such discussions only emphasized how little members of their opposing factions had in common and reminded conservative southern Democrats of how much they had in common with their Republican counterparts.

Given the increase in the numbers of liberal members following the 1974 congressional elections, any budget resolution that could gain broad support in the Democratic Caucus had to include significant concessions to liberal priorities. These concessions, however, not only made the party’s conservatives increasingly unhappy with the resolutions that were being produced, but also resulted in the party and the process being soundly condemned by the Republican minority. As described above, the nature of the process, combined with the generous spending targets proposed by Committee
Democrats in these first few years guaranteed the strident opposition of Committee Republicans. This meant that in their search for majority support of the Committee resolution, the Democratic leadership tended to immediately write off Republican members and to concentrate on building a budgetary coalition within their own party first (Copeland 1984; Schick 1980a). From the very first year of the new process it was clear that in order to survive on the floor, the House budget resolution would have to be far closer to the preferences of the party rather than the chamber median voter.

After decades of a cooperative working relationship with majority Democrats on both money Committees, solid Republican opposition to the budget resolution created a political climate on Budget that was very unusual for the House at that time. Certain Committees—such as Education and Labor, Judiciary—had always been more partisan than others, but partisanship quickly reached new heights on the HBC. Republicans neither had nor sought any substantial influence on the resolution, which left Democrats struggling to find and articulate their common ground. For many members, but especially those in the minority, these conditions were particularly frustrating and provided yet another disincentive for members to serve on the panel. Barber Conable seemed to sum up the Republican view when he referred to the new budget process in his journal as:

…a joyless, profitless operation. No matter how statesmanlike the procedure, any process that brings forth as large a deficit as we have had in the past is not likely to have any Republican support. This is why I suspect that most of us are unwilling to make the major emotional commitments necessary to have really constructive input. 24

Another major problem that became clear during the dry run was that the HBC’s lack of any significant institutional power also made resolutions even more difficult to pass than they might otherwise have been. As the committee and floor deliberations
described above indicate, the HBC did not and could not operate under the same kinds of rules and norms (reciprocity, deference, committee unity, etc.) that protected the rights and authority of other standing committees and that had particularly served to build up and maintain the power of the two established money committee in the House.

For example, every member of the HBC had another major committee assignment and the limited responsibilities of Budget tended to present only a brief distraction from members’ major committees and their business. This was in sharp contrast to the money committees that had substantial and full agendas and that were exclusive assignments (members could not serve on any other committee--with the exception of Budget). Members of the money Committees were not exposed to any competing or even different committee norms or cultures; their loyalty and energies were all centered upon that single committee (Fenno 1966; Manley 1970).

Furthermore, Budget did not directly control any tangible, constituent benefits that could compete with those that flowed through Appropriations or Ways and Means. These benefits not only gave committee members strong incentives to invest a lot of personal time and effort in their service on the money committees but they also gave non-committee members some very good reasons to defer to these committees on the floor. In the prereform House, few members relished a confrontation with members who had direct control over their committee assignments or the flow of federal funds to their districts. As former HBC chairman James R. Jones (D-Okla.) explained, “if an appropriator saw a certain member of Congress voting the ‘wrong’ way, that member knew that dam or highway or whatever in his district was in jeopardy.” For members of the HBC, on the other hand, “your power was whatever you could be perceived as
having” and this could only be produced through use of “smoke and mirrors” as you basically “had no power.” HBC members had multiple loyalties, low incentives to invest heavily in the process and no leverage over non-Committee members on the floor.

These disincentives and lack of influence were reinforced by the term limitation on members of the HBC. This provision had been included at the last minute in the 1974 Act as a guarantee to the money committees that the Budget Committee would never become strong enough to challenge their positions as the preeminent power centers in the House. It kept the Committee weak, and this strongly affected both the general level of member interest in serving on it and the commitment of those who agreed to do so. Barber Conable explained how service on the HBC was frustrating for him, both as a member of the HWMC and as a Republican:

When there is a choice between a Ways and Means Committee meeting and a Budget Committee meeting arises, I will always choose the Ways and Means Committee meeting. I know people will be counting on my judgment and experience there. I will never have a chance to use my judgment and experience on Budget because I cannot rise to a position of any power there. The pressure of the work in the Budget Committee is always to increase the size of the budget on the part of the Democrats and to drag heels without any plan but reaction on the part of the Republicans.

The dry run also showed that the inability of the HBC to settle or even contain the conflict that erupted around the production of the resolution had serious consequences for the floor consideration of the committee proposal. In 1975, the debate had been severely limited and had been abruptly cut short with impassioned leadership pleas for support for the process rather than for the substantive content of the resolution. In spite of the bloated post-Watergate Democratic majority, the fact that the resolution passed by the razor-thin margin that it did clearly signaled trouble ahead. Conflicts that could not be
settled in Committee naturally spilled over onto the floor and where, at this point in time, the leadership simply could not handle them.

Surprisingly, though only to a certain extent, the dry run did suggest that the HAC might easily adapt to the new budget process in spite of pre-reform concerns that the HBC’s responsibilities for spending targets would produce only rivalry and tensions between the two panels. As can be seen in Figure 2, the high levels of floor conflict and opposition to the two budget resolutions of 1975 disappeared when it came to voting on appropriations legislation that same year. In this first year out, the controversy and problems surrounding the HBC appeared to have little impact on the HAC. The Budget panel was restricted to a task that the HAC had never done and seemed to absorb most the tensions and conflicts of the guardianship role, leaving the HAC to function much as it had before reform.

There were several reasons for the disparities between final passage margins for the House Budget Resolutions and Appropriations bills shown in Figure 4-1. The first was that coming up with aggregate-level targets and overall priorities involved an inherently more ideological debate than that which typically accompanied the various appropriations bills. Another was that the HBC had made no real effort to constrain spending this first year out and hence had put no serious pressure on any single Appropriations subcommittee. The conflict on the HBC was largely fueled by the unprecedented deficit that it had projected, and naturally this was not something that could realistically be addressed within a single appropriations bill.
The level of conflict in 1975 was remarkably high on Budget yet remained low on Appropriations, and as long as the Democrats retained a sizeable majority, it seemed possible to limit the conflict to the resolutions without ‘infecting’ other legislation. After all, it was only one vote, and if the party could hold it together on that vote then the remainder of the Committees and their business might not be significantly effected.

**Implementation, 1976-78**

While some of the problems that the House faced in the dry run of 1975 began to fade or turned out to be less difficult than many had first anticipated (the newness of the process, the tight deadline for authorizing legislation, the possibility that it might not survive), some would become steadily more acute in the course of the ensuing five years.
In particular, relations between the HAC and the HBC soon took a semi-permanent turn for the worse as did the ideological conflict and tensions that the resolution provoked in the House. These internal problems, combined with changes in economic and political conditions, made it increasingly difficult for House Democrats to pass budget resolutions in the late 1970s. Prevailing conditions also worked against the successful integration of the process as pressures to restrain spending grew yet increasing numbers of Democrats sought to maintain increases in spending as a way to protect their constituency, and hence reelection interests. This translated into a decline in support for the ‘responsible rationality’ of the new process and renewed support for the decentralized committee system that had served such interests so well in the past.

Yet in spite of tentative signs of economic recovery across this period, the concomitant increase in annual deficits maintained some implicit constituency pressure for the new system to make a difference and members’ perceptions of public concern over rising deficits soon came into more direct conflict with their substantive policy and/or political goals. As a result, the former was initially downplayed at the expense of the latter and many majority Democrats sought to maintain the institutional status quo in order to protect the benefits that accrued to both them and their constituents under it.

The weak position of the new process within the House also encouraged Democratic complacency toward the growing problems of budget politics at this time. Many members felt that the new Committee was simply too far removed from electoral or governing reality to give issues raised there much serious attention. Furthermore, most of the constituency attention that the Committee did receive was driven by general concern about the state of the economy and the potential for members to be punished for
not doing more to bring down the deficit. Yet for this to happen, the Committee would have had to take on either Ways and Means (in order to raise revenues) or Appropriations (in order to cut spending), and it remained institutionally in a position to do neither.

Former HBC chairman James Jones (D-Okla.) also suggested that Democrats were slow to respond to the growing demand for spending constraint, in part because “they’d always won, they’d had an ability to win, to keep the House no matter who was president…Democrats were unwilling to let go of programs and unwilling to be too serious about the budget.”

The potential for an electoral backlash against congressional inaction was striking similar to that which had helped convince members to pass the original reform bill at the end of 1973. Yet without Nixon and after the 1974 elections had diminished both the strength and credibility of the Republican challenge, constituency considerations were soon relegated to the weakest source of support for the new process among the three dimensions.

There were also significant changes at the partisan level that continued to affect the House transition to the new process beyond the dry run. The liberal Watergate class elected in the 1974 elections unquestionably helped the process to develop in ways that were largely not anticipated or supported by more senior members or even the original reformers. Their influence, both within the party and the House as a whole, was subsequently consolidated when all but two of the Democratic freshmen won reelection in 1976. The other major partisan shock to the new process came with the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976. As described in the previous two chapters, budget reform had been enacted in response not only to the organizational problems the House faced in
responding to the president’s budget, but also to reduce the numerous political advantages held by the president in this area.

To a large extent, the Budget Act and the process it established were creatures of divided control, and Carter’s victory in 1976 suddenly cast the process in a very different light. The budget committees were no longer expected to advance their own agenda in opposition to the president’s but, given their origins and responsibilities, they scarcely seemed likely to serve as a rubber stamp for president’s program either. By having members debate and vote on the various provisions of the president’s budget, it made it less likely that members would find it as easy to support it than if its component parts had gone straight to the various committees as they had done prior to reform. The greatest pressures on the HBC and its implementation of the new budget process, however, continued to overwhelmingly come from internal considerations and affected all stages of the process as well as its relations with other committees.

Committee Conflict

The ideological and internal divisions that had plagued the Democratic majority on both the reform bill in 1973-74 and the dry run of 1975 remained strong with respect to the new process and the HBC through the end of the decade. Intraparty divisions made it particularly difficult for the HBC to reach agreement on the Budget Resolution as Democratic liberals and conservatives were almost equally represented on the panel. Both parties had made a reasonably good-faith attempt to balance representation on the Committee in the first Congress of its operations, but on the Democratic side, this left fiscal conservatives like Neal Smith (D-Iowa) and Phil Landrum (D-Ga.) sharing a panel with such liberals as Elizabeth Holtzman (D-NY), Parren Mitchell (D-Md) and James G.
O’Hara (D-Mich). The divided Democratic contingent meant that on the HBC, as on many committees, a few Democratic defectors could join forces with Republicans and control outcomes. Given the strong liberal representation on the HBC, it seemed particularly susceptible to a conservative takeover, because in spite of its outsize majority-minority ratio (17-8), Republicans needed only five Democratic defections to prevail on the Committee.

The chairman of the Budget Committee is responsible for putting forward the majority proposal, which is then marked up by the full Committee. On account of the deep ideological divisions among Committee Democrats--as well as among Democrats more generally--the chairman in the late 1970s was routinely faced with one of two options. He could either decide to work within his own party to try and produce a resolution that could satisfy sufficient numbers of both liberals and conservatives, or he could decide to fall back upon a coalition of moderate-conservative Democrats and Republicans. Throughout this period, both Brock Adams (D-Wash.) and his successor as chair of the HBC, Robert Giaimo (Conn.), stuck doggedly to the first of these two strategies, that of seeking to keep the liberals on board by making numerous concessions to their various policy priorities.

In spite of their considerable efforts, however, their proposals received a mixed reception from HBC Democrats; as Table 4-2 (below) shows, the chairman’s mark attracted an increasing number of amendments in Committee across this period, with most of them coming from members of his own party. This table also illustrates the low level of Republican influence on the resolution; in spite of their making numerous proposals each year, no Republican amendments were adopted by the Committee over
this four-year period. As in the case of the dry run, this reliance on intra-party bargaining among Democrats continued to attract the solid opposition of Committee Republicans as well as the equally solid rejection of Republican input at this level. Through the remainder of the decade, the Committee resolution failed to attract a single Republican vote after the 1975 switch by Conable and Cederberg.

Table 4-2: Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1975-78.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year, resolution</th>
<th>Amendments offered</th>
<th>Amendments approved</th>
<th>Committee approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st (H Con Res 218)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>13-10 (D11-5; R2-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 466)</td>
<td>5+ b (4D; 1R)</td>
<td>3 (D)</td>
<td>15-9 (D15-1; R0-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st (H Con Res 611)</td>
<td>9+</td>
<td>3 (D)</td>
<td>14-10 (D14-2; R0-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 728)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st (H Con Res 195)</td>
<td>13+ (12D; 1R)</td>
<td>6 (D)</td>
<td>16-9 (D16-1; R0-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st/2nd attempt (H Con Res 214)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 341)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st (H Con Res 559)</td>
<td>10+ (7+D; 3+R)</td>
<td>3 (D)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 683)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not Available.

b Figures followed by a ‘+’ indicate lower bound estimates culled from reports in cases where precise figures were not available.

Sources: LEGI-SLATE database, Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report coverage; House Budget Committee Reports.

The Committee’s problems were further compounded by rapid shifts in its membership. Part of this was inevitable under the statutory term limit, but the steep dropoff in the seniority of Democrats elected to the Budget Committee strongly
suggested that additional forces were at work. As Table 4-3 shows, the total seniority of Budget Committee Democrats fell by almost half in the four years after the dry run, even though the size of the Committee (25) and the majority-minority (17-8) ratio remained constant across this period. The total years of service for the six money committee Democrats is also shown in Table 4-3. In light of the greater overlap between the HAC and the HBC it is not surprising that the seniority of HAC members serving on the committee climbed steadily across this period (Chairman Bob Giaimo was also an appropriator). Ways and Means, however, made a complete about-face and within four years of the dry run had handed all its Democratic slots on the Committee over to its most junior members. For a committee that was supposed to bring the tax and spending sides of the budget together, the reversal did not bode well, especially considering that its decisions were supposed to be adhered to by the vastly more experienced and powerful HAC and HWMC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress/year</th>
<th>All HBC a</th>
<th>HAC b</th>
<th>HWMC c</th>
<th>All HBC</th>
<th>Total for Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94th (1975-76)</td>
<td>220 Democrats (17 members)</td>
<td>28 Democrats (3)</td>
<td>62 Democrats</td>
<td>105 Republicans (8 members)</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95th (1977-78)</td>
<td>174 Democrats</td>
<td>34 Democrats</td>
<td>48 Democrats</td>
<td>74 Republicans</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96th (1979-80)</td>
<td>126 Democrats</td>
<td>40 Democrats</td>
<td>12 Democrats</td>
<td>78 Republicans</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a House Budget Committee  
b House Appropriations Committee  
c House Ways and Means Committee
The exact cause of the general decline in the seniority of Democratic members (as well as those representing the HWMC) is difficult to pinpoint. Democratic nominations for the Committee were subject to approval by the full Caucus so it is possible that the more liberal junior members simply received more support than their more experienced counterparts. Another factor that likely played a role in the downturn was simply that without any independent power or authority within the institution, the interest and willingness of the more senior members to serve on the Committee declined substantially. This low level of interest was reinforced for senior Democrats on Ways and Means by rules that forbade them from holding a subcommittee chairmanship and serving on Budget at the same time; Sam Gibbons (D-Fl.) was one of several HWMC Democrats who quit the Budget Committee for this reason, and this rule also kept Jim Corman (D-Ca.) off the Committee in 1975. Appropriator Neal Smith, however, stated that he got off the HBC after serving only one term, simply because he “didn’t like the way it was going.” He added that the Committee only “talked about macroeconomics and theories,” which led him to conclude--as many HAC members still do--that “they didn’t understand budgets.”

As the seniority of HBC members plummeted, ideology and party loyalty became more telling in new appointments to the Committee made by both parties. The eight individuals that Democratic Caucus confirmed as new HBC members at the beginning of the 95th Congress in January 1977 had posted party unity scores a full 18 points above their party average in 1976. In a similar vein, the Republicans replaced more than half of their eight members with five newcomers who had party unity scores for 1976 12 points above the Republican average over the same time period.
The implications of the term limit for HBC membership had not been thought through by many Democrats prior to 1975. Although it had been included in the 1974 statute to assure appropriators that the new committee would never rival their entrenched institutional power, the rapid departure of the most senior members from the committee suggested a much more far-reaching effect. There was clearly some concern among Democrats about the term limit and its implications for the performance and basic viability of the new process; in December 1978, the Democratic Caucus voted to extend the four-year limit on service to six years.

If the influence of the Committee in the House rested entirely on the individual skills and attributes of the Chairman and the members themselves, then it made intuitive sense that the position of the Committee within the House would become more tenuous if its membership continued to become increasingly junior and ideological relative to that of the House as a whole. In addition, the short term limit gave other members little incentive to build close working relationships with members of the HBC as they were well aware that a new chairman and set of members would soon be taking over. The extension of the term limit showed that Democrats were clearly concerned by the Committee’s situation, but it did not suggest any significant consensus within the party on what could or should be done about it.

Floor Trouble

The upheaval and problems that beset the HBC clearly affected floor consideration of the resolution. As the dry run had shown, the process was simply much more difficult and conflictual than having separate panels make a series of budget-related decisions in isolation from each other. These problems were greatly magnified, however,
by the intrinsic weaknesses of the term-limited Committee, its ideologically charged and divisive debates and its sprawling, potentially duplicative policy responsibilities. In taking its proposals to the floor, the HBC found itself in a position unlike that of any other standing committee in the chamber.

The comprehensive scope of the proposed resolution ensured that large numbers of members would have an interest in altering or challenging it on the floor, and in the case of the HBC there were virtually no incentives to discourage them from doing so. The annual appropriations bills may be the most relevant comparison in terms of the level of non-member interest, but as discussed in previous chapters, the HAC members tended to work together to produce their legislation and report it unanimously to the floor, where their proposals were protected by the norms of specialization, deference and reciprocity that were generally adhered to by members of other House committees. Furthermore, non-HAC members were discouraged from challenging appropriations legislation on the floor because of potential for denial of future requests for funding for district-level projects.

The HBC operated on precisely the opposite basis. There could be no significant cooperation between the majority and the minority members of the Committee because they did not seek the same broad outcomes, i.e., a particularistic share of the benefits. The nature and scope of the resolution emphasizes the differences in policy preferences between the parties over any common ground. Even if the parties agreed on 80 percent of the resolution, for example, their members would inevitably get into bruising battles over the remaining 20 percent. The near-perfect opposition of Republicans to the Committee
resolution (see Table 4-2) strongly encouraged other Republicans to do the same on the floor.

In order to secure the support of most Democrats for the budget resolution in the late 1970s, provisions had to be made in order to win support from either left-of-center liberals or right-of-center conservative Democrats and Republicans. The zero-sum nature of such negotiations, however, ensured that whenever concessions were made to one side, a storm of protest and efforts to overturn the concessions would follow from the opposing faction. Conservatives regularly pushed amendments to restore defense cuts made by the liberals and to make further cuts in social spending, particularly in countercyclical aid. Liberals, on the other hand, would frequently offer amendments to restore or further increase social spending, to remove corporate tax credits, or to target Republican-favored programs such as revenue sharing for substantial cuts. Without tighter control of the floor, debate and amendments were potentially endless, as each side would inevitably try to counter any gains made by the other. In many ways, floor consideration of the budget resolution in these early years strongly supported new institutionalist arguments about the importance of agenda control, whether achieved through a committee system or floor rules and procedures. No such mechanisms were brought to bear on the new process during the first few years of its operation, and proceedings both in committee and on the floor became increasingly chaotic as a result.

The Committee problems described above clearly left the resolution vulnerable to a large number of amendments on the floor. In the first few years of the process—especially when Committee recommendations did not seriously challenge or threaten other committees’ interests or rights—the leadership could often push the resolution
through on appeals to protect the process. The narrow margins by which the resolution was approved each year (Table 4-4), however, suggested that the strength of such appeals was low and that they could not be relied upon indefinitely (see Schick 1980b, p.14-16).

Table 4-4: House Voting on amendments and final passage; budget resolutions 1975-78

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>No. of amendments and substitutes</th>
<th>Number approved</th>
<th>FINAL PASSAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1st (H Con Res 218)</td>
<td>5 (3D; 2R)</td>
<td>3D</td>
<td>200-196 (D197-68; R3-128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 466)</td>
<td>3 (1D; 2R)</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>225-191 (D214-67; R11-124)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1st (H Con Res 611)</td>
<td>9 (5D; 4R)</td>
<td>2D</td>
<td>221-155 (D208-44; R13-111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 728)</td>
<td>1R</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>227-151 (D215-38; R12-113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>239-169 (D225-50; R14-119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>1st (H Con Res 195)</td>
<td>11 (8D; 3R)</td>
<td>5D</td>
<td>84-320 (D82-185; R2-135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st/ 2nd attmpt (H Con Res 214)</td>
<td>7 (5D; 2R)</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>213-179 (D206-58; R2-135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 341)</td>
<td>4 (1D; 3R)</td>
<td>1R</td>
<td>199-188 (D195-59; R4-129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1st (H Con Res 559)</td>
<td>17 (8D; 9R)</td>
<td>5 (2D; 3R)</td>
<td>201-197 (D198-61; R3-136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd (H Con Res 683)</td>
<td>6 (3D; 3R)</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>217-178 (D215-42; R2-136)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ornstein et al. 1999; Suttle 1998

The dangers of the open floor process were made clear by the stunning defeat of the Committee resolution on April 28, 1977, in which the success of two amendments, each offered by HBC members--Omar Burleson (D-Tx.) and Otis Pike (D-NY)--had led to the unraveling of support for any resolution as the flood of particularistic amendments that followed added over $4 billion to the Committee’s projected deficit. Liberals abandoned their party’s proposal after substantial increases were made in defense
spending, and conservatives soon followed suit in opposition to the higher deficit figure. The resolution was defeated by an overwhelming 84-320 (CQWR, April 30, 1977, p.775).

During the first few years of the process, the HBC consistently failed to report a resolution that most Democrats could support. It was left to the leadership to push the resolution through on the floor, which they did mostly through some combination of amendments that offered concessions to the various party factions and by appealing to their members to ‘support’ or ‘protect’ the new process. While sufficient numbers of members were willing to support the process by not overtly defeating the majority party resolution on the floor, few were prepared to yield the HBC any significant influence or authority within the chamber. As a result, enforcement of the Budget Act had to come directly from the leadership--or indirectly through the Rules Committee--as the panel had no power to fight its own battles.

Figure 4-2: Percent floor support (of those voting) for Final Passage of House Budget Resolutions, House Appropriations bills for FY 1979 (passed in 1978)
The internal opposition to reform certainly did not simply disappear after the passage of the 1974 and most accounts suggest that the entrenched resistance to the process was concentrated among members of the powerful Appropriations Committee, most of whose members “tried to do everything they could to make this budget process an accounting procedure and not a whole lot more.” 32

In its first few years, the HBC imposed few constraints on the HAC as, due to its increasingly liberal composition, the HBC tended to recommend higher levels of spending than appropriators were generally comfortable with. Indeed, the disputes that did break out between the two committees in these early years tended to involve the HAC’s refusal to appropriate as much as the HBC had recommended. The new Committee monitored appropriations legislation to make sure that their actions complied with the various targets and ceilings, though it was dependent on the leadership to step in and back them up if they got into disputes with other committees. 33

As a result of the more liberal HBC setting higher spending targets than appropriators supported, prereform patterns of floor voting on appropriations legislation continued through the first few years of the new process. As can be seen in Figure 4-2, the percent support for final passage of House budget resolutions and House appropriations legislation in 1978 did not differ a great deal from the respective levels of support in 1975 (Figure 4-1). During the first few years of its operations, the HBC did not noticeably disturb the norms or operations of the HAC. This situation began to change in 1979, however, as even the more liberal HBC began to feel the pressure to constrain spending, which inevitably brought it into increasing amounts of conflict with
the HAC and finally disrupted that committee’s prereform norms of consensus and cooperation.

Notes

1 After hovering around the 5.2 percent mark for the first eight months of 1974, unemployment rose to 8.2 percent by January 1975. Other economic indicators fell sharply during the final months of the year (1974 CQ Almanac, p. 141).


3 Interview with author, June 1, 1999.

4 William Brodhead (D-Mich.), interview with author, June 4, 1999. While Gallup and other public opinion organizations were not yet registering high concern with the absolute size of the deficit, their data did show that a large proportion of voters were aware that the government was running a deficit (72 percent in March 1976) and 70 percent felt that it was very important to restore it to balance (Gallup 1978).

5 For a summary of the 1973 Democratic freshmen attitudes on this issue see CQWR, April 21, 1973, p. 900-902.

6 Democratic committee staff, interview with author, September 8, 1999.

7 Brodhead (D-Mich) also concurred with this assessment—“to the extent that the process took away from [the committees’] power it was in danger of being scrapped.” Interview with author, June 4, 1999. This view was also common among the Democratic staff interviewed from this period.

8 Interview with author, June 11, 1999. Some members (Cederberg) felt that it was there to stay though they were concerned by the prospect of significant ‘evasions’ of it. Others expressed no such concern (Anderson). Some members still believe that it should be scrapped (Smith).

9 Interview with author, September 8, 1999.

10 Calculated by author from CQ figures. Party loyalty scores are calculated for each individual member of Congress by CQ and reflect the number of times that a member votes with a majority of his or her own party on votes where a majority of one party votes in opposition to a majority of the other.

11 Interview with author, July 7, 1999.

12 Quoted in CQWR, Sept. 7 1974, p. 2418.

13 Budget outlays represent the total outgoing expenditures for the year; budget authority includes funding for projects that extend beyond the coming fiscal year.

14 Ibid, p. 106.


16 Interview with author, November 3, 1997.

Interview with author, May 14, 1999.

Barber Conable, interview with author, July 7 1999.


Bill Frenzel (R-Minn.), interview with author, November 4, 1997.

Republican chief of staff, interview with author, September 2, 1997.


Interview with author, April 23 1999. Jones was unusual among interviewees in that, in spite of having experienced the problems of this powerlessness first hand, he expressed support getting rid of the Budget Committees and the process and having the Appropriations Committee produce some kind of annual budget resolution or plan.

Interview with author, July 7, 1999.

Interview with author, April 23 1999.

Interview with author, April 20, 1999.

Interview with author, April 21, 1999.

Interview with author, June 1999.

Figures calculated by author. Source; Congressional Quarterly Almanacs, various years.

Butler Derrick (D-SC), interview with author, April 13, 1999.

After the HBC and Carter had agreed to increase spending to fund an economic stimulus package, the HAC tried to return to its prereform guardianship role and reported a supplemental appropriations bill “several hundred million dollars below the resolution”. Speaker O’Neill stepped in and forced the HAC to restore the funds to its own bill on the floor (see Schick 1981, p.314)
In late 1978, significant shifts in the external political climate began to threaten the tenuous control that House Democrats had maintained over the process since the dry run of 1975. After holding onto almost all of their Watergate gains in 1976, House Democrats suffered a net loss of 16 seats in the 1978 midterms that marked the first national gains for Republicans since Nixon’s resignation four years earlier. Though this still left Democrats with a comfortable 276-157 majority, the passage of Proposition 13 in California and the growing number of states that had issued calls for a constitutional convention to consider a balanced budget amendment, suggested a much more widespread change in the nation’s political climate than the congressional election results alone implied.

Carter’s response to these changes was to submit a FY 1980 budget that cut social spending but also increased defense spending, a combination that was an anathema to Democratic liberals who had struggled to support their party’s resolutions in previous years. As Congressional Quarterly reported, conditions handed House Republicans “the
best chance they’ve had in the four years of the congressional budget process to take the
decisive role usually played by liberal Democrats, and in the process to tip the balance of
power toward fiscal conservatism” (CQWR, March 31, 1979, p. 547).

Committee Failure and Floor Chaos, 1979

House Democrats made eight new appointments to the HBC for the 96th Congress
in 1979. While, as a group, these members were slightly less loyal than the members
appointed in 1977, their average party unity score for the previous year had still been 7
points above the party average. When added to the more liberal contingent appointed in
the previous Congress, however, these new members maintained the over-representation
of loyal and largely liberal Democrats on the HBC. The new appointees were also
overwhelmingly junior; Jones, who had first been elected to the House in 1972, was the
only one of the eight who predated the Watergate class.

Their appointment continued the sharp decline in the overall level of experience
of Democratic members on the HBC of the previous Congress. The total years experience
of HBC Democrats in 1979 was close to half of what it had been in 1975 (see Table 4-3).
Yet these new members would also provide the core of Democratic budgetary leadership
in the House through the next decade; three future chairman (James Jones (D-Okla.), Bill
Gray (D-Pa.) and Leon Panetta (D-Ca.) first took seats on the HBC in 1979, as did
Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Tim Wirth (D-Colo.)

In putting together his resolution mark in 1979, Chairman Giaimo responded to
widespread perceptions that the liberals’ support might be out of reach by taking the
unprecedented step of caucusing privately with Budget Committee Democrats prior to the
full Committee consideration of the resolution. In spite of these consensus-building
efforts, the chairman’s mark went on to attract a record 36 amendments in the committee markup, 28 of which were offered by the same 16 Democrats with whom he had just spent several days negotiating (see Table 5-1). The fact that the Democratic chairman could not even unify his own committee behind his proposal once more underscored the need for the majority party leadership to more actively assume responsibility for the production of the resolution. The level of conflict was clearly too high for the Committee to handle and as Barber Conable noted, under such circumstances, it becomes inevitable that members will “resort more and more to party as it becomes more confrontational. They need party support and party structures to get them through difficult votes.”  

Table 5-1: Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1979-80

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/ resolution</th>
<th>Amendments Offered</th>
<th>Amendments Approved</th>
<th>Final Committee Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st res.</td>
<td>36 (28D; 8R)</td>
<td>16 (14D; 2R)</td>
<td>16-9 (D16-1; R0-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd res.</td>
<td>7D</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>16-9 (D16-1; R0-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st res.</td>
<td>24 (19D; 5R)</td>
<td>4 (3D; 1R)</td>
<td>18-6 (D10-6; R8-0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the failure of committee-level negotiations, the leadership was well-prepared by the time the resolution came to the floor at the beginning of May 1979. As House Republicans rushed to finalize their alternative budget, sponsored by HBC members Marjorie Holt (R-Md.) and Ralph Regula (R-Ohio), the Democratic leadership assembled a 27-member task force, led by Norman Mineta (D-Ca.) with the goal of mobilizing members behind the HBC plan and preventing defections to the Holt-Regula plan. While admitting the Budget Committee proposal was far from ideal, Mineta sought to frame the issue for Democrats in terms of “Do you want a budget written by the
Democratic majority or do you want a budget written by the Republican minority?” (quoted in CQWR, May 5, 1979, p.815). Just as Nixon had helped promote unity among congressional Democrats on the issue of reform in 1973, the strong position of congressional Republicans in 1979 intensified Democratic efforts to increase unity among their own ranks. Once again, however, it was a defensive unity created by opposition pressure. Absent a strong and active political opposition, there was clearly very little substantive agreement at all among Democrats on the general direction and priorities of fiscal policy, and their difficulty in passing resolutions would have continued to increase as a result.

Yet in spite of the pressures of 1979, the Democratic leadership continued to allow the maximum possible number of amendments to the resolution to be considered on the floor. This had emerged as the central leadership strategy for dealing with the conflict and controversy that process had immediately attracted in the House (see Chapter 4). This--and appeals to protect the process--had worked reasonably well in the first few years, while members were gradually gaining experience and understanding of the process and the Committee resolution had put relatively little pressure on the other committees in a political or a substantive sense.

As the political climate began to change, however, and the prospect of another recession loomed in early 1979, the amendments began to flow more freely as more and more members sought to defend their own individual priorities against the growing pressures for constraint. The number of amendments on which recorded floor votes were taken generally followed the pattern at the Committee level (as shown in Table 5-1), and the numbers of amendments in both settings peaked during consideration of the FY1980
budget in the spring of 1979 (Table 5-2). The thirty-three floor amendments listed in Table 5-2 are only those on which recorded votes were taken—another twelve were apparently settled by voice vote (Suttle 1998, p.30)

Table 5-2: Floor Amendments Offered, Approved and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions, 1979-80.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>No. of amendments and substitutes</th>
<th>Number approved</th>
<th>Final Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; (H Con Res 107)</td>
<td>33 (21D; 12R)</td>
<td>7D</td>
<td>220-184 (D211-50; R9-134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; (H Con Res 186)</td>
<td>5 (2D; 3R)</td>
<td>1R</td>
<td>192-213 (D188-67; R4-146)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;/ 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; attempt (Senate res)</td>
<td>2D</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>212-206 (D212-52; R0-154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>241-174 (D218-45; R23-129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; (H Con Res 307)</td>
<td>12 (7D; 5R)</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>Pt 1: 225-193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pt 2: 241-174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; (H Con Res 448)</td>
<td>1R</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>203-191 (D201-45; R2-146)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ornstein et al. 1990; Suttle 1998

These amendments may have helped some members—to the extent that they could return to their districts and speak about how they had offered an amendment to increase funding for the Fuel Assistance Program for Low-Income Families (Dodd, D-Conn.), to increase defense spending (Bennett, D-Fl.) or to increase transportation funding (Glickman, D-Kan.)—but they also ratcheted up internal tensions to a level that threatened to undo congressional acceptance of the process altogether. Yet it was also apparent that equally allowing so many amendments was one of the few options that the leadership had to drum up sufficient support for the resolution on the floor; had the leadership brought the resolution to the floor under a more restrictive rule they would almost certainly have
faced a revolt from one or potentially both of their factions that would have led to its defeat.

Figure 5-1 shows the distribution of support for the 31 amendments to the first budget resolution on which recorded votes were taken in 1979. What is particularly striking about this distribution is that very few (7) of these amendments actually passed, and that a sizeable group of obviously very controversial votes were clustered in the 45-50 percent range. These amendments were considered over eight days and members engaged in heated exchanges over many of them only to see most fail. The fact that they were such close votes also suggests that these were major issues to a lot of members, ones that may have made the difference between support and opposition of the resolution on final passage. Although Republicans offered only 12 out of the 33 amendments, fully 8 of these ended up in this critical 45-50 percent bracket. Unlike the highly particularistic Democratic amendments, the issues involved in the Republican amendments were those that ultimately would define the budget politics—and the broader partisan politics—of the 1980s; revenue-sharing (distribution of federal funds to the states), balancing the budget, cutting food stamps (social programs) and lower taxes (Kemp).

What this all added up to in 1979 was a highly charged floor debate in which several very potent and divisive political issues were considered at length, most amendments were voted down and the resolution was ultimately approved on a typically narrow 220-184 margin. Only 9 out of 143 Republicans who voted did so in support of the resolution, and the Democrats suffered 50 defections on the vote.
Figure 5-1: Distribution of Support (percent of those voting) for 48 Amendments to 13 House appropriations bills (on which recorded votes were taken), 1979.

Figure 5-2: Distribution of Support (percent of those voting) for 33 Amendments to the First Budget Resolution (on which recorded votes were taken), 1979
Open floor consideration of the budget resolution in 1979 highlighted the problems faced by the Democratic majority in producing a comprehensive plan over and above the separate appropriations bills, as well as how intrinsically different the two were. As previously discussed, divisions within the Democratic majority meant that concessions had to be made to all sides in order to build and maintain a working majority. This, of course, had been the modus operandi on the HAC for decades prior to the 1970s (as well as a norm that persisted for some time after reform). What happened in the first few years of the process was that the Democrats basically tried to build budget coalitions the same way that they put together appropriations coalitions, albeit from within their own party instead of among all House members.

This open floor strategy could not endure for two primary reasons. First, as deficits and broader economic and political pressures kept the pressure on for a major adjustment in fiscal policy, these amendments inevitably became more specific in nature as members sought to defend their particular piece of the budgetary pie, and further complicated the process by drawing criticism from members of their own party for violating the macro-micro division of labor that Bolling and others had anticipated between the HBC and the authorizing and appropriating panels. As the Majority Associate Staff director of the HBC remarked at the time, this “strong tendency to line item…is a serious political problem in the House, given our difficulties anyway…We just cannot deal on that kind of highly particularized level and be effective; it eats up too much time on the floor; it causes a lot of consternation, does not get us anywhere, and does not change anything” (Center for the Study of American Business 1980, p.26-27).
Second, these particularistic Democratic amendments were fundamentally unpalatable to their ideological opponents as they directly contradicted their preferred outcomes, i.e., less spending. The fact that the president’s signature is not required on the congressional budget resolution removed one important incentive for the kind of members to come together in support of the resolution as they had traditionally done with the separate appropriations bills. Appropriations bills distribute benefits among members of both parties and it is clearly in their interest to maximize their collective leverage against the possibility of a veto. Budget resolutions, on the other hand, do not require the president’s signature, do not deliver any material benefits to constituents, and instead represent only a general statement of the values and priorities of the majority party.

Figure 5-3: Percent Support (among those voting) for Budget Resolutions, Apps Bills, 1979

Floor amendments to appropriations legislation, however, have often been just as controversial as those to budget resolutions. Contrast Figure 5-1 with the pattern of floor voting on appropriations amendments in the same year (Figure 5-2). The graph shows
the distribution of support for the 48 amendments offered to a total of 13 House Appropriations bills on which recorded votes were taken. Unlike Budget, support for appropriations amendments was almost evenly distributed between 25 and close to 100 percent support. There is no clustering in the mid-40 percent range that attested to the divisiveness of the budget amendments considered. While only one in five of the budget amendments were adopted, one out of every two appropriations amendments that were offered was approved.4

In spite of the fact that virtually all the close budget amendments involved spending totals, the individual bills that would ultimately make up those same totals exhibited little of the conflict evident on the budget resolution. Figure 5-3 shows the distinctive differences in the percent support for final passage received by the two House budget resolutions and the thirteen House Appropriations bills in 1979, differences that do not appear significantly different from those first seen in 1975 (see Figure 4-1). More appropriations bills received in excess of 90 percent support on final passage in 1975, but in 1979, support for most bills remained high. In addition, the two appropriations bills that had the lowest level of support had often been similarly divisive on previous occasions. The bill that failed (Apps 1) was the Legislative Appropriations bill and the next most divisive (Apps 11) was the Foreign Aid bill.

Even though, on one level, the HBC did indeed seem to ‘absorb a lot of the political heat’ that might otherwise have effected appropriation process, the relationship between the two panels had become increasingly strained by 1979. While the HBC regularly took political center-stage, the HAC was preoccupied with limiting the institutional implications of reform. In spite of the considerable constraints placed on the
HBC, the new process had clearly weakened the position and influence of the HAC in the House, and the fact that the HBC membership had so quickly become so much more junior and liberal than its still-powerful rival only made the adjustment a more difficult one for the HAC. In addition, the HAC had a new chairman in 1979—and one who was considerably less supportive of the new process than his predecessor had been.

George Mahon (D-Tx.), whose support had been critical to reform being passed in 1973-74, had been replaced as chairman at the beginning of 1979 by Jamie Whitten (D-La.). Whitten brought a very different style and set of priorities to the job, and in spite of having been deeply involved in the reform efforts of 1973, was much more aggressive in defending his Committee against any intrusions into its jurisdiction from what he clearly considered to be the ‘upstart’ HBC. Along with several other committee chairmen, Whitten was quick to protest the floor consideration of the FY1980 budget: “We are greatly distressed about the increasing tendency of the Budget Committee to construct their recommendations for overall aggregate targets on the basis of individual program line items… I am afraid we are losing sight of the basic objectives of the Budget Act” (quoted in CQWR, May 12, 1979, p. 878). Yet many other members also voiced similar concerns, including the man responsible for a great deal of the 1974 Act, Richard Bolling of Missouri, who remarked after the floor debacle of 1979 that the process “has gotten less and less macro and more and more micro. That’s exactly the opposite of what I had in mind” (quoted in CQWR, May 12, 1979, p. 878).

Strengthening the Process and Democratic Collapse, 1980

The pressures that had been evident on the process in 1979 only increased in 1980 when the Democratic administration responded to continued economic problems by
aggressively pushing for a balanced budget. This search for balance finally caused the fragile Democratic budget coalition to collapse, as it had threatened to do virtually every year since the process had been introduced. The HBC’s relations with other committees became particularly strained when it, as part of the effort to reach balance, included reconciliation instructions in the first resolution for the first time in 1980. At the Committee stage, six liberals withdrew their support from the Democratic proposal and the leadership was forced to make major concessions in pursuit of the necessary Republican votes—including $17.4 billion in cuts below Carter’s budget and a $10.3 productivity tax cut. The reconciliation instructions ordered eight authorizing committees in each chamber to make $9.1 billion in cuts and required Ways and Means to come up with $22.2 billion in taxes (CQWR, April 26, 1980, p. 1098). Naturally, most of the standing committee chairmen were up in arms at the very notion of their committees being dictated to by the Budget Committee, and Morris Udall (D-Ariz) led their efforts to have the reconciliation instructions removed.

The reconciliation instructions required the named committees to cut spending to the levels specified in the first resolution. They were unprecedented in two respects; they had never before been used to force major changes in policy nor had binding targets ever been included in the First resolution before. Under the Budget Act, only the totals in the second resolution were to be binding, as the whole point of having a second resolution had been to avoid getting locked into specific targets at the very beginning of the session. Drawing on the 1974 Act’s “elastic clause” (that the resolution could be used to address “such other matters relating to the budget as may be appropriate to carry out the purposes of this Act”), the HBC in 1980 had also introduced a new rule that any appropriations bill
that exceeded its allocation limit would be held at the desk (i.e., not sent to the president even if it was approved by both chambers), and had extended resolution recommendations through FY 1982 and FY 1983. The Committee’s increasingly junior and ambitious members were seen by many Democrats to be “grossly overstepping their bounds” as one Democratic staff person put it—and their actions heightened internal tensions and rivalries among Democrats. Whitten was "after the Budget Committee with a pitchfork" explained the same staff person, and the Committee’s actions had certainly “given him some reasons to be”. 5

Criticism of the HBC in 1980 extended well beyond the very vocal protests of the HAC chairman. Their use of reconciliation instructions was widely attacked for invading the jurisdictions of the standing committees and greatly restricting the committees’ discretion within their own jurisdictions. Sixteen Democratic committee chairmen and subcommittee chairmen signed a letter to Speaker O’Neill to bring the Udall amendment striking the reconciliation instructions to the floor (CQWR, April 19 1980, p.1057).

Floor consideration of the FY1981 budget resolution was very different from that of the previous year. After the debilitating stream of amendments that the resolution had been subjected to in 1979, the Rules Committee granted a modified open rule that sharply limited floor amendments for the first time since the new process had been introduced. Only eight major amendments were permitted, apparently chosen by the Committee from “a field of several dozen” (CQWR, April 19, 1980, p. 1057). Although HBC Republicans had supported the resolution for the first time ever in Committee, it soon became apparent that their support was unlikely to be continued on the floor; several Republican alternatives to the HBC resolution were proposed and the Republican Policy Committee
declined to take a position on the resolution. The Udall amendment striking the
reconciliation provisions was among those amendments made in order and brought to the
floor on May 7, 1980.

In spite of all the internal resistance to the new process that had been evident in
the House over the past five years, the Udall amendment was easily defeated by a margin
of 127-289. The vote split the Democrats, 107-158, and in line with their reputation for
fiscal conservatism, southern Democrats overwhelmingly voted against the Udall
amendment, 20-63. Yet a narrow majority of nonsouthern Democrats (87-95) also voted
down the Udall changes. Until this point, the security of outsize majorities had
encouraged the Democrats to allow the considerable internal resistance to the new
process to hold at bay the constituency and partisan pressures for budgetary change that
had played such a large part in producing reform in the first place. Judging by the ease
with which the Udall amendment was defeated, however, the situation in 1980 seemed to
have been reversed.

The defeat of the Udall amendment showed that even before the election of
Ronald Reagan and the completion of the southern realignment in the early-mid 1980s, a
clear majority of House Democrats were willing to greatly strengthen the process in spite
of the potentially devastating implications of doing so for the internal status quo. The
reconciliation instructions only named eight committees and ordered relatively modest
cuts, but it set an important procedural precedent which meant that, given sufficient
support on the floor (both for the resolution and the separate reconciliation legislation)
any of the standing committees could become the target of similar instructions in the
future. As they had done in the early 1970s, House Democrats, who could barely agree
on their basic goals and priorities, had again established a procedure that not only seemed well beyond their own ability to control but particularly susceptible to a takeover by their ideological opponents.

Although its advances were conditional upon floor support, the HBC had managed to greatly expand its power at the expense of the standing committees, and a sizeable majority of members had voted to sustain their action and to defeat the Udall amendment. The power to propose reconciliation instructions was in itself another important agenda-setting influence; if included in the committee resolution they could potentially be politically very difficult to remove on the floor. After having participated in the HBC deliberations in March, Democrat Bill Gray (Pa.)--who would later become HBC chairman--indirectly offered some insight into the failure of the Udall amendment when he commented that, “the 1980s will be an era of budget politics. For the first time we will be dealing with limitations and dwindling resources. The crucial question we face is how to take these limited capacities and determine what our priorities should be” (quoted in CQWR, March 29, 1980, p. 847). Although the 1980 reconciliation instructions represented only limited adjustments to the budgetary margins, Democratic support for reconciliation was perhaps facilitated by a more general awareness that the crucial questions that Gray referred to could not be put off indefinitely.

The strengthening of the budget process in 1980 was also accompanied by a major shift in the general level of support for passage of the thirteen regular appropriations bill. For the first time, the high levels of support that most appropriations bills had typically received on the floor were absent (Figure 5-4), and three bills that would become central to the budget battles of the next two decades--Treasury, Postal
Service and General Government, District of Columbia and Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary—were all approved by less than veto-proof majorities.

In the summer of 1980, the fragile Democratic budget coalition finally disintegrated, as it had constantly threatened to do since the dry run of 1975. In the elections that fall, House Democrats suffered a net loss of 23 seats and effective control of the chamber reverted to the conservative coalition of southern Democrats and Republicans. In January 1981, Ronald Reagan moved into the White House with an ambitious economic policy agenda.
Cementing the Changes: The Arrival of The Reagan Administration, 1981-82

The beginning of the Reagan administration in 1981 completed this shift toward a more conflictual and more overtly partisan budgetary process that had begun with the introduction of the new system in 1975. The failure to set the new HBC on the same institutional footing as the chamber’s other committees, combined with the inherently divisive nature of its responsibilities, all but guaranteed that the production of the resolution would quickly become a party- rather than a committee-based responsibility. The use of the Rules Committee to “run interference” for the HBC,6 the leadership intervention in its disputes with other committees, the leadership task force on the resolution in 1979--were all ways in which the majority party leadership had become actively involved in the process prior to 1980.

The defeat of the Udall amendment and the acceptance of reconciliation instructions in the first resolution for the first time in 1980 signaled that a clear majority of the Democratic rank-and-file was finally willing to strengthen the process. The elements of the more centralized partisan budget process were in place by 1980. The shift in patterns of floor approval for House appropriations bills following Democratic efforts to strengthen the budget process in 1980 would set the pattern for years to come. As the budget process became consolidated within the House as a purely partisan exercise, the high levels of support that House appropriations bills had consistently attracted in the prereform House--as well as through the first few shaky years of the new budget process--became increasingly scarce (see Appendix A). The shock of the first two budget resolutions under the Reagan administration caused chaos among Democratic ranks but ultimately led to, if not an explicit consolidation of support for the process, then
an implicit recognition that they would have to learn to live with it and more actively seek to control it.

The dramatic use of reconciliation by Reagan’s budgeteers, first in 1981 and again in 1982, is well-known and has been widely documented elsewhere (Stockman 1986; White and Wildavsky 1989). The 1980 elections had destroyed the Democratic coalition that had struggled to control the process throughout the early years of its operation in the House, effectively ceded control of the chamber to the conservative coalition, and had generated an overwhelming sense of Republican momentum as the 97th Congress convened in January 1981.

The political climate had also helped the more conservative James Jones (Okla.) to narrowly beat out DSG chairman David Obey (Wisc.) for the chairmanship of the HBC. As in 1972, the 1980 election—again temporarily—saw a popular, conservative president create the impression of constituency consequences for members who opposed his administration on fiscal issues. Jones expressed concerns almost identical to those voiced by Wilbur Mills in 1972 (see Chapter 2, p. 63) when he remarked early in 1981 that, “I think Congress will respond to what the American people want…If we are perceived as going back to fiscal chaos, there isn’t a Democrat or Republican who would be safe in the next election” (quoted in *CQWR*, Jan. 10, 1981, p. 63).

The fact that Democrats had set the precedent the previous year in terms of including reconciliation instructions in the first resolution all but guaranteed that the conservatives would follow suit. Jones did manage to put together a budget that Committee Democrats (with the notable exception of Phil Gramm of Texas) could support, but only by making extensive concessions to the party’s conservative wing and
the general ‘economy mood’ of the country. The House version included reconciliation instructions requiring savings of $15.8 billion in FY 1982, nearly double the amount of the previous year, but still considerably lower than the $36.9 billion demanded by Republican Senate resolution (CQWR, May 2, 1981).

As floor consideration approached, it became increasingly obvious to Democratic whips that they simply did not have the votes to carry the resolution. In a last-minute effort to woo conservatives, the leadership made a floor amendment in order that would have substituted Reagan’s defense total for the lower Budget Committee figure. This was clearly a desperate move because, as in previous years, they risked losing liberal support as a result of any concessions made to conservatives and especially so on defense spending. Even this, however, could not prevent the conservative Gramm-Latta (Reagan) budget from prevailing on the floor by a comfortable 253-176 margin. Reconciliation instructions in this alternative totaled an unprecedented $36.6 billion-six times that of the previous year.

Under Gramm-Latta, virtually every standing committee in the House was required to make cuts. Among the hardest hit in terms of the absolute size of the cuts were the traditionally liberal strongholds of Education and Labor, Energy and Commerce, Public Works and Transportation. Most committees struggled to report out their required savings--Energy and Commerce failed to do so and the party contingents on each instead sent separate letters to the HBC that detailed their preferred targets for cuts. Democrats complained bitterly but could do little. Education and Labor chairman Carl Perkins (Ky.) spoke for many Democrats when he complained about his committee having been forced to act “with a gun pointed at our heads” (quoted in CQWR, June 13, 1981, p. 1030). In a
similar vein, Post Office and Civil Service met their reconciliation requirements, but their report also included a plea for the House reject them. Although some committees used creative accounting techniques to come up with their cuts, Democrats were powerless to derail the process and Congress completed action on the reconciliation package that cut close to $35.2 billion from the FY 1982 budget on July 31, 1981.

The way that reconciliation was used in 1981 had a tremendous long-term impact on the process as it bestowed upon it the recognition and significance that, as the past six years had shown, that the structural changes alone had failed to infer. The use of reconciliation--first in 1980, and then more extensively in 1981--is widely referred to as having “put teeth in the process”. As former HBC member, Butler Derrick explained, it’s one thing to produce a first resolution, “but the problem is trying to live by it-and that’s what reconciliation makes you do.”

The first two years of the Reagan administration also seemed to confirm that the process required a certain configuration of constituency and partisan factors in order to overcome internal resistance and opposition and play a significant role within the House. Once again, it took center stage in the context of divided government and, once again, the Democrats were forced to define themselves and their substantive policy goals in opposition to those of an ideologically hostile administration that was pushing its own agenda. As Beryl Anthony (D-Ark) recalled:

A lot of the focus on the Democratic side came to the Budget Committee to try to put together a spending plan that articulated what our values were, what the Democratic party stood for versus what the Republican party stood for. We knew that we had to juxtapose the Democratic party against Ronald Reagan. And it fell largely to the Budget Committee, working with the leadership, to establish those priorities. And then to push those priorities and try and get those priorities implemented. Or at least make the public understand that this is what you care about, this is what they
care about. And that’s where you’re getting down to politics in its hardest form because it was all done toward making sure that the public was more attuned to the Democratic party than the Republican party. 10

These, of course, were the same kinds of pressures under which the process had been created and that appeared to activate and emphasize it once more under Reagan.

Specifically, they were pressures to set and promote a collective agenda even though most members knew full well that the Republican Senate and president would never permit the enactment of this agenda. In this manner, the realities of divided government reinforced internal inclinations to view the process as an agenda-setting mechanism with only tenuous connections to the legislative process and to policy outcomes.

Yet just as in the case of reform, the strong partisan and constituency pressures that made the process more important as an agenda-setting opportunity also generated huge amounts of internal opposition and resentment to the resolution acquiring any significant influence over policy outcomes and thereby diminishing the power and influence of other committees. The events of 1981 had given members of the Democratic majority new and compelling reasons to be nervous about the process, and the internal opposition that had simmered below the surface, once again reached a critical threshold in 1981-82. While Congressional Quarterly had headlined their preview of the FY1982 congressional budget as “Beleagured Process Faces New Pressures in 1981” (CQWR, January 10, 1981, p. 62), it had become “Budget Experts Warn Process Could Fall Under 1982 Strains” by the following year (January 23, 1982, p. 115).

Internal tensions once again reached a peak in May 1982, when HAC chair Jamie Whitten offered an amendment to the FY 1983 resolution to remove provisions for the deferred enrollment of Appropriations bills that exceeded their allocations under the first
budget resolution. Deferred enrollment meant that such bills would not be sent to the 
president until after Congress had approved a second budget resolution. This provision 
provided the process with one of its few meaningful controls, and although it was not 
surprising that Whitten brought such an amendment, the leadership was apparently 
caught off-guard when the amendment was approved by the full House, 212-206.

The events of 1981-82 once more demonstrated that the problems that had 
plagued the floor consideration of budget resolutions since the inception of the new 
process were well beyond the power of the Budget Committee to control. In both these 
years, HBC chairman Jones stuck to the norm established by his predecessors of working 
within his own party and reporting out budget resolutions that were supported by 
Committee Democrats and opposed by Committee Republicans. Yet this proved to be of 
absolutely no help in getting the resolution passed on the floor. In 1981, after the 
administration refused to accept any amendments to their budget, the Rules Committee 
had opted to allow only two viable alternatives to be considered on the floor; the 
conservative Gramm-Latta substitute and the Committee (Jones) resolution, that would 
significantly be offered on the floor by Conservative Democratic Forum (CDF) member, 

In their handling of the budget FY 1982 budget resolution in 1981, Democrats 
clearly sought to avoid a repeat of 1979, where over 40 very specific amendments had 
been offered on the floor and had not only undermined the integrity of the resolution but 
had greatly fueled internal tensions over the Committee’s efforts. Yet the alternative-- 
that of strictly limiting floor consideration to only a few substitutes to the Committee 
resolution--was precisely the wrong strategy at the wrong time for the Democrats in
1981. After the assassination attempt of March 30, Reagan’s popularity increased significantly across the country, particularly in the districts of the Democratic ‘Boll Weevils’. As David Stockman later put it, the restrictive rule “virtually ensured easy passage of our budget… [it] reduced the decision on U.S. economic policy for the 1980s to a political question: ‘Whose side are you on?’” (Stockman 1986, p. 174).

In an effort to avoid a repeat of 1981, Democratic leaders in 1982 again reverted to their previous floor strategy of allowing a maximum number of Democratic amendments to be offered on the floor, in the hope of building a budget coalition by letting everyone have their chance to amend the resolution. In 1982, the FY 1983 budget resolution received “the most complex rule that had ever been done”, as one involved Rules Committee staff person described it. The rule became known as ‘king of the hill’, after the children’s game in which the last person left standing wins. In this case, the Rules Committee made seven alternative budgets in order and selected some 68 amendments out of the more than 150 that had been submitted to the Committee (CQWR, May 22, 1982, p. 1174; submission estimate from personal interview source). The alternatives were split into two separate parts, A and B, with Part B containing the three that were considered the most likely to succeed.

As noted above, the range of alternatives and the high number of amendments that were made in order marked a final Democratic return to the strategy of inclusion and openness as a way to build a budget coalition on the floor. Yet the rule was much more an reflection of the political climate, primarily devised to “work around the fact that there simply were not enough votes to pass a Democratic resolution.” Again, debate stretched out over several days, and again the open process caused more problems than it
solved. Though the major Republican alternative was defeated, so too were all of the Democratic versions after what one staff member described as “major blood-letting” on the floor.

Figure 5-5: Distribution of Support (percent of those voting) for 31 Amendments to the First Budget Resolution (on which recorded votes were taken), 1982

Figure 5-5 shows a distribution of support across the roll calls taken on 31 amendments to the House Budget resolution in 1982 very similar to that of 1979 (Figure 5-1). Slightly more of the amendments (9) were successful and the same clustering of failed amendments is evident in the 40-49 percent range. The proportion approved was slightly higher than in 1979--30 percent instead of 20. The big difference, of course, was that while the first resolution that had attracted so many amendments in 1979 had passed, its 1982 equivalent did not. No amount of bargaining, debate or logrolling could get
around the fact that the Democrats could not muster a majority in support of their budget resolution. It was defeated (along with all the other plans) on a 171-253 vote.

The resolution went back to the Committee, and this time around, Jones’s ‘free-lancing’ was replaced by leadership control. As one staff member recalled, it was at this point that the leadership commitment to an open and inclusive floor process evaporated:

It became clear that everyone having their say was actually creating chaos because you would get a series of what we call cut and bite amendments and pretty soon, the budget that came out of committee, that should have been reflecting the view of the majority leadership in the House—pretty soon you had everyone trying to pick at it because they didn’t get what they wanted… by the time we got to the floor [in ‘82], Jones had no leadership support, he had other Democratic budgets and he had no Republican support… going back for the second time around, the leadership then came in and said, ‘here’s how you’re going to do it.’

When the leadership brought the resolution to the floor again in early June, only a single (HBC) Democratic and a single Republican alternative were made in order as substitutes to Reagan’s budget, which would be voted on only if both alternatives failed. After the Democratic alternative was defeated 202-225, the Republican version again prevailed by a 219-206 margin (\textit{CQWR}, June 12, 1982, p. 1387). The leadership position was defeated but their strategy did succeed in limiting the in-fighting among Democrats— or at least how much of it was done in public. The first attempt of 1982 was the last time that the resolution would ever go to the floor under such an open rule and the last time that a majority party has ever lost control of the process to their opponents.

After the revised Democratic plan was rejected on June 10, 1982, the Republican alternative, sponsored by ranking HBC Republican Del Latta, was approved by the House, 220-207. The narrower margin than the Gramm-Latta vote of 1981 (253-176), however, reflected a loss of momentum behind the conservative agenda as well as a
resurgence of internal resistance to the newly-strengthened process. The 1982 budget called for more modest cuts; reconciliation instructions were again included, though the required savings totaled $4.2 billion in budget authority and $8.1 billion in outlays (down from $36 billion total of 1981). There was also an effort to address the gaping hole in the revenue base created by the tax cuts of the previous year--the HWMC was instructed to find another $20.9 billion in revenues for FY 1983 (CQWR, June 12, 1982, p. 1387).

Partisan Consolidation

Far from being the direct result of the 1980 elections and the actions of the Reagan administration, the events of 1981-82 represented the culmination of a number of trends that had been evident with respect to the new budget process ever since its introduction in 1975. In the early 1970s, many members had supported the process as more of a political or symbolic statement of congressional intent and not as something that most of them wanted or expected to have a significant impact on internal arrangements or policy outcomes. Internal resistance was high from the very first year of the process, and without the external pressure of a president of the opposing party or a significant economic downturn, members generally were not inclined to try and use the process as a way to push through significant policy changes. There was little agreement among House Democrats on issues of fiscal policy and the institutionally weak committee, combined with open floor consideration of the resolution only exacerbated the deep divisions within the party. The HBC soon proved itself incapable of producing resolutions that could pass on the floor, and it was only by mixing and matching broad concessions to their opposing factions that the Democratic leadership managed to cobble together narrow floor majorities to support the resolution through the 1970s.
The recession of 1979, followed by the partisan shock of the Reagan administration, however, destroyed this fragile arrangement and pushed the Democratic leadership to become more actively and consistently involved in both the formulation and consideration of the resolution. The Mineta task force in 1979, the unprecedented use of a modified open rule for floor consideration in 1980 and the defeat of the Udall amendment that same year all showed a significant shift in both leadership involvement as well as rank-and-file willingness to support and strengthen the infant process.

While the Democratic majority in the late 1970s did move to strengthen the process procedurally, it (in particular, through the appropriations process) proved unable to muster the political will to make the considerable policy changes that external conditions demanded, and the Boll Weevils and the Republicans moved to fill this vacuum during the first two years of the Reagan administration. Through their use of reconciliation, the conservative coalition demonstrated the potency of the process as a mechanism for major policy change. To do so, however, meant bypassing or circumventing the traditional committee system, a move that inevitably generated massive internal stresses and tensions. The symbolism and good intentions that had encouraged members to support the reform bill in 1973--as well as to strengthen the process in the late 1970s--were quickly overwhelmed by the shock of the substantive policy changes and internal fallout produced by the first two budgets under the Reagan administration.

The strong Democratic reaction against the Reagan budgets and the administration’s broader agenda clearly helped consolidate leadership control of the Committee--that most members came to accept as necessary to forestall any further
budgetary or electoral losses to the Republicans. During the transition period most majority Democrats had wanted the process to survive but at the same time, they also sought to preserve the internal status quo and its policy outcomes. The budget battles of 1981 and 1982 provided a maximal disruption to both and in doing so, loosened many of the internal constraints on the process.

At the end of 1982, the budget process in the House once again seemed to be faced with many of the same problems that had plagued it since its introduction in 1975. Among majority Democrats, dissatisfaction with the process was rife and its future, once more, called into question. Yet the constituency-level pressures that had fueled congressional acceptance of so much of the Reagan agenda in 1981-82 also produced two other major changes--one internal and one partisan--that would prove critical to the long-term consolidation of the process. First, the publicity and national attention that Reagan had exposed the process to led many members to recognize it as much more important and salient than it had been prior to 1981 and made it considerably less likely that that the Committee or the process would be abandoned or repealed.

This first change was largely due to the use of reconciliation in 1981-82 which, as former Budget Committee member and chairman Leon Panetta (D-Ca.) explained, forced members to pay attention to the process because it demonstrated that “you could not only take control of a budget resolution but actually implement through legislative changes that could significantly impact programs that a lot of people thought would never be touched. Suddenly reconciliation became the teeth in the budget process that everyone had assumed would never really bite.”  

In the words of two former members of Congress, Stephen Solarz (D-NY) agreed with Panetta that the losses of 1981 and 1982
“sensitized people to the potential significance of the reconciliation process”, 15 and many members became a lot more interested and involved in the process, simply “because they knew that it could make a difference.” 16

On top of the procedural shock of reconciliation, Reagan’s high-profile involvement gave the process and the HBC a major political role that helped the Committee offset its lack of formal institutional power. According to another former HBC chairman, James Jones (D-Okla.), the Committee had “no real power” prior to 1981, but after Reagan connected with “a national constituency that said budgets are important… he created that perception of power, and the real power was in the voting booth back in your home district. And so there, all of a sudden, the Budget chairman had some real power to deal with the other committees. That’s where it started changing.” 17

The second major change that was consolidated in the wake of the 1981-82 budgets was a renewed commitment among the Democratic leadership and rank-and-file to budget resolutions as statements of party philosophy and priorities. This, of course, meant that meaningful participation in the production of budget resolutions was once again restricted to members of the majority party, both by leadership design and by the unified opposition of the minority. As they had been in the late 1970s, budget resolutions after 1982 were again consistently negotiated and debated among the majority party members on the Committee in consultation among themselves and with the membership of their respective Caucus or Conference.

In the post-Gramm-Latta era, however, the big difference was that efforts by Democrats to make changes to the chairman’s mark--either in Committee or on the floor—all but disappeared; a particularly startling turnaround when the number and frequency
of Democratic amendments in the pre-Reagan years is considered. With virtually all
decisions regarding the resolution and its content being made prior to the HBC markup,
the production of the annual budget resolution after 1982 ceased to be a committee-based
task and became the responsibility of the House majority party. As noted in the previous
chapter, the party leadership had often intervened in support of the HBC during the late
1970s, but after 1982 their involvement became institutionalized.

As had been the case in 1979, this was not a proactive decision by a Democratic
majority that had an extensive or particularly ambitious agenda to push in 1983. It was
essentially a politically defensive reaction to the conservative budgets of 1981-82 that
intensified leadership efforts to push Democratic unity on the resolution above what it
might otherwise have been. The requirements of the budget process, combined with the
political and economic conditions of the times had created new and compelling incentives
to articulate and promote whatever consensus could be found—or manufactured—on
budget issues among members of the Democratic majority. Regardless of the significant
differences existed between them, for many Democrats the lesson of 1981-82 was that it
would be far less costly to work those out than to open the door to a conservative
alternative. The actual level of involvement of the party leadership in producing the
resolution after 1982 varied from year to year as they worked on an oversight basis to
ensure that the resolution was broadly consistent with Caucus preferences.

The internal pressure on the process by the end of 1982 was so high that some
contended that further reforms were unavoidable in order to head off “a mass internal
rebellion” (CQWR, August 7, 1982, p. 1891). Boling had appointed a Rules Committee
task force in 1982 (headed by Anthony Beilenson, D-Ca.) to review the process and
present its recommendations for reform in the next Congress. Yet one of his key staff members maintains that he did so only reluctantly, as he felt it was still too early to expose the process to risks inherent in taking a reform package to the floor. Given the chaos that had frequently broken out over floor consideration of the annual resolutions, any outcome seemed possible, including the outright repeal of the 1974 Act.

Agitation for reform was widespread among Democrats: HAC chairman Jamie Whitten had strongly signaled his dissatisfaction with his process-weakening amendment of 1982, Gephardt and Panetta had pushed Bolling for the creation of the Rules Committee task force on budget reform (and both subsequently sat on the panel), and Appropriator and HBC member David Obey had laid out his own reform proposal in his Additional Views on the FY 1983 Budget Resolution. Budget issues were overwhelming the House, generating “an enormous amount of senseless conflict” Obey argued, “not because they get solved but because they don’t.”

The use of reconciliation instructions in the first resolution in 1981 and 1982 had created strong internal tensions among Democrats, and as support for the Whitten amendment in 1982 had suggested, many members appeared more than willing to further undermine the process in the House. Yet one former member suggested that Whitten’s amendment was not supported as a serious effort to weaken the process but rather as “an opportunity to send a message to our leadership that said ‘better open your eyes and start working with us or we’ll wreck this place’.” If this was the case, then rank-and-file dissatisfaction at the time may have been less with the process itself and more with the way that it was being run by the leadership. The latter, of course, changed dramatically the following year.
In many respects, then, the prospects for the process at the beginning of 1983 did not look good. After the floor debacle over the first resolution in 1982, Speaker O’Neill had been ready to give up on the process and move Appropriations bills without a resolution (CQWR, June 5, 1982, p. 1327). Although it was avoided in that particular year, Congress subsequently set May 15 as a deadline by which, if the budget resolution had not been passed, the HAC could formally begin work on their annual bills. This occurred in 1983 and on several subsequent occasions thereafter. Every time that Congress moves appropriations bills without a resolution in place, it undermines the substantive import of the resolution and further consolidates member perceptions of the resolution as a political document at the expense of its intended role as a blueprint for subsequent decision-making.

The primary rationale for having a budget resolution was to guide subsequent taxing and spending decisions. If the majority moves on appropriations bills without a resolution being in place, the resolution inevitably becomes less and less relevant. In most years, the resolution has been approved roughly one month after the statutory deadline, but in 1985 and 1991, agreement was only reached on a budget resolution after October 1 and the beginning of the fiscal year which it was intended to cover. Although there are many other reasons why for delays in passing the annual appropriations bills, figures from the House resolution were often still used as a guide by the HAC. The lack of formal approval, however, clearly makes enforcement of those figures highly problematic.

The process in 1983 also faced a future without one of its strongest and most influential supporters, Rules Committee chairman Richard Bolling (D-Mo.) who retired
at the end of the 97th Congress in 1982. As noted in the previous chapter, Bolling had used the Rules Committee to provide critical support and protection for the infant process, and the new chairman, Claude Pepper of Florida had neither the ability nor the inclination to continue to do so. As one staff member described it, Bolling’s departure left gaping holes all over the ‘offensive line’ that Rules had previously provided for the HBC. 22

Why then did the new process survive this tumultuous transition period? Given that the Democrats formally held majority status throughout this period, the endogeneity of House rules suggests that by the late 1970s the process should have been shunted aside just as deftly as the previous experiment with a legislative budget had been in the late 1940s. By the end of 1982, it did not appear to have directly furthered the policy goals of any particular legislative majority—except those of the conservative coalition—which had only gained control of the chamber in 1981. Yet it had somehow managed to survive its first six years in spite of the fact that by 1979, its operations had begun to threaten the substantive interests of the titular majority, including their “collective reputation” with the potential to affect the reelection fates of all its members (Cox and McCubbins 1993).

While a majority of members are expected to alter rules that are no longer seen as serving their best interests, members ‘best interests’ with respect to the budget process and policy outcomes in the 1970s and early 1980s became more complex and conflictual, making the act of changing the rules in itself, a politically charged issue. As had occurred during congressional consideration of the reform bill in 1973, constituency-level considerations provided the critical incentives for members to support and maintain the new process. In the same way that many members had supported budget reform on
symbolic grounds, its untimely demise in the late 1970s would have handed conservatives an equally potent political symbol of congressional irresponsibility. The 1982 recession had only heightened public concern over the rapid increases in annual deficits that had been produced by the combination of the massive revenue losses of the Kemp-Roth tax bill and Reagan’s defense buildup. For members to have seriously weakened or undermined the only process through which Congress could reasonably be expected to address the problem of deficits problem would have been all but impossible for most members to justify or explain to their concerned constituents.

Reinforcing this political rationale for maintaining the process was a more practical concern over the continued rise of entitlement or mandatory spending, one that was significantly shared by both the Appropriations and the Budget Committees. Appropriators may have generally been wary of the HBC and its potential to interfere in their responsibility for federal spending decisions, but they also seem to have recognized that this new process also provided the only institutional channel through which the continued rise of entitlement or mandatory spending might conceivably be checked. The growing proportion of the budget consumed by such programs had been a major part of the reason that Appropriators (and especially chairman Mahon) had supported reform in the early 1970s and this growth had continued unabated through the second half of the decade. Entitlement spending had surpassed discretionary accounts for the first time back in 1975, and its explosive growth showed no signs of abating. While discretionary spending increased 28 percent between 1980 and 1983, entitlement accounts rose 41 percent over the same period (CBO).
The first two Reagan budgets had starkly demonstrated the political and administrative limitations of relying solely on cuts in discretionary spending to constrain the deficit, and many members on both sides of the aisle began to recognize that adjustments to entitlement programs were becoming unavoidable. This was particularly the case among members of the 1982 freshmen class, many of whose members “were aware that our long-term budget problem was really related to the entitlement programs,” a viewpoint that facilitated a critical easing of tensions with Whitten and the HAC, as well as a slight bump in support for the budget process as the only mechanism through which Congress could make changes or adjustments to existing entitlement laws.

The institutionalization of the process, in spite of the considerable internal problems and political tensions that it evoked within the House, was also greatly facilitated by the rapid turnover of membership that occurred in the decade between congressional consideration of reform and 1983. It is interesting to note that turnover had been relatively low in the years preceding reform; almost two out of every three members in the 93rd House (during which reform was passed) had served four or more terms. Members first elected in 1971 and 1973 had tended to be strongly supportive of reform efforts in the early 1970s (see CQWR, April 21, 1973, p. 900) but their numbers had been far from decisive in 1973. The subsequent election of large freshmen classes in 1974, 1978, 1980 and 1982 proved critical in the consolidation of the process over the long-term. These members were much less likely to challenge the process than their more senior counterparts, and by 1983, over half of the entire House membership had no experience of the chamber without a budget process in place (Ornstein et al. 2000).
Throughout this transition period, freshmen members clearly saw the process in a very different light than did their more senior counterparts. Part of this was due to obvious disparities in institutional power; as described in Chapter 2, the more senior members had the most to lose under any internal reforms, while newer members had no such stake in the status quo. As former Rep. William Broadhead (D-Mich) also explained, the more junior members were inevitably more influenced by the recent changes in broader political and economic conditions as running for the first time, “you are explaining to the voters the approach that you would take, and [in 1975] there was a need to explain to the voters what you felt about the fact that the government was continually running very high deficits. And so each of us [the Watergate class] had to address the issue in a more philosophical way than a member who was running for reelection…” 24 This “philosophical” orientation clearly fit well with the comprehensive new budget process and its focus on aggregate-level totals and overall priorities, one that would only become more important as deficits became an increasingly dominant concern through the 1980s and into the 1990s.

Members elected after 1975, therefore, tended to have both significant electoral and institutional incentives to get involved in and support the process. As deficits skyrocketed from $27.7 billion in FY 1976 to $195.4 billion for FY 1983 (CBO), so did the interest of successive freshmen classes in the budget process. Many of these members coveted assignment to the Committee for many of the same reasons that likely discouraged more senior members from serving. The term limit and lack of formal influence, for example, made committee service unappealing for many senior members who tended to see HBC service as a distraction from their major committee. These
members had remained dedicated to advancement on the terms established in the prereform House; specialization, and a long, slow rise up through the ranks of their major committee.

To many of the newer members, however, service on the Budget Committee was attractive because, unlike any other Committee in the House, the term limit offered the possibility of a (relatively speaking) meteoric rise to the top; a member could become chairman with only a few years of service under his or her belt. Similarly, the lack of institutional power was much less of an issue for more technocratic junior members who recognized the publicity potential of the Committee and its issues. The Committee’s appeal for more junior members was cemented by the publicity that surrounded the so-called “Gang of Five” in 1980. The Democratic budget coalition fell apart in early 1980 as House liberals finally withdrew their support from the resolution, first in Committee and then on the floor. The opposition of liberal Democrats forced the Committee to move to the right, firstly to get the resolution out of Committee, and secondly, to garner sufficient support on the floor. For the first time ever, the resolution received bipartisan support at the Committee level and attracted few--but sufficient--Republican votes (22) on the floor to push the resolution through without liberal support.

The liberals continued their fight through the conference proceedings, however, and five of them--Leon Panetta (Ca.), Timothy Wirth (Colo.), Richard Gephardt (Mo.), Norman Mineta (Ca.) and William Brodhead (Mich.)--all Democratic members of the HBC, very publicly refused to sign off on the conference agreement when it was brought before the House at the end of May 1980. These members may have been following the lead of both their own president and Speaker, but their actions clearly highlighted the
divisions within the party and gave ammunition to their conservative opponents. Far from suffering recriminations, however, the internal and electoral profiles of several of the individual “gang” members received considerable boosts. As a senior staff person noted, the example of the Gang of Five was a formative one in terms of the Committee’s appeal—“those guys figured it out good. They could play, they could break out of the pack on that Committee…once they got there and did very well getting headlines and things like that--every [junior member] that came along after that wanted assignment to Budget.”

In the 1982 elections, most of the Democratic gains came from campaigns that had emphasized deficit reduction. So much so that in 1983, freshman Buddy Mackay (D-Fl.) organized an informal Budget Study Group specifically to help his class members become better acquainted with the process and its implications. It quickly became an important and influential group; later that year, fifty-two out of the fifty-eight freshmen supported the Budget Committee resolution on the floor and in 1985 Mackay and classmates Barbara Boxer (D-Ca.) and Jim Slattery (D-Kan.) won seats on the Committee. The freshmen and junior members who served on the HBC did so because it dealt with issues that were important and salient to the people who had voted them in. They had no experience of a House without a budget process and quickly accepted it to an extent that did not seem possible among their more senior colleagues.

Another reason that the process survived was ironically due to the very “flexibility” that lay behind so many of the problems of its chaotic transition period. This argument was advanced by several key Democratic members and staff interviewed for this project who, while frustrated by the limitations of the process, also saw its flexibility
as a critical in giving it the chance to succeed. As one high-level staff member explained, it “meant that [it] didn’t come under attack right away as totally limiting or constraining the jurisdiction of the traditional committees or altering the balance of power within the House.”

Former chairman Jones (D-Okla.) also emphasized this same quality when he described the Budget Act as “a little bit like our Constitution… a living breathing document that is interpreted in a way that meets the needs of the times.” As noted above, this flexibility may have helped the process to survive but it also played havoc with internal arrangements, and injected high levels of conflict and uncertainty into an institution that had previously exhibited very little of either.

Several interviewees for this project also suggested that critical support for the new process during this period came from the Rules Committee that had produced the House version of the 1974 Act. There is little visible evidence of this, as it was apparently done on a very informal basis with no direct link to the annual consideration of the resolution. This account makes intuitive sense, however, as the House Rules Committee had moved quickly to claim jurisdiction over the original reform bill in 1973 and had secured control of waivers for committees to report budget-related legislation after the Budget Act deadlines for itself under the 1974 statute. According to one staff member, Bolling “made it absolutely clear [to other committees] that they would get no waiver… the Rules Committee could basically tell you that if you didn’t comply with the Budget Act, we’re not bringing up your bill on the floor… the Rules Committee was the only institutional mechanism that really could have been used to enforce the Budget Act. The committees were adamantly opposed to it.”
A final factor that worked strongly in favor of the process was simply time. In this respect, the case of budget reform supports institutionalist expectations that, once established, internal rules and arrangements gradually take on a life of their own and become increasingly resistant to significant change. The political and economic conditions of the times clearly helped to keep the process in place, but they did little more than just that. There was ample time and opportunity between the dry run of 1975 and the beginning of the 1980s for the majority Democrats if not to cast it aside then to at least make significant alterations to it. Bolling’s apparent reluctance to open the process up to reform was also consistent with the institutionalist view; he was one of its strongest supporters, yet he seemed to have felt that the best chance of preserving it was to do nothing.

Through the first two Reagan budgets, the Democrats had little choice but to let the conservatives run the show in the hope that the results would come back to haunt them at election time. After the 1982 recession and their substantial gains in the elections of that year, however, the onus was back on the Democratic majority to regain control of the process and produce resolutions that could be supported by a majority of their members and not fall foul of the same procedural entanglements that had hamstrung the process so often in the past. The events of 1981/82, moreover, had transformed member and public perceptions of the process in the House and its new power and saliency made it more important than ever that the Democrats fully control the production and passage of the resolution. As the 98th Congress convened in January 1983, the budget process in the House appeared poised to enter a new era.
Notes

1 The amendment drive was sponsored by the National Taxpayers Union which announced early in 1979 that they expected to have the necessary number of calls for a constitutional convention by early summer. In response to their announcement, both House and Senate Judiciary and Budget Committee began studies or scheduled hearings (CQWR, 1979).

2 Averages calculated by author from CQ figures.


4 1979 was a relatively quiet year in terms of conflict on appropriations amendments between 1975 and 1979. Earlier years did show the kind of clustering evident on budget amendments in 1979—and a similar rate of success—but appropriations bills during these years continued to win the approval of outsize floor majorities.

5 Interview with author, September 9, 1999.

6 Rules Committee staff member, interview with author, September 9, 1999.

7 As most staff members interviewed for this project pointed out, the original intent behind reconciliation was to make relatively minor adjustments as part of the Second resolution.

8 It took three ballots to break a tie between Obey and Jones. Jones prevailed by only 5 votes.

9 Interview with author, April 13, 1999.

10 Interview with author, June 8, 1999.

11 Interview with author, September 9, 1999.

12 Committee staff, interview with author, September 1999.

13 Democratic staff, interview with author, June 4, 1999.


15 Stephen Solarz, interview with author, June 18, 1999.


18 Congressional staff member, interview with author, September 1999.

19 House Budget Committee Report on the Concurrent Budget Resolution for FY 1983 (H-Rept 97-521), p.223. Obey proposed that voting on the budget resolution be delayed until after the HAC and the HWMC had both acted, and all their bills combined into a single budget bill. If this bill differed significantly from the initial resolution, the Budget Committee would be given the first chance to offer a substitute.
The deadline for final approval of the resolution was originally May 15 before it was pushed back a month to April 15 under Gramm-Rudman in 1986.

Interview with author, September 1999.


Democratic Committee staff person, interview with author, September 1999.

Democratic staff, interview with author, June 1999.


Democratic staff, interview with author, September 1999.
As described above, the House Budget Committee found itself in a very different position after 1982. The emphasis given the process by the Reagan administration and the drastic policy changes brought about by reconciliation essentially redefined its position and significance in the House as members became more attentive to and interested in the budget process and the activities of the HBC. The groundswell of political opposition to the administration’s agenda combined with growing concern over burgeoning deficits produced several significant changes in the Committee’s membership and operations after 1982.

After directly intervening in the HBC’s second attempt at the resolution in 1982, leadership involvement was high from the beginning of 1983 and strongly supported by most Democrats for many of the reasons described in Chapter 5. Although Chairman Jones publicly continued to expressed hope for some degree of bipartisan cooperation, most of his colleagues seemed determined to produce a purely Democratic budget. The fact that the Senate remained under Republican control, encouraged an overly partisan response from House Democrats in 1983. Future budget resolutions would have to
be as strongly Democratic as possible in order to maximize leverage over Senate Republicans in conference--as well as to minimize losses in veto threat situations with the administration.

The leadership encouraged all Democrats to complete their “Exercise in Hard Choices” that consisted of a series of multiple choice options on the budget that emphasized the deficit consequences of selected taxing and spending options and tested support for various combinations. While most interviewees referred to this as an “educational tool” that was used by the leadership to help explain budget process and problems to the broader membership, there also appears to have been a feedback loop to it--in 1985, for example, Majority Leader Wright (D-Tx.) quoted from the results of the survey that had obviously been tabulated by the leadership (CQWR, May 11, 1985, p.875).

Changes in Committee Composition

Beginning in 1983, the leadership began to encourage their strongest and most loyal supporters to seek seats on the HBC, though this seems to have been a matter of oversight rather than direct leadership intervention. It had always been difficult for conservative southerners to get on the Committee--even Jim Jones (D-Okla.), who later became chairman, failed in his initial campaign for a seat--and the backlash against Phil Gramm’s defections in 1981-82 only made it more difficult for these members through the remainder of the decade. A few southerners, such as Marvin Leath (D-Tx.) and Jerry Huckaby (D-La.) won seats in the 1980s, though others, including Charlie Stenholm (D-Tx.) had to wait until the 1990s to succeed in their efforts to secure assignment to the panel.¹
Although all appointments were subject to Caucus approval, the nominations were made by the Steering and Policy Committee, and that was chaired by the Speaker and weighted in strongly in favor of the party leadership. With respect to the new Democratic assignments to the HBC in 1983, the rank and file were strongly supportive of the leadership, and all the nominations and decisions regarding HBC membership were upheld by the Caucus in that year. Democrats supported the leadership’s decision to throw Phil Gramm off the HBC in January 1983 and, perhaps fearing a repeat performance in the 98th Congress, the Caucus also upheld the leadership position to deny a Budget seat to John Breaux (D-La.) on the grounds that his leadership support score was simply too low (CQWR, Jan. 6, 1983, p. 6). The Caucus confirmed all of the Steering and Policy nominations for Budget Committee slots, and the seven new members in 1983 were loyal, mainstream liberal Democrats who had posted party unity scores in 1982 that were, on average, 12 points higher than their party mean.²

Most of the new Democratic HBC members appointed in January 1983 had been motivated to seek assignment to the Committee in direct response to the cuts that had been forced on them by reconciliation over the two previous years. These new HBC Democrats seemed representative of many in their party; they were upset about the policy changes that had been forced through reconciliation, but rather than push for process-weakening reforms, they sought greater control over it as it stood. George Miller (D-Ca.) for example, a new HBC member in 1983, served on Education and Labor, a Committee that had been hit particularly hard by reconciliation in 1981. He described himself as “infuriated” about the cuts ordered in his committee’s programs by non-committee members who “had no idea what they were doing” (quoted in CQWR, March 5, 1983,
Other new members in 1983 included Howard Wolpe (D-Mich.) and Geraldine Ferraro (D-NY), who similarly disagreed with many of the changes of the past two years and sought a seat on the HBC in response to them.

Yet these new members did not generally seek to protect their major committees from the budget process; instead they strongly supported the leadership and its efforts to put together a Democratic budget that would highlight the differences between the parties, and especially, those between House Democrats and the president. By using the budget to put forward their own priorities in opposition to those of the president, Democrats clearly hoped to mobilize their traditional constituencies and better compete with Republicans on the national stage. As one former Budget Committee member explained, the situation with Reagan led many Democrats to more actively encourage leadership efforts to articulate and emphasize their party’s priorities. The budget resolution provided the obvious vehicle for such efforts:

I mean here—we want to spend more on education, they want to spend less. They want to spend more on defense, we want to spend less. That’s right—you want to vote for people who spend more on defense? Pick the Republican party… if you feel the need to be protected from, you know, weapons in space then the Republican party’s your group, your set of guys.3

While leadership influence was clearly a factor in the assignment of an unusually loyal group Democrats to the HBC in 1983, this proved to be more of a short-term correction than a long-term strategy to stack the Committee; in the very next Congress, new HBC Democrats as a group had an average party unity score below the party mean for the year immediately preceding their appointment (see Table 6-1 below). The transition period had clearly shown that the biggest problem was winning approval of the
resolution on the floor and stacking the HBC with the most loyal party supporters had proven to be of little help in achieving this.

Table 6-1: Difference between Mean Previous Year Party Unity Scores; all Democrats, continuing Budget Committee Democrats and new Budget Committee Democrats, 1975-1993.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>All Democrats</th>
<th>Continuing Budget Democrats</th>
<th>New Budget Democrats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94th (1975-76)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95th (1977-78)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96th (1979-80)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>+15</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97th (1981-82)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98th (1983-84)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99th (1985-86)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100th (1987-88)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101st (1989-90)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102nd (1991-92)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103rd (1993-94)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CQ Almanacs; averages calculated by author.

Furthermore, the consolidation of the HBC as a leadership committee, combined with the concern over deficits set in motion a self-selection bias that helped accomplish the leadership’s goals with minimal need for their direct or regular intervention. As described earlier in this chapter, the Democrats who most actively sought seats on the Budget Committee in 1983 were precisely the kind of members that were most likely to support the leadership on budgetary issues. Given the political and economic climate, they also tended to be those members who were most deeply concerned with deficit reduction. The Reagan years had dramatically decreased the appeal of the HBC for members who advocated increased spending on key domestic programs. These members
(Dale Kildee, Patsy Mink) were still represented on the Committee but external conditions, combined with the efforts of the leadership to position Democrats as the party of deficit reduction and fiscal responsibility, reduced their influence and likelihood of success.

Yet the composition of the Committee in some ways mattered less after 1983, partly because individual members exercised less independent control over the resolution but also because the party as a whole became more cohesive, essentially catching up to the level of partisanship that had been evident on the Committee since 1975. As Table 6-1 shows, most of the Democratic ‘stacking’ of the HBC occurred during the transition period when it was perhaps seen as necessary to safeguard against conservative coalition control of the Committee. While the party unity scores of continuing Budget Committee Democrats peaked at 15 points above the party mean in the 96th Congress, less than ten years later they were almost perfectly representative of their party as a whole. As Table 6-1 also indicates, the mean party unity score for all members was up almost 20 points across the same period.

Resolutions that clearly articulate collective goals and priorities may not only strengthen the party’s electoral appeal or message but may also help unify its members within the legislature, both in terms of building a more solid budgetary consensus and in electing new members dedicated to similar goals. Republicans had consistently responded to the process in this manner ever since the dry run of 1975. After the Reagan budgets, the Democrats came to see the resolutions in precisely the same terms, even though there was considerably less policy consensus among Democrats than among Republicans.
In spite of the still-considerable differences within the Caucus, new Committee leadership helped consolidate the explicitly partisan control of the process in the House. After a futile attempt to get around the term limit, Jones rotated off the Committee at the end of the 98th Congress in 1984 and his successors, Bill Gray (Pa.) and Leon Panetta (Ca.) were both chairmen who were much more in tune with the leadership and responsive to the Caucus as a whole than Jones had been. Jones’ leadership had been relatively responsive and open but his precarious electoral position had closed off certain options for him and circumscribed his support for the leadership and the Caucus at a few key moments. Both Gray and Panetta were much less inclined to engage in the kind of “freelancing” that Jones had been associated with and worked closely with the leadership, the Caucus and other committees and their chairmen.

Unlike Jones, Gray had the unwavering support of his liberal urban Philadelphia district which gave him far greater political latitude in leading the Committee. By all accounts, he was the consummate consensus builder who independently broadened the scope of pre-markup consultations. One senior Democratic staffer suggested that Gray’s leadership ushered in a new era on the Budget Committee based on the extent to which he “went out and started to do meetings with the different caucuses within the Democratic Caucus. He’d say, ‘well, what do you need? Here’s kind of what we’ve got to do--what do you need out of this? Let’s walk through everything that we’re talking about and then go back to the leadership and vet it through the leadership and put it together.’” The pressure for more active leadership involvement soon receded under Gray’s leadership, partly because of the Republican losses in the 1982 elections but also because he ran the Committee in such an inclusive and open manner.
Table 6-2: Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1983-94.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amendments offered a</th>
<th>Amendments approved</th>
<th>Final Committee Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>4+ b (2+ R)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20-11 (D20-0; R0-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1R</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19-9 (D19-0; R0-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>4 (3R; 1D)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>14+ (10+ R; 4D)</td>
<td>4 (3D; 1R)</td>
<td>21-7 (D21-0; R0-14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>4D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21-14 (D21-0; R0-14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4+ (D)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21-14 (D21-0; R0-14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Voice vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>6 (5R; 1D)</td>
<td>1D</td>
<td>Voice vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>19R</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27-16 (D27-0; R0-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9 (7R; 2D)</td>
<td>2D</td>
<td>26-17 (D26-0; R0-17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Where possible, the number of committee rolls calls on amendments is given. In years where this was not available, the estimate could include amendments disposed of without objection, by voice vote, or with a show of hands.

b Figure followed by a ‘+’ indicate lower bound estimates culled from CQ and other media coverage of the Committee for years in which precise figures were not available.

As a result of extensive intra-party consultations and negotiations, however, the Committee markup was transformed from a substantive discussion of the resolution to a venue in which the final majority document would be presented (often only a few hours before the markup) to the minority, their complaints and criticisms heard, their amendments voted down, and the majority resolution reported out on a party-line vote. Table 6-2 shows the pattern of Committee amendments and voting between 1983 and 1994 on recorded votes. The comparison with the equivalent figures for the pre-Reagan transition period (Tables 4-2 and 5-1) is striking. While more than 100 amendments--with most of these coming from the majority party--were subjected to recorded votes between 1975 and 1980, the equivalent figure is well below 100 for the twelve-year
period shown in Table 6-2. The decline in the number of adopted amendments is sharper still: from approximately 40 between 1975 and 1980 to a total of 8 for the 12 years shown in Table 6-2.

This steep drop in successful amendments to the Committee resolution attests to the dramatic impact of the expanded--and ultimately institutionalized--party role prior to the HBC markup. As extensive intra-party consultation and negotiations became the norm, the priority for the majority party members on the HBC was to report the negotiated resolution intact to the floor. Not only did this make it more unlikely that majority amendments would be approved but, as can be seen in Table 6-2, there was a similar decline in such amendments even being offered during the committee markup.

Not only did majority Democrats become considerably less inclined to look to for any Republican support for their budgets but Republicans themselves remained convinced that they should not get involved in the work of the Committee at all. Ever since the dry run of 1975, Republicans had embraced the role of loyal opposition and had often declined to put forward either their own or their president’s alternative. As Bill Frenzel recalled: “We knew we didn’t like the Democratic one and were happy to vote no, but we didn’t know what the heck to vote yes on.” The decision to vote against Democratic budgets was always an easy one for Republican, but as Frenzel indicated, coming up with a single alternative was much more problematic.

The consolidation of the process was significant in both internal and partisan terms. First, from an internal perspective, it carried the Committee even further from general chamber norms; it may happen occasionally on other committees that markups are reduced to such a formality but there is no other panel on which this is such a
prevalent and deeply entrenched norm. As numerous members interviewed for this project explained, the atmosphere on both money committees has remained very different from that on the HBC, a curious discrepancy given that it is primarily the HWMC and the HAC that are charged with implementing the resolution. For example, Bill Gradison (R-Ohio), who won a seat on Ways and Means in 1977, recalled how on that Committee:

I felt, even though I was a new member, and a Republican at that, that I could have a hand in the process there, and I felt that I did. I actually got some significant things into tax law and certainly a lot of them into health care law by working with Rostenkowski, who I thought was a great Committee chairman, and with Pete Stark, my friend from California. He and I see the world in different ways and see the federal role in different ways but we found a lot of things we could effectively work together on. 6

Minority members of the HAC also made similar remarks about the cooperative working environment that continued to characterize a great deal of their Committee’s work into the 1990s. Republican Appropriator Dan Miller (Fl.) described how there was much more cooperation on the HAC in the mid-1990s, which he mostly attributed to the must-pass nature of the Committee’s legislation. Democrat David Price similarly concluded that “coming back here [in 1997] as minority member I did about as well on my Appropriations as I had done as a majority member.” 7 All money committee members interviewed for this project agreed that the working environment on their major committee provided a sharp contrast with their experiences on Budget.

The greater majority party role in the process also institutionalized the steadfast opposition of the minority party. As the Democratic leadership and rank-and-file more actively supported using the Committee and the resolution to emphasize the differences between their agenda and priorities and those of Reagan and the Republican party, Republicans embraced the role of the reliable opposition. As Table 6-2 shows, not a
single HBC Republican voted in support of the Committee resolution across this entire twelve year period.

In spite of good relations with the Democratic HBC chairmen with whom he served, Gradison felt that there never was “a serious attempt to come up with a bipartisan anything.”  

Bill Frenzel (R-Minn.), who had preceded Gradison as ranking member in the 100\textsuperscript{th} Congress, voiced similar sentiments when he explained that “Leon [Panetta] and I could have made a deal in thirty minutes. But Democrats had their programs and Republicans had theirs… and so we couldn’t get very far off first base or we’d get picked off. In the end I had to be a Republican and Leon had to be a Democrat and we couldn’t have got our caucuses to go along with the deals that we arranged so we didn’t try.”

The lack of bipartisan cooperation on the budget resolution is often lamented by many Representatives, current and former, and of both parties. Yet some have also suggested that such cooperation is not only absent but is neither possible nor appropriate, given the nature and significance of the budget resolution (see also Schick 1980b, p. 9-12). Gradison, along with several others members, made the case for partisanship in the following terms; “if you think of the budget as sort of the distillation of overall comprehensive policy, as a statement of policy goals and priorities then it seems to me not inappropriate for the majority to state ‘here’s our policies and priorities-what are yours?’”

While the disengagement of the Republican minority from the process is most often explained (or justified) in partisan terms, political self-preservation or blame-avoidance concerns have consistently discouraged members of both parties from supporting the resolution, both in Committee and on the floor. Since the dry run of 1975,
budget resolution votes have regularly pressured members to make a variety of very
difficult, politically risky decisions in their efforts to set priorities and to match revenues
to expenditures. As former HBC member William Brodhead explained, the temptation to
just vote no was always strong, even among members of the Democratic majority:
“There’s lots of votes that you cast on the floor that you know you’re going to be
severely held to account for but for voting against the budget resolution? No constituent
is ever going to confront you about that.” 11 David Price (D-NC) similarly observed that
“the easiest vote on a budget is always no” and that many members often vote “for no
budget whatsoever.” (Price 1992, p.91)

The production of the resolution had been consistently partisan since 1975, but it
became much more so in the 1980s as the primary significance of the resolution for most
members became a “political document”. In the terminology of congressional debate this
phrase is typically used to refer to a proposal that has makes few concessions to the
realities of governing and is instead driven by electoral or purely political goals. 12 Due to
its agenda- and priority-setting influence, the resolution has always been part economic,
part political in nature. Most members, however seem to feel that over time, its economic
relevance has been over whelmed by its political dimensions. Earl Pomeroy (D-SD)
explained these two competing influences on the resolution in the following terms:

The budget developed within the Budget Committee should basically
establish the spending levels across the functions of government that still
leaves broad discretion to the appropriators…but generally does move
forward the longer-term framework for federal spending. That’s what it
ought to do. More recently it has simply been used as a highly visible
extension of the political fiscal policy that a party wants to campaign on--
not what they want to govern on. 13
In a similar vein, Jim Mattox (D-Tx.) suggested that a major problem with the Budget Committee is that, as is often the case in Congress, “the political necessity of getting elected [causes] people to engage in political statements and in political actions that do not coincide with the best interests in running the government as a responsible enterprise.” 14 Charlie Stenholm (D-Tx.) confirmed that attitudes on the HBC are often “not conducive to the legislative process” but rather reflect “the way the political process works.” 15 Various other members and staff interviewed referred to the resolution as “a political document” without elaboration, or as simply “not real”.

The more the resolution has been accepted and viewed as a political document, the greater the tendency has been for it to stray away from being a realistic proposal that could actually be supported and implemented by both chambers and the president. While the chamber has, on several occasions, been forced to proceed with appropriations without a resolution in place, the lack of a chamber-sanctioned total for each subcommittee to work within in such cases, has only created uncertainty and confusion among appropriators.

This political dimension to the resolution was only strengthened by the blatant use of patently unrealistic economic assumptions and other budgetary ‘gimmicks’ to arrive at the lowest possible deficit projection, a problem that became particularly acute during the first two years of the Reagan administration. One former Democrat contended that the administration ensured the resolution would become much more a political rather than an economic document by submitting budgets based on patently unrealistic assumptions (what David Stockman referred to in his 1986 book as the Rosy Scenario). Such tactics put the Democrats in a difficult situation, explained the former member, because “if we
said ‘well, your economic assumptions are off,’ and we put in economic assumptions that were lower than that, then we had to make up the numbers for the deficit. So it meant that the Democrats just bought his numbers.”

A Purely Partisan Affair: The Resolution After 1982

The consistent party role in producing the resolution might have been expected to further diminish the already weak appeal of the Committee as, in contrast to most other House committees, members of both parties who sat on the HBC had virtually no opportunity to exert any individual influence over the committee’s output after 1982. During most years, however, competition for the open seats on the Committee remained high in both parties and among Democrats, and the average seniority of their HBC contingent recovered slightly from a low of 6.4 years in 1981 to almost 10 in 1991. As far as representatives from the money committees were concerned, the seniority of Democratic representatives from Ways and Means had dropped off sharply during the transition period, their counterparts from Appropriations soon followed suit in the 1980s.

The seniority of Democratic HAC members on Budget remained constant through the 1970s because Chairman Giaimo and Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) were both (relatively) experienced members who stayed on the panel for the maximum six-year period. Their replacements at the beginning of the 97th Congress in 1981, however, were two of the HAC’s most junior members--W.G “Bill” Hefner (D-NC) and Bill Gray (D-Pa.)--who ranked, sixth and second from the bottom in seniority on the HAC, respectively. These were the first appointments from the HAC under Jamie Whitten’s chairmanship and doubtless reflected his low regard for the HBC. Of the seven new HAC appointments to the HBC proposed by Whitten in the 1980s, fully six had less than a decade of seniority
at the time of their appointments and four of those had only four years experience when they were first selected to serve.\textsuperscript{17}

The motivation for the money committee chairmen to promote their most junior members seems to have been for them to serve as reliable monitors of the HBC and defenders of the committee’s jurisdiction with little likelihood that they could--or would--make any substantive independent contribution to the committee’s work. Tom Downey (D-NY) had only served six years in Congress and had only been on the Ways and Means Committee (HWMC) for two of those years when he took a Ways and Means slot on the HBC in 1981. He was asked to serve by the HWMC chairman and explained his responsibilities in the following terms:

My assignment to the Budget Committee was very simple--protect the jurisdiction of the Ways and Means Committee at all costs. All other issues were secondary… [Rostenkowski] could not have cared less about the Budget Committee or its processes or the Budget itself. You were there to make sure that the Budget Committee did not screw around with the Ways and Means Committee. That was your job.\textsuperscript{18}

Considering the very public hostility that HAC chairman Whitten displayed toward the HBC, his expectations of his appointees to the Committee were likely couched in similar--if not stronger terms than those recalled by Downey. A more senior money committee member on the HBC might have had the ear of his chairman or the personal influence to win support for HBC proposals on their major committee or in their caucus or conference. Junior members were unlikely to be in a position to do so nor presumably would they risk the wrath of their chairman by siding with the HBC position if their committees ever clashed.

This pattern of HAC appointments is also consistent with the generally low support for the process evident among the more senior members of the HAC. Yet by
placing only its most junior members on the HBC the leadership of the HAC also
couraged the growing dislocation between the resolution and the economic and
legislative realities of the times that, to some extent, certainly strengthened the hand of
the HAC by undermining the relevance of the resolution. Yet this dislocation also caused
problems for the HAC by making it more unlikely that they would have neither a
cohesive plan nor a strong and reliable base of rank and file support to count on as they
marked up their separate spending bills. Had more senior appropriators been assigned to
the HBC, they might have been able or inclined to keep the resolution more realistic and
relevant to the legislative process through which it must be implemented. The often
substantial distance between the resolution and fiscal and political realities must hence be
seen as something of a double-edged sword for appropriators, as it only seems to have
heightened delays and conflict surrounding the annual appropriations bills (see Appendix
A). The more the resolution seeks to influence policy, the more it intrudes upon the
jurisdiction of the HAC, and the resulting conflict has increasingly undermined the
consensus and cooperation traditionally associated with the appropriations process in the
House.

The stronger party role in producing the resolution unquestionably helped
minimize much of the uncertainty and chaos that surrounded its floor consideration
during the transition period. The situation also greatly improved as the realignment of
the South continued through the 1980s, further shrinking the number of southern
conservatives within the Democratic party at the same time as the increased size of the
Democratic majority diminished their influence. On an internal level, broader majority
party cooperation in producing the resolution was also important in closing off the
endless stream of both Committee and floor amendments that had caused so many problems during the transition period.

Table 6-3 shows the highly stable pattern of floor amendments to the Budget Committee resolution that followed the partisan consolidation of the process after 1983 and the near-uniform rejection of virtually all amendments that did reach the floor. In most of these years only three or four major substitutes were made in order, and these typically had no serious chance of passage but were instead voted on in order to placate the various groups or factions behind them (often the Congressional Black Caucus on the Democratic side, ultra-conservative or deficit reduction groups on the Republican). After 1983, the leadership often used the Rules Committee to weed out potentially successful amendments or substitutes. Bill Gradison recalled how one year the Rules Committee had rejected his amendment but had made in order one offered by ranking Republican Del Latta. After action on the resolution had been completed for the year, he casually inquired of a Democratic friend on Rules as to why Latta’s amendment had been made in order but not his. “‘We thought yours might pass’”, his friend informed him. 19

Table 6-3: Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, 1983-94.

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D = Democratic; R = Republican

After being rejected on the floor in 1977 and 1982 and being preempted by Gramm-Latta II in 1982, the HBC-reported resolution was approved without change on the floor almost every year between 1983 and 1994. While the extensive party
negotiations and deliberations prior to markup, along with strict limits on amendments and substitutes on the floor, clearly signaled tighter majority party control of the resolution, these changes did not significantly alter the already-high levels of partisan voting that had been evident on resolution votes prior to 1983. Figure 6-1 shows the difference between the cohesion of each party on final passage votes for budget resolutions and their respective mean party unity score in the House for each year between 1975 and 1994. In years where the Committee reported more than one resolution (there were three in 1979) or in years where the Committee was first defeated on the floor, the reported resolution unity figure is the mean of however many final passage votes were involved. In order to be consistent with CQ’s annual party unity scores, final passage votes that did not feature a majority of one party voting in opposition to a majority of the other (the first attempt at the First Resolution 1977, along with the 1988 and 1989 votes) were excluded.

Although Democratic unity on passage of the resolutions did seem to recover slightly after 1982 and actually surpassed that of House Republicans in 1985 and 1991, the general pattern of heightened partisanship on resolution votes after 1982 does not appear significantly different from that of the transition period. In other words, the internal consolidation of the process by the Democratic majority after 1982 did not increase partisan voting on budget resolutions; it was rather a belated organizational response to tensions that had been evident since 1975.

The new process institutionalized a more overtly zero-sum debate over priorities that had largely been avoided under previous arrangements (Ellwood 1985; Thurber 1995). Many of the staff and members interviewed for this project—Republican and
Figure 6-1: Difference between Party Unity on (partisan) Final Passage of Budget Resolution Votes and Mean Party Unity Score on all Party Votes, by party, 1975-1994
Democrat alike--offered similar perspectives on the divisive nature of the resolution and the kind of conflict that it has encouraged:

...when you have an overall budget, when you are looking at the bottom line as to how big the deficit is or how the surplus is going to be used -- which is the issue today -- then it becomes much more politically confrontational. That’s just the nature of what happened as a result of putting the budget process in place. You have much clearer competition between priorities as a result of that because it all takes place within one document. Whereas [prior to reform] the Appropriations bills each came to the floor on their own and there was very little competition among them for resources. 20

I think the reason that [the HBC] tends to be more partisan than some goes back to the fact that [they] tend to discuss overall goals and directions that the parties want to take the country in. So if Republicans are talking about they need smaller government and tax cuts, that’s where the debate tends to lie. And the Democrats -- that’s not their position. And so because it tends to be a macro picture then they begin to debate what makes a Republican a Republican and a Democrat a Democrat. So in that sense I think that is why you tend to have partisan debates. 21

The comprehensive scope of the resolution and its significance as the first congressional statement of budgetary priorities immediately encouraged both parties to use the new process as a platform from which to influence the parameters of the political debate and the subsequent legislative agenda. Congressional consideration of budget resolutions was immediately and strongly partisan in 1975 and has largely remained that way ever since. As Figure 6-1 shows, voting on the resolutions was consistently characterized by a far higher level of party unity than was evident in the chamber as a whole, in large part because it evoked a very different kind of debate that emphasized the differences between the parties instead of their common interest in particularistic benefits, as had been the norm in the prereform Congress. Many of the problems of the transition period occurred primarily because the Democratic majority had very little
cohesion at this philosophical or macro-level while their Republican counterparts appeared highly unified on such issues.

The exceptionally high level of Republican unity on resolution votes—which peaked at over 30 percent above their mean party unity score in 1978--clearly put the Democrats under a huge amount of pressure to more firmly control the process. Yet this was by no means an easy or even an attainable task; even after 1982, when Democrats held bigger majorities with fewer conservative members, their unity on resolution votes still tended to be eclipsed by that of the Republicans (Figure 6-1).

The lower level of Democratic cohesion on budget resolution final passage votes was driven by ideological differences within the majority party but it also reflected the efforts of their members to defend their respective bases of institutional power. Internal power struggles unquestionably constrained Democratic responsiveness to the changing political and economic climate at the end of the 1970s. Former HBC chairman Jim Jones (D-Okla.) explained the his party’s problem during that period as one of having been in power too long: “you become arrogant…and unwilling to be influenced by the marketplace, which in this case is elections, because you’d always won and you’d had an ability to keep the House no matter who was president. And so the Democrats were unwilling to let go of programs…they just held on, and poor Jimmy Carter was perceived as ineffective.”

To some extent, differences in party unity on the resolution accurately reflected the broader condition of the two parties. While the high Republican figures are likely inflated somewhat by the ease of voting against Democratic budgets, they are consistent with a generally more unified Republican party and the disarray that the Democrats were
in during much of this period. Even with the overwhelming ideological and political pressure from the Reagan administration, Democrats still could not agree on what their party stood for. The late Richard Conlon, the staff director of the Democratic Study Group (DSG) at the time, summed up his party’s problems when he commented in 1981 that Democrats had not “stood for anything since the 1960s. We had a consensus then around a series of issues, which eventually got enacted into law under the label of the Great Society. Since that time this party has not been pushing for anything. It has essentially been defensive” (quoted in Johnson 1981). In spite of the leadership’s best efforts to heighten party unity on budgetary issues, the persistent divisions within the party on substantive policy issues meant that their strongest showings continued to be driven by defensive responses to conservative initiatives through the 1980s.

The new budget process combined with the steady rise of federal budget deficits highlighted this Democratic defensiveness and helped make it an increasingly and unsustainable strategy for them. The passage of the House reform bill in December 1973 had owed a great deal to the defensive reaction of many Democrats to the excesses of the Nixon administration. Yet by 1983, this same process had taken on a role and significance well beyond that envisioned by most of its proponents and had been very effectively used by the conservative coalition to defeat the very priorities that Democrats had put the process in place to defend. The threat it now posed to both the partisan and the internal status quo that Democrats had long been committed to protecting, forced them to at least try to more actively articulate and promote their common goals and priorities.
In spite of the system of extensive intra-party consultation and negotiation that was consolidated after 1982, the pressures of the times and a new political competitiveness between the parties continued to make a substantive budgetary consensus elusive. In each of the twelve years after 1982, House Democrats did successfully shepherd their budget resolution through the House, but the partisan consolidation of the process in the House only sharpened differences--and tensions--with the president (and the Republican Senate between 1983 and 1986) on both the resolution and the appropriations legislation that followed. The unwavering opposition of congressional Republicans, Republican presidents and the inexorable rise of deficits starkly illustrated the limitations of the process and led to repeated standoffs between the branches through the remainder of the decade. These standoffs led members to engage in a series of ad hoc procedural improvisations in their efforts to deal with budget-related issues.

As with the introduction of the new process back in 1975, the procedural improvisations of the 1980s did not replace the pre-existing process but were instead layered on top of it. These changes, however, proved to be of a far more transitory nature than the 1974 system which survived, more or less intact, until it was revitalized by the BEA in 1990 and the return of unified control in 1993.

**Other Influences and Developments**

Although the budget process in the House essentially completed a period of political and internal transition at the end of 1982, the rest of the decade saw periodic and significant deviations from the partisan, process-centered norm. These deviations seemed to occur when pressures on the process reached a peak, and entrenched partisan norms,
high levels of constituency concern about the deficit, and internal maneuvering to protect individual-level interests left the two branches of government--and often even the two chambers of Congress--unable to reach agreement.

In desperation, members sought first to engage President Reagan in negotiations at an earlier stage in the process, and after these efforts failed, they resorted to budgeting by formula, a system through which Republicans sought to force Congress to balance the budget and Democrats hoped to finally drag President Reagan to the bargaining table. The process in the late 1970s had been constrained by the ideological divisions within the Democratic majority and by the internal power struggles that the reform era had triggered. In the 1980s, however, these problems were quickly superceded by conflicts with the Senate and the president. The majority party in the House could now produce and enact its own resolution; but the more successful it became at so doing, the less likely it was that it could get both the other two institutions to go along with its plans. When both sides advance comprehensive statements of their goals and priorities, each risks a loss of face and constituency support in backing down (see Gilmour 1994), and the potential for stalemate must rise accordingly.

The President

One of the central goals of the 1974 Act had been to constrain presidential efforts to control the nation’s fiscal policy and to reassert congressional authority in this critical area. On an informational level, the establishment of the Congressional Budget Office certainly provided this independence. Politically, however, the influence of the president has continued to constrain congressional efforts to produce and implement its own budget and, some would argue, has even been strengthened under the new process (CITES).
This continued dominance may have, in many respects been inevitable, especially given the added leverage of the traditional presidential ‘bully pulpit’ in an era of mass media (Kernell 1986), which only compounds the inherently problematic task of projecting an unified position from as fragmented and pluralistic an institution as the House of Representatives. House Democrats were forced to address this problem of coordination in their budgetary battles with the new Reagan administration. As former Rep. Beryl Anthony (D-Ark.) explained:

…the Budget Committee would be marking up a budget that would be carefully trying to bring everyone on board but would be different than what Reagan had pushed. O’Neill would be holding press conferences saying, ‘well, my party stands for this’ and we would be marking up a bill that was totally different… he was articulating one position while his committee was doing something different. So the press could pit you one against the other which made you look like you didn’t know what you were doing. Which was right… So we got O’Neill to hire a PR person so that we could speak with one voice. 23

Yet these problems continued through the 1980s and even under the more centralized, partisan control of recent years, Speakers have constantly had problems in dealing with the multiple power centers in the House and their different and often conflicting priorities.

While presidential influence on the budget peaked in the early 1980s, it remained powerful throughout the remainder of the decade and into the 1990s. In the aftermath of the 1984 presidential elections, Congress and the president entered a lengthy period of budgetary stalemate and standoffs. After 1982, House Democrats had constantly attacked Reagan and his conservative allies for their irresponsible creation of huge deficits and tried to position themselves as the party of deficit reduction. In order to reduce the deficit, however, Democrats had to come up with sufficient offsets in other areas, the
most popular of which were to cut defense spending and/or raise taxes. After Mondale’s crushing defeat on a tax increase platform in 1984 and Reagan’s insistence that he would veto any new taxes, greater cuts in defense spending became their only alternative. Renewed tensions with the Soviet Union, however, along with Republican control of the Senate and strong opposition from conservatives within their own ranks soon combined to this option increasingly unlikely.

Under such conditions, it became all but impossible to produce a ‘Democratic’ budget that could bring down the deficit, protect traditional priorities, yet still provide enough for defense to survive on the floor. The general pressure for deficit reduction was very high, but in Congress members could not agree on how to act without hurting the interests of their specific constituency and clientele groups or by clashing with a still-popular president. In 1985, House Democrats indefinitely postponed action on the budget resolution and instead waited for Senate Republicans or the president to make the first move (CQWR, May 4, 1985, p. 816).

After his re-election in 1984, Reagan continued to submit budgets that proposed huge deficit increases and deep domestic cuts that were clearly unacceptable to large majorities of Republicans (as well as Democrats) in Congress. This made life particularly difficult for Senate Republicans who either had to embrace high deficits or publicly break with their own president. After coming under attack from the president for their efforts to constrain defense spending, the Senate finally approved a budget resolution that held the defense budget to a rate-of-inflation increase but cancelled the cost-of-living (COLA) increase for Social Security benefits in the new fiscal year and zeroed out funding for thirteen domestic programs including general revenue-sharing,
trade adjustment assistance, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Economic Development Administration, community services block grants and the Work Incentive program (CQWR, May 18, 1985, p. 917).

The House approved an HBC resolution less than two weeks later that had virtually nothing in common with the Senate plan. The House froze defense spending instead of Social Security COLAs and agreed only to eliminate the general revenue-sharing program from among the thirteen programs targeted by the Senate (CQWR, May 25, 1985, p. 971). Reagan then confounded Senate Democrats by turning around and cutting a deal with Speaker O’Neill to protect the Social Security COLAs. In negotiations with House Democrats, the Senate lost most of its major provisions and the conference report much more closely resembled the House resolution.

This three-way divided control (at this point it had become obvious that there was little common ground between Senate Republicans and the White House), combined with intense pressure for deficit reduction and no consensus on spending cuts or tax increases, all but guaranteed budgetary stalemate and House Democrats began pushing for an economic ‘summit’ with Reagan. The Republican Senate--rightly concerned with an electoral backlash against this continued stalemate--began aggressively exploring other ways to achieve deficit reduction. In the fall of 1985, Senators Phil Gramm (R-Tx.), Warren Rudman (R-NH) and Ernest Hollings successfully attached a proposal to achieve a balanced budget by 1990 to Senate legislation to raise the federal debt ceiling.

Budgeting By Formula

Budgeting by formula, like summitry, has been an option to which members seem to resort in situations where the partisan and fiscal pressures on the budget become so
great as to appear politically or substantively unresolvable through normal channels. It was by no means a new idea; entitlements after all, are spending formulas and in terms of overall constraints, both the use of fixed spending ceilings back in the late 1960s (Schick 1980a, 1981) and proposed balanced budget amendments to the Constitution had also involved similar limitations or constraints upon congressional action. The spending ceilings, however, had been repeatedly breached, and most experts agreed that the likelihood of a balanced budget amendment having the desired effect were worse still. Yet the appeal of formula-driven budgeting in the mid-1980s was based on many of the same short-term considerations that had helped build the reform coalition in 1973.

In both cases, members confronted substantial popular pressure for policy change but could not reach agreement amongst themselves as to what specific changes should be made. Rather than take no action, members approved procedural instead of explicit policy changes, and installed mechanisms that might potentially have produced a new set of policy outcomes. While the 1973 Act had been outcome-neutral, however, the changes made in the mid-1980s established a set of rules that were intended to force Congress to produce a very specific outcome; to balance the federal budget by FY 1991 through a series of required reductions that would be made by automatic, across-the-board cuts (sequesters) if congressional action failed to meet the preset targets.24

Members had long realized that the pressure or the demand for deficit reduction was certainly strong in the abstract but elusive when discussed in terms of specific cuts or tax increases.25 By the mid-1980s it had also become clear that it would be difficult to substantially reduce the deficit through cuts in nondefense domestic discretionary spending alone; as HBC chairman Bill Gray pointed out in 1985, even if Congress
cancelled every last one of these programs they would still not save enough to cover the projected FY 1986 shortfall (*CQWR* Feb. 23, 1985, p. 347).

While a long list of programs were exempt from the automatic cuts required by Gramm-Rudman in 1985 (and under Gramm-Rudman II) some mandatory spending programs were included. Yet this system also contradicted the very essence of the outcome-neutral Act of 1974 and robbed the congressional budget process of the flexibility that many had strenuously defended as essential to its internal and political viability. The adoption of Gramm-Rudman showed that that partisan budgetary tensions were on the verge of overwhelming the more traditional representation of local-level constituency interests in the House. Partisan pressures pushed members to support the most ideologically pure budget and to refuse to compromise. Yet constituency-level pressures should, in theory, have encouraged members to produce a blueprint that would facilitate the smooth passage of the annual appropriations bills that provide funding for a significant proportion of federal benefits and services to constituents around the country. Surprisingly, members got hung up on the former while increasingly neglecting the latter; partisan budget battles only made it harder for the other committees--especially the HAC--to get their work done. For three straight years in the mid-1980s (1985-87) not one of the regular appropriations bills were in place at the beginning of the fiscal year on October 1 (Ornstein et al. 2000). Both sides supported Gramm-Rudman as a means to the ideological end of forcing their opponents to bear the brunt of the costs involved in deficit reduction.

The political one-upmanship that went on over deficit reduction in the 1980s, first between the Democratic House and the Republican Senate and president, and
subsequently between the Democratic Congress and a Republican president, caused members to temporarily lose sight of the specific constituency—as well as the internal-level implications of their actions. The automatic cuts required under Gramm-Rudman if Congress failed to meet the preset targets were to be split 50-50 between defense and domestic discretionary programs.

Democrats supported Gramm-Rudman as a way to force Reagan to the bargaining table by “kidnapping his favorite grandchild” (defense), as Tom Foley liked to explain it, and forcing him to negotiate a swap after which everyone would start acting more responsibly about the budget. To Democrats, negotiation was the only acceptable outcome; if deficits continued their inexorable climb it was obvious in 1985 that the domestic cuts that would have been required by a sequester would be politically untenable to most Democrats and perhaps even many Republicans.

For Reagan, however, the chief appeal of Gramm-Rudman seems to have been the opportunity to make the exact same cuts in domestic discretionary accounts that Democrats were assuming would never happen. He had already boosted defense spending to record levels and, as the congressional reception of his second-term budgets had consistently shown, members of both parties supported some degree of scaling back in this area. To Reagan the 50-50 split offered an opportunity to secure the major cuts in domestic spending that had eluded him through much of his term. Yet Gramm-Rudman failed to trigger negotiations for over two years primarily because neither side had any incentive to accept anything other than the 50-50 distribution of the cuts that would occur under sequestration. Reagan wanted more cuts in domestic discretionary, while
Democrats would have preferred to see a higher reduction made in defense accounts, and neither side any reason to yield anything to the other.

Gramm-Rudman not only guaranteed a series of politically very difficult cuts, but it also caused serious internal problems and tensions that arguably surpassed even those of the 1981 reconciliation. In particular, the cuts required in nondefense domestic discretionary programs were deeply resented by HAC chair Jamie Whitten. As long as the role and influence of the budget process had remained minimal, Whitten seemed able to live with it, even though he was not known for being particularly gracious about its presence. If the Budget resolution set reasonable targets, although the HAC could no longer spent as much as it wanted, as one leadership aide put it, it would retain significant discretion to spend “where it wants” (quoted in CQWR, Jan. 3, 1987, p. 22).

The threat of sequestration and the steep cuts required to meet the deficit reduction targets, greatly increased the pressure on the HAC, and Whitten quickly became one of the most vociferous opponents of this ‘automatic’ approach. As Democrats increasingly stalled on appropriations bills while they pushed for a negotiated deal with the White House, they began to bundle all the appropriations bills into a single end-of-year omnibus bill as part of the deal. While reconciliation had previously fueled member resentment about the power of the Budget Committee, the growing reliance on summits and deals toward the end of the decade involved a still-narrower circle of members, obviously shutting out most members and creating resentment that spread well beyond the HAC.

After the 1987 budget deal had been negotiated in this manner, Marvin Leath (D-Tx.) summed up members’ growing frustration with the way the process was headed:
“you work all year in your committees and then end up with three-quarters of the
government run by half a dozen people locked in a room for three or four weeks. I resent
that’ (CQWR, Dec. 26, 1987, p. 3183). The Democratic leadership finally got the budget
summits they had been seeking but they paid a high price in terms of internal tensions
and dissatisfaction among their members. The Republican minority faced similar
problems; the exclusion of so many members from the Andrews AFB negotiations also
played a major role in Gingrich’s revolt against the plan. Dissatisfaction among both
parties ensured the chamber’s decisive rejection of the 1990 deal, and high-level
negotiations would repeatedly create similar internal tensions throughout the 1990s.

Although the budgeting-by-formula approach of Gramm-Rudman and its
successor statute was technically part of the congressional budget process, it was more of
an add-on than a replacement and caused significantly greater problems than the original
process had ever done. The first major and dramatic use of reconciliation at the
beginning of the decade had made the process more important by giving it “teeth”, at
least for that legislative session. Gramm-Rudman took this principle too far by trying to
control not only the current Congress but also to constrain future Congresses. The
pressure to meet the hugely unrealistic targets also all but guaranteed a renewed and
extensive reliance on accounting tricks and gimmicks in order to produce a plan that
could arrive at the required deficit projection. While all of these pressures might have
suggested that the budget process itself was in danger of becoming irrelevant, it was not
the process but the arbitrary, inflexible targets that were putting so much stress on the
system.
The targets were primarily the result of the partisan tensions created by the combination of rising deficits and divided control. Both parties became more homogeneous during the course of the decade, in large part as a result of long-term changes in their respective bases of electoral support and in the revitalization of their national organizations (Dodd and Oppenheimer 1989; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1992). But the budgetary debate over priorities and the questions it raised about priorities and the overall direction and goals of public policy also played an important role. While the national political debate would likely have occurred anyway, the budget process served to institutionalized this inherently ideological struggle over macro-level fiscal policy that had been previously excluded from the congressional agenda prior to 1974 (Schick 1980b; Gilmour 1990).

Partisan tensions over the budget became institutionalized to the extent that they did not even seem to require constant levels of direct constituency pressure to sustain them. Constituents often became less concerned about deficits in years of economic growth after 1982—even though their concern would return with a vengeance in the early 1990s and dominate the 1992 presidential election). Yet every single year, the parties would still engage in these deeply divisive and conflictual battles over the budget. By the end of the decade, partisan pressures had simply eclipsed the influence of constituency considerations and internal constraints on the budget process in the House.

From its very beginnings in the early 1970s, members had been concerned that a congressional budget process would undermine the traditional committee system and weaken both individual and institutional discretion, yet they supported the Gramm-Rudman process in the 1980s that had precisely that effect. When the 1990 budget
negotiations gave them the chance to replace it, they came up with a far more workable alternative that for the first time directly addressed what many members had seen as the central problem since the 1970s--that of entitlements. Most members and commentators agree that especially compared to the excesses of Gramm-Rudman, the Budget Enforcement Act (BEA) of 1990 has been a resounding success.

The BEA was negotiated as part of the high-profile budget deal in which President George Bush reneged on his no new taxes campaign promise of 1988. It was also notable for heated strong Republican opposition (led by Newt Gingrich of Georgia) to a budget deal negotiated by a president of the same party. On a partisan level, the 1990 budget deal had strongly negative effects for the Republicans--most scholars and commentators agree that Bush’s change of heart on tax increases was central to his loss in 1992. The tax increase also divided House Republicans, many of whom had supported the first budget deal. For example, Jack Buechner (R-Mo.) attributes his 1990 defeat solely to his outspoken support for President Bush on the budget that year. Yet most of the damage, he explained, was not done by Democrats but by Republicans who attacked him for ‘selling out’.

Yet it also included some major procedural changes to the budget process that had a very significant, long-term impact on both the internal distribution of power and policy outcomes, two areas that had been overshadowed by the high levels of partisan conflicts since 1975. The 1981 budget had, of course, had affected both these areas but it was only made possible by the extraordinary partisan and constituency pressures of that year; no changes were made that strengthened the process or the influence of the HBC over the
long-term. In 1990, however, both sides agreed that something needed to be done about
Gramm-Rudman and a package of rules changes were pushed through with the budget
agreement. These new rules both significantly curtailed the independent power and
influence of the HAC and produced substantive changes in budgetary outcomes.

According to one of the primary staff authors of the agreement, there were two
major parts to the 1990 BEA. The first part was to set caps on Appropriations to control
spending in the discretionary part of the budget. The second introduced a pay-as-you-go
(PAYGO) requirement--some seventeen years after it had appeared in the JSC
recommendations--that applied to both entitlement liberalizations (statutory increases in
the numbers of eligible recipients) and tax increases. The costs of any changes in either
one of these areas would have to be paid for or else it would trigger an entitlement
sequester.

Perhaps most importantly, the BEA required a single panel to internalize
competing pressures to spend and to save, in much the same role that the HAC had
played in the prereform Congress (Fenno 1966). A senior Democratic staff person
explained the arrangement in the following terms:

It’s the Ways and Means Committee that writes most entitlements and all
taxes so either way, it’s Medicare—it’s program—that is going to get
sequestered whether it does an entitlement liberalization or a tax cut. So
the right people were being held institutionally hostage; Medicare was
held hostage to control what the Ways and Means Committee did and that
works.28

The changes and innovations made to the budget process by the 1990 BEA
represented the first realistic attempt to combine the flexibility that many members felt
was essential to successful budget-making with sufficient enforcement and control
provisions to constrain the deficit. These new rules altered the internal dynamic of the
process by setting firm limits across the major spending categories for several years to come. By so doing, however, it also fulfilled the major responsibility of the HBC and the budget resolution, making both all but irrelevant for the following two years.

Notes

1 Interview with author, August 4, 1999.

2 Source: CQ Almanacs, averages calculated by author.

3 Tom Downey (D-NY), interview with author, June 15, 1999.

4 Jones’ Oklahoma district went 81 percent for Nixon in 1972 and its conservatism, combined with his chairmanship of the “liberal”/leadership Budget Committee, made him a prime target in the 1982 elections, where Republicans spent over $1 million trying to defeat him. He barely hung on but was later defeated in his bid for the Senate in 1986.

5 Democratic congressional staff, interview with author, June 1999.

6 Bill Gradison, interview with author, August 2, 1999.

7 David Price (D-NC), interview with author, August 4, 1999.

8 Gradison, August 2.


10 Bill Gradison, August 2.


12 A more recent example of a “political document” would be the sweeping tax cut legislation passed by the Republican 106th Congress in defiance of a certain veto from President Clinton. The bill had no chance of enactment but was passed to demonstrate a political commitment rather than an attainable policy goal.

13 Interview with author, August 5, 1999.

14 Interview with author, June 6, 1999.

15 Interview with author, August 4, 1999.

16 Interview with author, August 3, 1999. Schick (1990, p.204) also similarly notes that “the incentive to lie is great because each dollar of deceit means one less dollar of deficit reduction has to come from paring expenditures or boosting taxes.”

17 The four members were Benjamin (D-Ind) in 1981; Gray (Pa.) and Fazio (Ca.) in 1983, and Durbin (Ill.) in 1987.
228

18 Tom Downey (D-NY), interview with author, June 15, 1999.

19 Bill Gradison, as recounted during interview with author, August 2, 1999.

20 Former HBC member and chairman Leon Panetta (D-Ca.), interview with author, May 27, 1999.

21 Republican staff, interview with author, September 2, 1997.

22 Interview with author, April 23, 1999.

23 Interview with author, June 8, 1999.

24 For a more detailed treatment of the causes and consequences of Gramm-Rudman see White and Wildavsky 1989.

25 The experience of Stephen Solarz (D-NY) at a 1985 district meeting was apparently typical: “all hands went up when he asked his audience if they wanted a balanced budget but few or none voted for higher taxes or cuts in housing, education, transportation or a range of other programs” (CQWR Aug. 3 1985, p.1524). Similarly, Butler Derrick (D-SC) found low support for most solutions except to “cut welfare. They want to balance the budget in somebody else’s yard,” he concluded (CQWR Feb. 23, 1985, p. 347).

26 As retold by congressional staff, interviews with author, June 1999.

27 Interview with author, August 5, 1999.

28 Democratic Committee Staff, interview with author, June 4, 1999.
CHAPTER 7
REVITALIZATION AND REGRET:
THE PROCESS IN THE 1990s

After years of being side-lined by high level deals and budgeting-by-formula experiments in the late 1980s, the budget process in the House once again returned to center stage in 1993, revitalized by both parties as a comprehensive--and meaningful--agenda-setting mechanism. In the space of a few short years, however, each party shared some sense of political regret over their bold use of the process to “do the right thing” in terms of deficit reduction and party priorities. Many Democrats felt that their votes on the first Clinton budget in 1993 (typically referred to by their Republican opponents as “biggest tax increase in history”)) played a major role in their 1994 losses. A few short years later, the Republican majority was also on the receiving end of a public backlash against many of their actions but, in particular, against attitudes embodied by the gung-ho ideological purists of their HBC contingent. Despite the greatly increased homogeneity of interests between members of the same party--and the differences between them--the process has remained without any significant institutional moorings, and was once again adrift at the end of the 1990s.
The change in majority party control, the booming economy, and the emergence of surpluses have all done little to reduce high levels of partisan conflict over budget resolutions and reconciliation bills--levels that have also become routine on certain appropriations bills (see Appendix A). By the end of the 1990s, the budget process had taken on a role that seemed almost the opposite of that envisioned by many of the Democratic reformers of 1973 and had helped trigger renewed calls for reform that were ironically aimed--not at the dysfunctional Budget Committee--but at the HAC.

**The Short-lived Return of Unified Control, 1993-94**

The return of unified control in January of 1993 provided a very different kind of challenge for a process that had been almost exclusively created and sustained by the pressures of divided government. For only four out of the almost twenty years since the process had been created had the White House and congressional majorities been held by the same party and, even then, the tensions between Carter and congressional Democrats had made it difficult for them to reach agreement on budgetary issues. Part of the problem had clearly been the still-high number of conservatives in the Caucus, but Carter’s leadership style had also played a role. Immediately after assuming office the new president had waivered on several key budget policy issues, making changes that drew the ire of many congressional Democrats, but especially those on the HBC. It was HBC chairman, Robert Giaimo, after all, that had famously remarked early in Carter’s term that “This is the United States Congress where the Democratic majority is going to write the legislation. It is not the Georgia legislature.” (quoted in *CQWR*, April 30, 1977, p. 775).
The first Clinton budget suggested that the patterns of behavior and expectations that had been associated with the process under divided control would remain unchanged; namely, that the congressional majority party would produce a resolution that would be strongly opposed by the minority party, reported out of Committee and approved on the floor on strict party-line votes. As described above, these norms had been instrumental in bringing about the repeated and highly problematic budgetary standoffs between the two chambers and the president. With the presidency, House and Senate all held by the same party, however, the potential to overcome budgetary gridlock was high as the plans put forward by each institution naturally had had much more in common than those produced under divided control. Yet unified government also increased the pressures within the majority party as opposition to a president of the other party was replaced with the more delicate task of synthesizing presidential and congressional power and policy agendas.

From the first days of the 103rd Congress it seemed likely that members of the president’s party would give him the benefit of the doubt for the time being, even though major rifts remained evident among Democrats, particularly on issues such as the administration’s controversial stimulus plan and its proposed BTU tax (see Woodward 1995). The election of liberal Martin Sabo (D-Minn.) over the more centrist John Spratt (D-SC) as new chairman of the HBC in January 1993 also helped improve the prospects for the administration’s budget. Sabo’s election represented a significant break with the more junior and ambitious chairmen of previous years (a fourteen-year veteran and an Appropriator), and he quickly made clear his intent to defer to the president’s program to the greatest possible extent. When questioned on the priorities that he would bring to his
new position at a January 6 news conference following his election by the Democratic Caucus, Sabo firmly responded that “We’ll wait for the president’s recommendation, and we’ll move on from there… I think our focus has to be on moving forward with the president’s program” (quoted in CQWR, Jan. 9, 1993, p. 69).

The quick passage of the budget resolution in 1993--it sailed through the House on April 1, the earliest it had ever been approved--was significantly aided by a deliberate White House strategy to bring it to a vote before the controversial stimulus package, but its ease of passage was also greatly facilitated by the now-routine process of majority party consultation and cooperation in producing the resolution. Sabo continued the norms of extensive consultation and negotiations with as many members of the Caucus as possible--all behind closed doors and prior to the Committee markup of the resolution.1 While they did stick closely to the Clinton plan, HBC Democrats also included an additional $25-30 billion in spending cuts, primarily to make up the difference in a CBO-detected shortfall in the Clinton plan (CQWR, March 13, 1999, p. 575) but perhaps also to assert a degree of political independence from the already-troubled Clinton administration.

As Table 7-1 shows, the established norm of the majority-party production, approval and passage of a resolution over the objections and opposition of an equally unified minority reached new heights in 1993-94. HBC Democrats held the line on the budget resolution, with no defections at the committee level and only 11 on the floor in 1993 and 1994. Republicans, once again, were monolithic in their opposition; not a single Republican supported the budget resolution in Committee or on the floor of the House in 1993 or 1994. They had always been very highly unified on resolution votes (see Figure
and without the pressure to support a president of their own party, an additional increase seemed inevitable under unified Democratic control.

Table 7-1: Committee and Floor Amendments (offered and approved) and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions, Unified Democratic Control (1993-94)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Committee amendments offered</th>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Committee approval</th>
<th>Floor amendments offered</th>
<th>Approved</th>
<th>Final Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>19 (all R)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27-16</td>
<td>3 (1D; 2R)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>243-183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(D27-0; R0-16)</td>
<td>(D242-11; R0-172)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9 (7R; 2D)</td>
<td>2D</td>
<td>26-17</td>
<td>4 (2D; 2R)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>223-175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(D26-0; R0-17)</td>
<td>(D222-11; R0-164)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As previously noted, however, it is much easier for a party to unify in opposition to a budget than to support and enact a proposal of their own and the level of minority cohesion on the budget resolution varies a great deal depending on whether it is measured as opposition to the Democratic resolution or support for their own alternative. Prior to 1993, House Republicans often chose not to endorse a particular alternative, but in the years that they did, it was generally the president’s budget that they put forward. Unified Democratic control gave House Republicans more freedom push their own alternative to the majority party resolution, though as initial efforts in this area showed, they were far from cohesive on this front (CQWR, Feb. 27, 1992, p. 444-45). In ranking HBC Republican John Kasich, however, Republicans had an energetic and dedicated leader who was convinced that his party needed to be more proactive in their approach to budgeting and had to both propose and rally behind a detailed Republican alternative.
Beginning in 1993, Kasich began putting together and aggressively promoting such proposals, something that had largely been discouraged or avoided as risky and divisive when the president had been of the same party, and was difficult to do without the kinds of technical expertise and other resources at the disposal of both the president and the majority party. Offered on the floor as a Republican no-tax, spending-cuts-only substitute to the Democratic resolution, Kasich’s 1993 proposal drew 135 votes which CQ noted as “a high-water mark for House Republicans on any GOP budget proposal--including those by Reagan and Bush--for the past seven years.” (*CQWR*, March 20, 1993, p. 658). While this level of support was unprecedented among Republicans, it was still far short of a majority, and 41 House Republicans voted against the plan. The following year, however, support for Kasich’s alternative jumped to 165 votes and the number of Republican defections fell to 9 members. As had been the case throughout the 1980s, a president of the opposing party played a significant role in encouraging the minority to become more creative and assertive in its opposition on the budget.

The level of unity that House Democrats exhibited on resolution votes in 1993 and 1994 also reflected a continued level of partisanship on the budget process that was considerably above that of the House as a whole. Democrats were by no means unified on their policy goals and priorities, but the politics and mechanics of the process still encouraged them to vote as if they were. Their discipline also produced intensified Republicans efforts to “make Democrats as uncomfortable as possible, put them on the record on tough votes and smoke out potential allies for the fights to come” (*CQWR*, March 13, 1993). As Table 7-1 shows, even though the floor was tightly controlled by the Democratic leadership, Republicans took advantage of the more relaxed committee
setting to propose a record 19 amendments during the 1993 HBC markup and followed them up with another 7 in 1994.

Politically, unified control should push majority party members on the HBC--and on the floor--to yield to the president’s agenda to the greatest possible extent though in doing so, they must inevitably lose some degree of substantive and political control to the president. The first two years of the Clinton administration suggested that under unified control it may be much more likely that the various branches will be able to reach agreement on substance but that for the House majority, the political strain will also be substantial. This unified-control dynamic may ironically produce the same end result for individual members as that of divided government; in both cases, the partisan pressure (either to support the president or the congressional leadership) is intense, yet by elevating partisan considerations over both constituency-level interests and internal factors, some members will inevitably leave themselves vulnerable on the latter two fronts. For these members, strong partisanship on budgetary issues might either be expected to lead to a loss of internal power and discretion over outcomes and/ or a loss of constituency confidence over responsiveness to local concerns.

The situation of majority party members had been equally precarious under divided control. For many Democrats, protection of constituency, partisan and internal interests demanded strong opposition to the Reagan-Bush budgets that were formally submitted to Congress. The deficits, stalemates and heightened partisanship that their opposition helped fuel, however, were strongly disapproved of by large numbers of their constituents whose interests they were ostensibly trying to protect. These partisan budget battles were also driven by member perceptions of constituency-level risk, a rank-and-file
resentment over a loss of internal power and control, which led directly to Gramm-Rudman and an increased reliance on high-level budget ‘summits’ (neither of which, ironically, did nothing to remedy either complaint). In sum, the brief return to unified Democratic government showed that the problems and dilemmas of the process and the partisanship it creates are by no means confined to periods of split party control.

Republicans and Surpluses, 1995-99

For the first twenty years of the new process, the fact that conditions were relatively constant (rising deficits, slow or erratic economic growth, Republican presidents and Democratic Congresses), made it difficult to separate out the effects of the process from other pressures and problems of the times. Since 1995, however, the pattern of divided control has been reversed (Democratic president, Republican Congress), the economy has grown at an unprecedented rate and instead of deficits, members now discuss prospective surpluses. Yet partisan conflict on the HBC has continued unabated, in part due to problems caused by the increasingly austere five-year discretionary spending caps agreed to under the 1997 budget agreement, but also because of Republican attitudes toward the HBC and the budget process.

The years since 1994 suggest that the long-running polarizing effect of the process has remained strong; in spite of all the various changes in conditions, the debate over a budget resolution still pushes each party to define their goals and priorities in opposition to those of the other and to emphasize the issues that divide them over those on which they agree. The closeness of recent House majorities has further entrenched
such behavior, as to do otherwise would be to pass up an invaluable opportunity to get
their ‘message’ out or to mobilize their core ideological base of electoral support.

The Budget Process and the ‘Revolution’ of 1995

Given the consistently high degree of unity exhibited by congressional
Republicans on budget resolution votes over the previous twenty years (see Figure 6-1),
the new Republican majority was widely expected to give the process a central role after
they assumed control of the House in January 1995. This in itself was not particularly
surprising, as Democrats had done the same thing during the first year of the Clinton
administration, and budgetary issues had been a dominant focus for Republicans in the
1994 congressional elections. Both the FY 1994 (the first Clinton budget) and the FY
1996 (the first Republican budget) budgets showed how dramatically the role and
significance of the budget resolution and process have increased after election results that
are construed as having given one party a ‘mandate’ to govern. As had been the case
with the Reagan budgets of 1981 and 1982, members supported budget resolutions and
reconciliation bills that represented significant changes in policy in both 1993 and 1995.

The budget process and Committee is essentially a mechanism for bringing about
substantial change; in years when there has been no such demand, there is little for the
Committee to do as the unconstrained operation of the appropriations process is sufficient
to provide for incremental increases in the status quo (Fenno 1966; Wildavsky 1964). In
1993, House Democrats went along with the rather unexpected deficit-reduction clarion
call issued by the first president of their own party in twelve years (Woodward 1995). In
1994, House Republicans had made their standard theme of fiscal responsibility central to
their campaign and had specifically pledged to bring a Balanced Budget Amendment and the line item veto to the House floor as part of their ‘Contract with America’.

Regardless of whether they could succeed, the fact that House Republicans had made a commitment to such sweeping changes was indicative of the strength of their collective dissatisfaction with the budgetary status quo. Given this dissatisfaction, the budget process and the HBC presented a natural institutional focus for Republicans and their leaders as they assumed control of the House in January 1995. Yet the scope of their agenda pushed this focus--for the first time ever--beyond the HBC to the HAC, where the leadership sought to use the appropriations process to push through their ambitious policy agenda and bypass the legislative committees (Aldrich and Rohde 2000). Not all of the GOP agenda concerned fiscal policy but in that area, the budget resolution and reconciliation bill provided the detailed leadership blueprint that was intended to guide the HAC. As Jon Healey reported in January 1995, both Kasich and Livingston had publicly stressed that the goal of balancing the budget in seven years would require “systematic changes in government, not just tinkering around the edges… The ramification is that major policy decisions become tied into the budget process…” (Healey 1995, p. 203).

What was particularly notable about the Republican operation of the budget process in 1995 was not that it contained most of their agenda nor the unprecedented partisanship that surrounded it. The major change in 1995 was that unlike the Democratic majorities that had sought to keep the two committees and their processes as distinct and separate as possible, the Republican majority specifically and deliberately sought to politicize the HAC to the same extent as the HBC (Aldrich and Rohde 2000).
Gingrich had elevated Bob Livingston (R-La.) to the chairmanship of the panel over four of his more senior colleagues, had required all the subcommittee chairs to write letter confirming their support of the party agenda and had appointed an unprecedented number of freshmen to a panel that had historically been out of their reach.

In spite of these efforts to alter traditional patterns of behavior on the HAC, however, the leadership use of the budget resolution to set the agenda in 1995 still created an almost-identical set of internal problems and disputes to those encountered by Democrats. If the level of Republican support for a strong, central budget process is considered across the three dimensions of reform, the similarities with the Democratic experience are striking—in spite of the presumed differences in the homogeneity of interests among members of each party and significant differences in broader political and economic conditions faced by each majority.

On the partisan dimension—although their historical consensus on fiscal policy suggested otherwise—the new Republican majority soon encountered ideological divisions and internal tensions similar to those that had frequently plagued their Democratic predecessors. A significant part of the problem was simply the transition from opposition to governing (see Dodd 1986a). Republicans had been highly unified in their opposition to Democratic proposals prior to 1995, yet even where there had been support for a single minority alternative, these proposals were never exposed to the diverse and often competing individual-level constituency pressures that are inevitably more keenly felt by the members of the majority party. House Republicans had heavily promoted their Contract with America proposals in the 1994 congressional elections, but most polls found only limited numbers of voters were aware of their existence or details.
The large Republican freshmen class that took office in January 1995, however, was deeply committed to the Contract and broader goals of drastic reduction in the size of government, and with it, the annual federal budget deficit. The Republican freshman class of 1995 was very similar to the 1975 Democratic class in terms of size and activism, as well as their ideological extremism relative to the nonfreshmen members of their party in the House.

The new Republican majority, however, approached the budget from the opposite direction of Democrats, who had been very strongly oriented toward their respective constituency interests and demands but found it much more difficult to agree on a set of common fiscal policy goals and priorities until faced with a president of their own party. Due to their lack of experience in the majority, Republicans were much less familiar with the detail of their constituents’ expectations of government; they knew that they didn’t support the Democratic agenda and as an opposition party, that had been enough for them to go on. As a majority party facing an ideologically hostile president, however, House Republicans were under pressure--just as Democratic majorities before them had been--to aggressively define and articulate their agenda in opposition to that of the president.

In many ways, the Republican contingent on the HBC had a headstart on Republicans on other committees as they had already had two years experience of devising and promoting Kasich’s alternative budgets and were quickly tapped by the leadership to serve as the jumping off point for the first Republican budget in 1995. The nature of the system is such, however, that efforts to organize and lead a governing coalition through the budget process/ resolution will invariably clash with the individual-level constituency pressures and demands that continue to support the traditional
committee system in the House. Where the prereform system had essentially allowed
the authorizing and appropriations process to run their respective courses with their
various outcomes becoming the budget, the post-1974 system begins with a plan that
seeks to direct, and in some cases, dictate the legislative action that must follow it.

The resolution, however, was specifically set up to function as an agenda-setting--
and specifically not a policy-making--mechanism and its history in the House has shown
that it cannot easily be transformed into the latter as efforts to do so will activate all of the
latent internal opposition that the Act specifically sought to avoid. The more detailed and
ambitious these efforts, the greater the extent to which they will infringe upon the
discretion of the various standing committees to arrive at their own decisions related to
their respective jurisdictions, and the stronger the internal tensions and conflicts will
become. Without any permanent institutional power or authority of its own, the role and
significance of the budget process/ Committee within the House has tended to recede
almost as quickly as it has expanded, regardless of which party is in the majority.

Republican control of the House since 1995, however, exposed the process to much more
intense and sustained pressure than it had previously endured and triggered a whole new
debate on its future.

Republican Budget Committee Composition and Leadership

Led by chairman John Kasich (R-Ohio), HBC Republicans in 1993 began to use
the budget process/ Committee in a far more constructive and aggressive fashion than had
been the norm under presidents of their own party. This new emphasis on a putting forth
a detailed alternative also coincided with a dramatic shift in the pattern of Republican
assignments to the HBC. In broad terms, Republican assignments had roughly followed the lead of the Democrats (see Table 6-1) in that they become significantly more representative of their party by the 1980s. It was not a linear progression for Republicans, however (as Table 7-2 shows), as new and continuing HBC Republicans were consistently more loyal than their partisan peers through the 99th Congress, though this distance shrank steadily thereafter. Using the mean loyalty scores recorded in the last session of the previous Congress, new and returning HBC Republicans in the 1990s appeared to be only slightly more loyal than their Conference as a whole.

Table 7-2: Republican Budget Committee Assignments 1975-99, Difference in Mean Previous Year Party Unity Scores; all Republicans, Continuing House Budget Committee (HBC) Republicans and New HBC Republicans and Freshmen Assignments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress (year)</th>
<th>All Republicans</th>
<th>Continuing HBC Republicans</th>
<th>New HBC Republicans</th>
<th>Republican Freshmen</th>
<th>Democratic freshmen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94th (1975-76)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95th (1977-78)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96th (1979-80)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97th (1981-82)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>+11</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98th (1983-84)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>+15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99th (1985-86)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>+14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100th (1987-88)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101st (1989-90)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102nd (1991-92)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103rd (1993-94)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104th (1995-96)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105th (1997-98)</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106th (1999-2000)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although Republicans had been much more generous with waivers for their members of the HBC to serve more than 3 terms, only four Republican HBC members from the 102nd Congress had sought and received reassignment to the Committee at the beginning of the 103rd Congress in January 1993. This unusually high number of Republican vacancies on the Committee left the party with thirteen new appointments to make for the 103rd Congress. The seven non-freshmen members who were assigned to the Committee for the first time were broadly representative of their party, with a mean party unity score of 81 in 1992 compared to a 79 average for all House Republicans. The remaining six slots, however, all went to freshmen members.

Table 7-3: Years experience of House Appropriations Committee (HAC) members on the House Budget Committee (HBC) and mean HBC seniority by party, 1975-2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress/year</th>
<th>Combined years experience HAC Democrats (3)</th>
<th>Mean seniority HBC Democrats (years)</th>
<th>Combined years experience HAC Republicans (2)</th>
<th>Mean seniority HBC Republicans (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94th (1975-76)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95th (1977-78)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96th (1979-80)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97th (1981-82)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98th (1983-84)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99th (1985-86)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100th (1987-88)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101st (1989-90)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102nd (1991-92)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103rd (1993-94)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104th (1995-96)</td>
<td>28 (2 as minority)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>18 (3 as majority)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105th (1997-98)</td>
<td>14 (only 1 appt)</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106th (1999-2000)</td>
<td>16 (2 members)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>12 (3 members)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the mean seniority of HBC members of both parties fell sharply after the initial highs of the 94th Congress, this trend appeared to bottom out in the 97th Congress (1981-82) and recovered slightly over the following two Congresses (Table 7-3). At the beginning of 100th Congress in 1987, however, the party trends diverged and have remained significantly different since then. While the mean seniority of the two party contingents had been roughly similar--with neither one being consistently higher than the other through the 100th Congress--mean HBC Republican seniority did not recover at the end of the 1980s and continued on its downward trend to new lows in the 1990s.

As Table 7-2 shows, Republican began packing freshmen representatives onto the panel in 1993, pushing their mean seniority on the Committee to an all-time low of 4.1 years (Table 7-3). Six freshmen were appointed to the HBC in 1993, another six as the party assumed majority control in January 1995, three in 1997, and five more in 1999. Between 1993 and 1999, 20 Republican freshmen were appointed to the HBC, compared to only 11 such assignments made by the Democrats across the same period.5

By stacking the Committee with freshmen throughout the late 1990s (20 freshmen assigned to the Committee in the last four congresses), the Republican leadership presumably sought to ensure a unified front at this early stage in the proceedings and to build up some momentum for the fights that lay ahead. The Budget Committee has never been able to dictate the course of the legislative action that must follow the resolution, but, as the Democratic experience of the late 1970s clearly showed, the behavior and actions of the HBC can critically influence the agenda and political tenor of the session to come.
In spite of the steady stream of ‘democratizing’ reforms in the House over the past three decades, assignments to the prestige committees of Appropriations and Ways and Means have remained largely off-bounds to freshmen, in spite of their increasing campaign emphases on balancing the budget and other themes of fiscal responsibility. Many of the members or their staffs interviewed for this project reported that as freshmen, they took seats on Budget after having lobbied unsuccessfully for assignment to Appropriations or Ways and Means. Ironically, one of the few freshmen to win a seat on Appropriations (Mark Neuman, R-Wisc.) was thrown off the defense subcommittee in his first term and--after the freshmen had rallied in his support--was compensated with a seat on Budget (see CQ Almanac 1995, p.1-16). With the exception of 1995, for new members seeking to influence national fiscal policy service on the HBC remains their best, if not their only option.

Yet a large number of freshmen appointments to the Committee can only strengthen perceptions of the resolution as a political document at the expense of its significance as a blueprint for governing. There are two primary reasons why freshman and more junior members should tend to support a more strongly partisan or ideological resolution. First, they are less socialized into the rules and norms of the institution and hence less aware or concerned about the internal power struggles that the budget process can easily trigger. They are also likely to be less familiar with the technical complexities of the process and less cognizant of the political and economic constraints upon the taxing and spending decisions that follow the resolution.

Second, while their campaigns may have made impressed upon them the strength of constituents concern about deficits or other aspects of fiscal policy, they may be less
familiar with the contours of district opinion regarding specific options or tradeoffs and hence may be more easily swayed by leadership arguments and persuasion. On the difficult 1993 vote on the FY1994 resolution, for example, the Democratic leadership was able to convince virtually all freshmen to support the resolution while thirteen committee chairmen and subcommittee chairmen defected on the first vote. One of two Democratic freshmen on the HBC in 1993, Earl Pomeroy (D-SD) implied that his relative inexperience had a huge influence on his support for the budget resolution that year: “knowing what I know now, that may have been a vote that carried more risk than I would presently find acceptable… Politically it almost took me out.” 6

This movement toward greater Republican freshmen representation on the HBC built upon the partisan consolidation of the process that had occurred under the Democrats. While the HBC is generally seen as a ‘leadership’ committee, it has long stood in stark contrast to other leadership committees as one that is made up of disproportionately junior rather than senior members. This is in large part a reflection of the challenge on budget-related issues for both parties has tended to be seen more as one of keeping up with shifts in the external political climate and less as one of actually making policy changes in response to such shifts. This distinction lay at the heart of the 1974 statute and led members to layer the new process over existing arrangements rather than to make any major changes in the internal status quo at that time.

Budget-related issues had remained salient in congressional campaigns, and Republicans first elected in the 1990s were much more likely to become preoccupied with such issues during their first term. In a virtual repeat of the Democratic experience in the early 1980s, these new members were far more concerned about the deficit and
committed to its reduction than many of their more senior colleagues, and also came to focus on the HBC as the most accessible and appropriate arena in which they could make a difference. Their presence on the HBC was useful to both them and their party in terms of connecting (or at least appear to connect) these critical campaign themes and promises to their behavior in office. The extent to which their behavior impacted policy outcomes, however—as always—has remained firmly beyond their control in the hands of the leadership and their fellow partisans.

Table 7-4: Amendments Offered, Approved, and Final Passage Votes on House Budget Resolutions by Party, House Budget Committee, 1993-99.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amendments offered</th>
<th>Amendments approved</th>
<th>Final Committee Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>19R</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27-16 (D27-0; R0-16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9 (7R; 2D)</td>
<td>2D</td>
<td>26-17 (D26-0; R0-17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24-17 (D1-13b; R23-0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>12D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997c</td>
<td>7D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31-7 (D11-7; R20-0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>16D</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22-16 (D0-16; R22-0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>22-18 (D0-18; R22-0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Where possible, the number of committee rolls calls on amendments is given. In years where this was not available, the estimate could include amendments disposed of without objection, by voice vote, or with a show of hands.

b The sole dissenting Democrat on every committee roll call in 1995 was Mike Parker (Miss.) who later switched parties.

c Balanced Budget Agreement of 1997 was already in place.

If the unprecedented numbers of Republican freshmen appointed to the Committee were intended to produce high levels of support for strongly partisan resolutions (‘political documents’), they certainly did not disappoint. As can be seen in Table 7-4, strict party-line voting on budget resolutions in Committee was uninterrupted by the change in majority party control, with the exception of the 1997 vote that occurred...
shortly after the bipartisan Balanced Budget Agreement had been negotiated between the Clinton administration and congressional Republicans. Unlike previous high-profile budget deal years, however, there was no significant renewal of consensus surrounding the passage of House appropriations bills in the aftermath of this deal (see Appendix A).

Yet the fact that the Committee was stacked with more ideological freshmen and more junior members soon led to a growing gap between the highly partisan or political resolutions it produced and the internal and constituency considerations that dominated subsequent legislative action on these issues. As one Republican member noted, the freshmen tended to be “deficit hawks…serious about balancing the budget, that type of stuff. And that’s not true of the ‘old boy’ membership.” While the freshmen-stacked Committee helped ensure that the leadership version of the Budget resolution was sent to the floor unchanged, its unrepresentative membership suggested that its prospects both on the floor, in the other House committees that would ultimately be responsible for implementing it, and in the Republican Senate--were considerably less assured. In contrast to Gramm-Rudman or the 1990 BEA, the new Republican majority in 1995 sought to make sweeping budgetary change through political rather than procedural means, much as Reagan and the conservative coalition had done in 1981. As far as congressional budgeting is concerned, however, neither political pressures nor procedural reform appear capable of providing the long-term stability or incentives necessary to hold members to their party’s ambitious and often contentious budgetary plans.

In both 1981 and 1995, perceptions of electoral mandates were sufficient for the majority to enjoy some degree of success in the short-term, again suggesting that constituency-level factors have repeatedly strengthened the institutional position of the
process and the Committee at these key moments of sweeping agenda change.

Whenever such momentum has developed, however, it has always faded fast and 1995 was certainly no exception. Resistance to Kasich’s/ the leadership’s budget within Republican ranks was apparent from the very first days of the 104th Congress and, as had been the case for the Democrats, it was largely driven by internal tensions and power struggles.

The first order of budgetary business for the new Republican majority was to revise the existing FY1995 budget. Both the HBC and the HAC sought to influence these changes, as the HBC began work on a revised budget resolution while the HAC began putting together the individual recissions bills among its various subcommittees. The HBC chairman quickly organized his into policy-specific working groups and publicly announced a target of $200 billion in cuts over the next five years, an amount intended to both cover the cost of the promised tax cuts and still allow for deficit reduction (CQWR, Jan.14, 1995, p.146). Although these groups attempted to work with appropriators and authorizers to build Republican support for their proposals, they soon ran into strong resistance from many newly-minted committee chairs who were “reluctant to have their hands tied on policy questions” (CQWR, Jan. 21, 1995, p. 205).

Kasich’s ambitious plans and efforts to set the agenda were immediately challenged by other Republicans, in particular HAC chair Bob Livingston, who announced that his Committee would not set specific targets for spending cuts. In spite of his position as Gingrich’s hand-picked chairman, Livingston pointedly remarked that “the worst thing we can do is come up with grand numbers and goals that we find out we can’t meet” and said that he would pay no attention to such targets until they were
“provided by a higher authority” (quoted in CQWR, Jan. 14 1995, p. 146). His sentiments were echoed by one of his subcommittee chairmen who warned against trying “through the budget process to micromanage the appropriations numbers… we probably have a better feel for where we can go after some legitimate savings” (quoted in CQWR, Jan. 21, 1995, p. 205).

Although Kasich went to considerable lengths to foster consultation and cooperation with other committees and their leaders, he also upped the political ante and increased internal tensions with his high media profile and numerous public announcements in early 1995. As the full House was considering the relatively modest HAC proposal for $17.4 billion in recissions for FY 1995, Kasich unveiled his committee’s revised budget resolution calling for $100 billion of appropriations cuts over the next five years. Not only did this seem like an impossible goal given the controversy that had exploded around the FY1995 recissions, but he further infuriated the already-beleaguered appropriators by releasing a list of “illustrative” cuts that would meet the targets laid out in the resolution (CQWR, March 18, 1995, p. 796) Many Republican appropriators were irritated by what they saw as the efforts of the HBC to “dictate” policy to them (Hager 1995, p. 344), and Kasich’s very public posturing made it difficult for both authorizers or appropriators to later distance themselves from positions taken by the Committee. As one Republican staffer recalled, Republican members of the Committee “did not make themselves best friends with some of the authorizing people” and the following year, the Committee came under considerable pressure from early on not to get into specifics in the resolution.
These first few weeks would set the tone for the budget process under the Republican majority. Internal constraints upon the process remained just as strong for a new majority that almost had publicly committed itself to major changes in fiscal policy as they had been for the entrenched Democratic majority that had harbored no such ambitions back in the 1970s. The high numbers of Republican freshmen appointed to the HBC in 1995—along with Kasich’s energetic leadership—proved invaluable to the leadership, again in the short-term, in setting the parameters of the agenda for the new Congress. In that critical first year, and in subsequent years, the HBC produced a strongly partisan resolution that was approved on party-line votes on the floor.

The prolonged battles over the FY 1995 rescissions meant that the Republicans got off to a late start on the FY 1996 resolution. In spite of the resistance encountered on the much more modest rescissions bills, the leadership threw its weight behind a much more radical HBC proposal for their first full (FY 1996) budget. With the House-approved Balanced Budget Amendment facing an uncertain future in the Senate and beyond, the HBC became the venue through which the leadership would push their plan to achieve balance in seven years (Maraniss and Weisskopf 1996, p. 36-52). The controversial resolution proposed cutting $1.04 trillion over seven years—including $288 billion from Medicare, $187 billion from Medicaid, $192 billion from nondefense discretionary and $219 from other entitlements programs—and passed the House on May 18 on a near perfect party-line vote (CQWR, May 20, 1995, p. 1460). Many elements of the plan, however, proved unworkable and internal disagreements among Republicans or Clinton vetoes of several appropriations bills resulted in the unprecedented government shutdown at the end of the year.
While party voting remained very high on both sides, neither the resolution nor the HBC carried the weight it did after that first year of Republican control. House Republicans had tried to govern in 1995 on the ‘political document’ produced by the HBC and they would not make the same mistake again. After 1995, the Committee proved unwilling or unable to adapt in the wake of such events such as the government shutdown and the embarrassing retreat over riders on emergency Midwest flood aid, which resulted in a broad scaling back of budgetary ambitions among House Republicans. The resolution remained an important political document, but its influence on subsequent congressional action soon diminished as surpluses and their increasingly tenuous majority encouraged many House Republicans to more aggressively pursue district benefits through such legislation as Bud Shuster’s mammoth ISTEA highway spending bill and the last-minute omnibus spending bill of 1998.

A Rivalry Renewed: The House Budget and Appropriations Committees

The years after 1995 also saw a continuation of the tensions between Republican members of the HBC and the HAC that had been evident from the very first days of Republican control. Internally, the HAC has remained the prestige Committee in the House and its power has continued to make it difficult for Budget to exert little, if any, influence over its actions. The Republican takeover, however, temporarily disrupted the balance of power between the two committees. While the leadership backed the HAC position in the initial clashes over FY 1995 rescissions, they then allied themselves very closely with the freshmen on the HBC over the FY 1996 budget and pushed the moderates on the HAC to go along. As previously discussed, partisanship on the HBC
had been firmly established for over a decade prior to 1995 and virtually any ambitious leadership proposal could have sailed through the Committee and prevailed on the floor due to the well-established recognition of the resolution as a political document. The situation on the HAC was quite different and in 1995, the leadership anticipated considerably more resistance from this panel. All subcommittee chairmen had been required to sign pledges of support for the Republican agenda, and the new HAC chair Bob Livingston (R-La.) had also been selected for his post over four of his Committee colleagues with greater seniority. According to one Republican staff person, the circumstances of Livingston’s appointment—at least through the 104th Congress—was supposed to serve as “a constant reminder to those people of who is in charge.”

In 1995, Republican leaders were clearly much more concerned about the ‘institutional’ types that have traditionally ended up on the HAC and become socialized into a set of inclusive and largely nonpartisan norms (see Fenno 1966), than they were about the ideologues on the HBC. The enduring stability of the HAC culture was much of a problem for the Republicans than it had been for Democrats, largely because of the sweeping challenge to the spending policy status quo that the GOP’s agenda represented. One Democratic staff member observed that tensions often ran high between the two panels as, many of the Republican ‘budgeteers’ see Republicans on the HAC as “part of the old school, the government-as-usual school. They represent precisely what the new Republicans got elected to get rid of.” Many appropriators of both parties, on the other hand, would still apparently relish the opportunity to get rid of the Budget Committee. While the surprise victory of 1994 gave momentum to Republicans on the HBC, the balance soon shifted back toward the HAC, in spite of the leadership’s best
efforts to recast that Committee’s traditional role in the House. It has remained dominated by the essential nature of its responsibilities, the fact that it is charged with originating and enacting the only must-pass legislation of every Congress. The shutdown of 1995, of course, only underscored the importance of this task and the considerable risks involved in treating it in the same partisan manner as the budget resolution.

As had been the case with Democratic majorities, the major exception to a strongly partisan role for the HBC under the Republicans occurred in the wake of the high-level Balanced Budget Agreement of 1997. Once again, however, the role of the Committee was essentially determined by recent election results and the dominant ‘message’ that emerged from them. The Balanced Budget Agreement of 1997 may have temporarily defused tensions between the two parties on budget goals and priorities, but it also showed the Republican majority to be susceptible to the same kind of internal backlash or resentment against such deals as the Democrats had experienced during the late 1980s. The leadership only just managed to stall Shuster’s ISTEA reauthorization (which would have violated the terms of the deal within a few short weeks of it being signed), and several members of the HAC publicly complained about the deal and insinuated that it would not--even could not--last. Ironically, while Democrats on the HBC went along with the deal and gave bipartisan support to the resolution, their counterparts on the HAC did not. There was no rebound in the levels of support for the regular House Appropriations bills in 1997. Most of the bills that had been the most controversial before the Deal--Interior, Treasury-Postal, District of Columbia and Commerce, Justice and State--remained so.12
Finally, the five years of Republican majority control have shown that the tensions and problems that have typically surrounded the process have remained unaffected by the prospect of (substantial) annual surpluses and both staff and members interviewed for this project were divided on what impact surpluses would eventually have. Some argued that without the deficit, there was no need for the process whereas other suggested that without the crushing political pressure produced by large annual deficits the process may yet have the chance to function as it was intended.

As had been the case in the 1980s, the significance, centrality and partisanship of the budget process continued to vary through the 1990s. The BEA, for example, left the Committee with little to do in the early 1990s, and it largely followed the lead of the Clinton administration in 1993 and 1994. Yet the performance of the process has largely been consistent with its origins; it was established to respond to the partisan and institutional pressures of divided government and it has tended to become more significant under precisely those conditions. Although the House as an institution has generally been slow to respond to the new pressures and demands of its changing external economic and political environment, the budget process, if anything, has been overly sensitive to such shifts. The years in which it has mattered most have tended to be those immediately following elections that resulted in a significant shift in the partisan balance of power. Its lack of power and continued internal resistance to the process, however, all but guarantee that the House will quickly revert back to more decentralized rules and arrangements after such episodes.

In 1998, the Republican Congress notably failed to produce a Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for the first time ever since the 1974 Act came into effect. As
had occurred under Democratic control, each chamber had no problem producing and passing its own budget resolution but in 1998 the two sides were so far apart that they did not even convene conference meetings.

In both 1998 and 1999, the appeal of the Budget Committee for highly ambitious members continued to take its toll on the process; various House staff and members interviewed for this project confirmed that Kasich’s obvious intent to run for the presidency had strongly affected the resolutions reported out by his committee in 1998 and 1999, though several also suggested that Domenici’s efforts to secure biennial budgeting before his retirement played a significant part in the failure to produce a resolution in 1998.

The long-term impact of the events of the past two years on the budget process in the House remains uncertain. There is general agreement that it has suffered a serious deterioration, but there have also been years under Democratic control where the process was ineffectual or had no significant role to play though that did not stop it from being used in a very significant an effective capacity to pass the first Clinton budget in 1993. Yet this recent decline has produced numerous calls for reform and several proposals have been introduced in both the House and Senate. The HBC reported a bill in early 1999 co-sponsored by Committee members Jim Nussle (R-Iowa) and Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.). In spite of the breakdown of the budget process in 1998-99, however, the thrust of the proposed changes was to give more control to the Budget Committee (mostly by providing for automatic appropriations) at the expense of the HAC.
The influence and authority of the HAC continues to be the primary target for budget reformers, in large part because the substantive and organizational differences between the two panels and the overlap in their responsibilities guarantees repeated clashes. A central motivating factor in the recent spate of reform proposals has been that under conditions of divided government, the appropriations process has often been Congress’s Achilles’ heel in its struggle with the president. The fact that the annual appropriations bills must be signed into law by the president each year and that presidents of both parties have been able to successfully exploit their veto power during budgetary end-games has encouraged members to try and alter existing procedures in order to provide themselves with some degree of leverage at these critical moments.

The provisions in the HBC’s Nussle-Cardin budget reform bill for automatic appropriations, for example, would permit Congress to ignore the president and automatically roll over existing levels of funding (at the same or a slightly reduced level) into a new fiscal year. If the bills did not have to be resigned every year, the balance of power would clearly shift away from the president and back toward Congress. Although this may not seem to be a particularly sound way to make fiscal policy the prospect of weakening the ability of the president to hold Congress hostage over the must-pass Appropriations legislation at the end of each fiscal year holds obvious appeal for many members of the current Republican majority.

Another popular reform proposal has been for the Congress to adopt a biennial budget cycle and this has received renewed attention in recent months: the Rules
Committee held hearings on the issue early in 2000 with a view to developing a legislative proposal by the end of the year. The Rules Committee hearings signaled strong leadership support for biennial budgeting where none had been forthcoming for continuing appropriations; the leadership effectively killed the Nussle-Cardin bill that proposed the latter by referring it to the HAC after it had been reported by the HBC in June 1998. In contrast, there did seem to be significant support for biennial budgeting; President Clinton called for it in his FY2001 submission, Speaker Hastert testified in support of it, as did HAC chairman C.W. Bill Young (R-Fl.). While influential members on both sides of the aisle have called for it, however, senior Democratic appropriators have remained deeply opposed (Rules Committee Hearings Transcript for Feb. 16, 2000). The full House once again rejected biennial budgeting by a 217-201 margin on May 16, 2000 (Pianin 2000).

Both automatic continuing resolutions and biennial budgeting seem unlikely to succeed, mostly for the same reason that budget reform has evolved in the way it has over the past thirty years--because the HAC has remained the foundation of internal power and influence in the chamber. Both proposals would diminish the influence of the HAC within the chamber; automatic continuing resolutions would deny appropriations bills their historic and exclusive ‘must-pass’ status within the House and potentially lead to the abandonment of the regular appropriations process in its entirety. Biennial budgeting would theoretically also reduce the power of the HAC by having them appropriate only once every two years instead of on an annual basis. Yet the impact of biennial budgeting on the HAC might be substantially reduced if, as many members anticipate, the number of supplemental appropriations bills during the second year was high.
The HAC has also been frustrated by recent developments, but of course, its members would much rather weaken or abolish the HBC than support changes that would diminish their own influence. Given that their preferred outcome is unlikely, appropriators would seem most inclined toward proposals to increase cooperation between the two committees, mostly along the lines originally envisioned by the reformers of the early 1970s.

The obvious way to promote such cooperation would be through having more appropriators (and presumably Ways and Means members) serve on the HBC, increasing the personal stake of HBC members in producing a workable resolution. The fact that this has no been given more serious consideration to date illustrates the continued influence of internal constraints on reform. HAC representation on the HBC had to be dramatically scaled back in 1973, partly because of concerns about the HAC accumulating excessive power, but also because the Democratic majority was deeply divided at that time and HAC members were generally much more conservative than the party as a whole. House Democrats have since become much more homogenous in their interests and unified in their voting (Sinclair 1983; Rohde 1991) but such proposals have yet to be forthcoming.

The advantages of having more appropriators serve on the HBC would be that they could potentially break down some of the rivalry that has long existed between the two panels and replace it with the cooperation that was hoped for by many of the reformers back in 1973. The responsibilities of the two panels under the 1974 statute clearly overlap and part of the problem has been the strong divergence in the respective membership and operations of each panel. The HAC continues to attract more senior,
moderate and “responsible” members while the HBC--alone among “leadership” committees in the House--has become the almost exclusive domain of the most junior and ideological members from both sides of the aisle. Similarly, many HAC subcommittees have remained true to their cooperative, bipartisan tradition (Fenno 1966, 1973; Appendix A shows which bills have continued to be approved on a bipartisan basis) while partisanship on the HBC has consistently been among the highest of any panel in the chamber. These entrenched differences in membership and operations have made it all but impossible that the two committees will be seeking the same goals or emphasizing the same priorities in any given session.

While the Joint Study Committee proposal in 1973 had called for the HAC and the HWMC to each control one-third of the new committee’s membership, the money committees were ultimately given only five seats each on the HBC under the 1974 statute. Of these five, three were later set aside for majority party members and two for minority party members from each panel. When the new budget process was introduced in 1975, this meant that instead of controlling two-thirds of the HBC’s membership, the money committees controlled two-fifths, or 40 percent. There has been no adjustment made to this original number, even though the HBC has since expanded to 43 members in the 106th Congress, reducing money committee representation from both parties to a mere 23 percent.

The intent of the Act was that the HBC would be responsible for putting together a macro-level plan, leaving authorizers, the HAC and the HWMC to make the micro-level decisions about how to reach those goals. These two levels, however, cannot be expected to fit together if they are developed entirely in isolation from each other, and a
greater membership overlap could potentially increase consistency across the levels. As one senior appropriations staff person argued, there does seem to be a need for more people on the HBC “whose jobs depend on implementing those plans.” In his view, the resolution has gone so far down the ‘political’ rather than ‘governing’ track that it has only succeeded in putting out “more and more unrealistic numbers that appropriators can get around anyway.” A less drastic remedy might also be a change in the pattern of appointments to the HBC, away from the most junior ideological members, as had begun to occur on the Democratic side in the mid-1980s (see Table 7-3) and may yet be revived should Democrats regain the majority in 2000.

Nussle-Cardin also included provisions to have the president sign the resolution, an idea that is often supported as a way to get the president involved in the process sooner and preempt some of the problems that have regularly erupted later in the session and held up so much of the congressional agenda. The problem with this idea is that the president could—and likely would—simply refuse to sign it (under divided control, it is, after all, a statement of the opposing party’s priorities) and Congress could not force him to do so. Others have opposed such proposals on the grounds that, by giving the president considerable leverage at such an early stage in the process, they would violate the constitutional separation of powers.

In spite of Congress’s best efforts, the president continues to enjoy a range of critical advantages in shaping and influencing the budget over those of his congressional opponents. The presidential veto, for example, had long been recognized as a mechanism by which the presidential could force Congress to cut spending (Kiewiet and McCubbins
1987), but Clinton has stunned congressional Republicans with his ability to use it to extract higher levels of spending from Congress.\textsuperscript{14}

The irony is inescapable; more than a quarter of a century after the 1974 Act, members of Congress are still producing budget reform proposals that they believe would strengthen their position relative to that of the president. Internal constraints within the institution--most notably the continued dominance of the Appropriations Committee--still prevent seem to be preventing its members from enacting the kind of changes that would yield such dividends. Instead, the process currently only reflects the balance of political and electoral forces within the institution at that particular point in time. In a general sense, if recent election results appear to strengthen one side at the expense of the other the advantaged party will claim a ‘mandate’ to govern, and the momentum resulting from the election will likely strengthen their case and put their opponents on the defensive (it’s hard to argue against the “will” of the people, after all). If political or electoral forces do not clearly favor one side over the other, the process is likely to be downplayed or ignored.

The similarities in the politics and internal mechanics of congressional budgeting under Democratic and Republican control, through steep deficits and into an era of prospective surpluses strongly suggest that the process represents a new path of development within the House. Its substantive significance will continue to vary from year to year but it seems likely that the philosophical differences that have come to polarize the congressional parties so sharply over the past twenty years will continue to dominate the process through the foreseeable future. While the process was originally devised and supported primarily as the solution to an obvious internal or organizational
shortcoming, the strongly partisan tensions between Congress and the president that facilitated its enactment in 1974 are likely to remain its most significant legacy.

Notes

1 One Democratic staff person estimated that Sabo walked the entire Caucus through the budget resolution, making changes along the way in closed-door 2-3 hour meetings that were held 2-3 times a week for almost 6 weeks prior to the HBC markup. Interview with author, September 2, 1997.

2 They are ‘prospective’ to the extent that their future size (or existence some would argue) is dependent upon the economy continuing to grow at its current (unprecedented) rate.

3 For example, Del Latta (Ohio), the first ranking Republican on the HBC served continuously from 1975 until 1988. Bill Gradison (R-Ohio) was also permitted to serve five terms on the Committee (1983-92).

4 Source: CQ Almanacs. Means calculated by author.

5 In comparison, the Democrats on the HBC had over 8 years of prior congressional experience in the 103rd Congress, though this fell to a low of 5.2 in the 105th before recovering to 6.3 in the 106th.

6 Interview with author, August 5, 1999.

7 Dan Miller (R-Fl), interview with author, November 4, 1997.

8 Republican staff, interview with author, September 2, 1997.


10 Democratic staff, interview with author, June 1999.

11 Interviews with author, various (Miller, Lilly)

12 The one exception was the Labor-HHS bill than had been approved by a 51 percent majority in 1996 but jumped to 81 percent approval in 1997 (see Appendix A).

13 Democratic HAC staff, interview with author, June 2, 1999.

14 Interviews with author, various sources, 1999.
In many respects, the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act (CBICA) of 1974 must be considered an exceptional case of congressional reform; it is regularly described by both members and commentators alike as the most important congressional reform in over fifty years, one that “affects just about every existing unit of Congress” (Ellwood and Thurber 1977, p. 164) and that has “significantly altered congressional operations” (Price 1992, p. 92). Yet the scope of the changes made also means that their enactment and implementation should have captured the full range of interests and influences involved in major reform, one that is unlikely to be provoked by more modest proposals. While it may not be representative of the general population of congressional reforms, this case supports some tentative conclusions regarding the capacity of the House for fundamental change that, over the longer-term, should be more critical to its future than an ability to make any number of more minor adjustments.

As presented in this dissertation, the case of the CBICA of 1974 strongly supports institutionalist expectations of deep-seated internal resistance to major changes in congressional rules or procedures. Its enactment, however, also suggests conditions under which this resistance may be sufficiently reduced to allow reform to pass, and its
implementation shows how, even after reforms have been approved, continued internal resistance can lead to unintended consequences such as the dramatic increases in partisanship that the new process helped fuel.

While individual-level perspectives on congressional reform lead us to expect the momentum for change to originate within the constituency and/ or the partisan dimensions, the 1974 Act showed how a particular combination of constituency, partisan and internal conditions was required for reform to succeed and endure. Budget reform was finally approved by the House in December 1973 because pressures across these three dimensions converged in a way that made it impossible for members not to act. The primary motivation may have come from external factors but the internal tensions of the times also gave critical credibility to the issue that helped to finally get it on the congressional agenda at the end of 1972.

**Timing and Motivation**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the literature suggests that member support for major internal reforms should be fueled by shifts in external political and economic conditions and constrained by the strength of their vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo. The former are expected to lead members to support rules changes in order to facilitate collective responsiveness to new and salient policy problems or concerns among their constituents, while the latter is expected to encourage members to oppose such changes as threats to the existing distribution of power and influence within the chamber. For reform to occur, therefore, external pressures for change must become significantly stronger than the high expected level of member support for the internal status quo.
As described in Chapter 2, the events leading up to the 1974 CBICA were consistent with both sets of expectations; the impetus for reform came largely from outside the institution, and a majority of its members resisted the mounting pressures for change until the last possible moment. The economic slow-down and downturn and conflicts with the executive branch provided the critical external pressures for reform, though internal support for existing arrangements was also significantly undermined by a clear lack of organizational capacity to coordinate budget-related decisions as well as by the reform movement that was then reaching its zenith in the House Democratic Caucus (Rohde 1991; Schick 1981, 1990; Sundquist 1981).

These events also suggested that much of the critical pressure for reform was indirect or implied, based on perception and possibility rather than any specific shifts in public opinion. While the Gallup Poll at the time, showed clear evidence of public concern about the economy, and even of a growing feeling that government action was fueling rather than restraining inflation, the organization asked no specific questions about the proposed reforms, nor is there any reason to believe that voters in general, paid a great deal of attention to the issue in 1973.

If most constituents struggle (or fail) to keep up with the activities of both Congress and their individual Representative, far fewer can reasonably be expected to be cognizant of internal organization and procedures and the impact that they may or may not have on outcomes. Even when budget reform was being debated back in 1973, there is little in the journalistic or institutional record to suggest strong constituency pressure or even interest in the proposed changes. Several members interviewed for this project stated that no-one in their district really had any idea that a new system was even being
considered, much less had a strong opinion on it. Constituency concerns, in this case, may have been policy- rather than process-oriented but the fact that Congress had no panel or mechanism through which it could consider and control the component parts of the budget helped parlay these policy concerns into support for internal reform.

What stands out in the case of the 1974 Act, however, is how critical presidential pressure was in triggering reform and how ill-inclined members appeared to be to make major changes of their own volition. Members had been struggling amongst themselves over spending levels for several years prior to 1973, yet there had been no serious effort to come up with any long-term structural or procedural solutions. Even after the shock of the October 1972 debt ceiling bill (see Chapter 3), the budget reform bill was stranded in the Rules Committee for over six months in 1973 as Democrats fought bitterly amongst themselves over the proposed changes. Only after continued economic problems and Senate action did the House finally bring a reform package to the floor, and even then, the compromises necessary to get it passed belied the near-unanimity with which it was ultimately approved. A potential constituency-level connection and strong partisan incentives (to win the PR war against the Nixon White House) had critically helped convince members to pass budget reform in 1973. These pressures, however, declined steadily through 1973 (as Nixon’s Watergate-related troubles mounted) allowing the depth of internal resistance became the dominant influence on the bill, producing several key changes in the 1974 Act that greatly effected its consequences for the chamber (see Chapter 3).

A strong constituency dimension seems unlikely to be present on most issues of congressional reform, meaning that some kind of intervening variable or agent should
generally be required to provide such a link. Absent a structural and/or political crisis within Congress, a constituency-level connection should be critical in generating support for reform as members preferences are otherwise likely to favor the maintenance of the status quo. A constituency dimension to internal reform does not necessarily have to be direct or even that compelling; with respect to the 1974 Act, the potential for such a connection was sufficient to help convince sufficient numbers of members to support change.

The Consequences of the 1974 Act

Events leading up to the budget reforms of 1974 not only demonstrated the overwhelming inclination of members of the majority party to defend status arrangements but further suggested that while this inclination should be sufficient to keep most proposals off the active congressional agenda, it can also be expected to weaken or dilute reforms that are formally taken up by the chamber. The consequences of the 1974 Act show how, once enacted, reforms can develop in ways that were unexpected or unintended by its original supporters, particularly as the new rules are integrated into the broader legislative environment (Davidson and Olesek 1976; March and Olsen 1989). In the years after 1975, the process began to take on new meaning and implications for members as it interacted with preexisting institutional rules and norms. In this case, unexpected consequences followed from the fact that it immediately became far more conflictual than most chamber business at that time and that the HBC had not been granted sufficient authority to contain, much less resolve these strong and persistent conflicts (see Chapters 4 and 5). As this conflict quickly spilt over into the floor
proceedings, it became obvious that the new process was going to require far more adjustments within the chamber than most had foreseen.

Continued problems in the broader economy combined with rigorous conservative opposition also helped close off the possibility of abandoning or repealing the process. As discussed in Chapter 5, any Democratic attempts to do so would only have been attacked by their conservative opponents as further proof of congressional irresponsibility. The reform effort may have succeeded in 1973 as a largely symbolic or organizational issue but the escalation of partisan tensions over continued economic problems in the latter part of the decade proved critical in keeping it in place. This political need to keep it in place forced certain internal adjustments on the part of the Democratic majority.

As shown in Chapter 4, the production of the resolution in the House immediately displayed a high level of partisanship that contrasted sharply with the generally low level in the House at that time. The debate over the resolution activated partisan conflicts and divisions that directly contradicted or undermined most of the rules and norms of ‘committee government’. The broad scope of the HBC’s responsibilities and the high levels of partisanship that its deliberations immediately exhibited left the committee incapable of handling the resolution in the way that most other committees operated; by working together, pooling their expertise, compromising as far as possible on their differences and presenting a unified front on the floor. The HBC was consistently divided over its reported resolution and the conflict that its proposals provoked on the floor only highlighted the advantages of unanimously-reported legislation.
These floor problems also highlighted the influence of amendment rules in producing universalistic or majoritarian outcomes (Baron and Ferejohn 1989). As described in Chapter 5, Democratic leaders in the late 1970s allowed a large number of amendments to be offered on the floor as a way of patching together majority support for the resolution. This strategy, however, greatly destabilized the process by encouraging universalistic amendments to a fundamentally majoritarian process (Gilmour 1990). By doing so, it also helped fuel the demand for stronger leadership within the chamber (Palazzolo 1992; Sinclair 1992), well in advance of the Reagan administration and the completion of the southern realignment in the 1980s. This is not to suggest that these electoral influences were unimportant but to highlight this important institutional dimension that has often been ignored or downplayed in the literature.

The immediate institutional consequences of reform, therefore, were the consequences of making such a weak committee responsible for producing such an overarching and inherently contentious plan. The failure of the HBC to handle its high level of conflict produced by budget resolutions meant that it would either become consolidated a leadership committee or would simply be allowed to lapse, as the 1940s experiment had done before it. These consequences resulted from the extent to which the 1974 Act permanently broadened the parameters of the institution’s routine agenda, and injected consistently high levels of partisan conflict into what was otherwise a largely bipartisan and consensual legislative environment.

The consolidation of the process after 1982 was a response to the problems of the transition period but also signaled the institutionalization of reform’s unintended partisan consequences. During the transition period, primary responsibility for coming up with a
resolution had remained with the HBC chairman. After 1982, the chairman continued to perform an important role, but his mark became the end result of extensive meetings and negotiations with members of the Caucus and leaders of other committees. In subsequent years, substantive decisions regarding the resolution have consistently been made well in advance of the HBC markup. This practice has locked in the outcome that had occurred in most years of the transition; the minority would neither support nor contribute to the majority proposal and so the majority party would consistently propose a resolution that reflected the preferences of the party rather than the chamber median voter.

The fact that most other House committees, especially the HAC, have continued to propose legislation closer to the chamber median has been at the heart of the controversy that has continued to surround the process in the House, as these other committees will rarely concur with the HBC’s positions or recommendations. These tensions have only been heightened by internal power struggles and turf battles that continue to be provoked by the HBC and its operations. While other members of the majority party might not necessarily have felt obliged to follow the budget numbers as they enact its legislative component parts, the minority party has always been inclined to attack any such inconsistencies for political gain. In this manner, the plan that was clearly intended to serve as the broadest and flexible of guidelines has been steadily transformed into a very detailed and highly salient and politicized statement of majority party priorities at the expense of its intended role as a realistic and attainable budgetary blueprint for the other committees to follow. There are still ways to get around its recommendations—especially under conditions of divided government—but the steady increase in the competitiveness of the two parties has only increased the electoral risks
associated with such efforts and provided important incentives for members to pay more than just lip-service to the process.

In spite of the continued instability of the process following its partisan consolidation in the House, it does appear to have been unintentionally instrumental in creating a new developmental path within the institution. The high level of partisan conflict and internal problems that plagued the process in the late 1990s were essentially the same as those faced by the Democratic majority of the late 1970s. The fact that these have been unchanged by the switch in majority party control, a strong economy, and the transition from a deficit to a surplus era supports the contention that the roots of these problems are deeply embedded within the institution itself, albeit exacerbated by the currently high levels of partisan competition and the continuation of divided government.

Other Considerations

In addition to the direct influences on the process described above there are several major, largely external factors that were very important in shaping the consequences of reform, in both an institutional and a political sense. Perhaps the most critical external influence on the consequences of reform was the rapid rise of federal budget deficits after 1980 and their emergence as the dominant political issue of the following fifteen or so years (Kettl 1992; Penner and Abramson 1988; White and Wildavsky 1989). While the introduction of the process in 1975 required the parties to debate their overall goals and priorities on an annual basis, poor economic conditions through the 1970s combined with the steadily rising deficits of the 1980s and early 1990s greatly increased the saliency of this debate.
As southern conservatives completed their realignment into the Republican party during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the resulting polarization of the two parties and the nationalization of elections (Aldrich 1995; Dodd and Oppenheimer 1989b; Rohde 1991) also led the budget process in the House to evolve in ways that were not anticipated by supporters of reform in 1973. The near-monolithic opposition of House Republicans to Democratic budget resolutions both in Committee and on the floor consistently pushed Democrats to produce plans that were inevitably closer to the party rather than the chamber median. Deep ideological divisions among Democrats through the 1970s and into the early 1980s, however, meant that these plans were often a confusing mixture of concessions to both liberals and conservatives that most members, and even the leadership, were often reluctant to draw attention to--or, in some cases, even acknowledge--after they had been approved by the House.

As the parties became more polarized through the 1980s, the production and enactment of the resolution became a party-based rather than a committee-based responsibility. It became the focal point for Democratic efforts to articulate and promote their agenda and to contrast it to that of the Reagan administration. As a result, the political aspects of the resolution soon overwhelmed its role as a substantive economic guide for the legislative action that followed it. The polarization of the parties and their increasing competitiveness in the years following reform clearly helped consolidate the new process in the House on a partisan and political basis. The emergence of more cohesive and distinct parties in the years since reform, along with the trend toward the ‘nationalization’ of congressional elections (Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1993)
has only increased the tendency of members on both sides of the aisle to use the process
to promote proposals “that they want to campaign on, not what they want to govern on.”

Prospects and Conclusions

Proposals to further reform the congressional budget process have been made
with astonishing regularity ever since it was introduced in 1975 and have generally been
subject to the same critical pressures that shaped the 1973 debate over the original Act.
These factors are not expected to have the same effect or implications with respect to all
congressional reform proposals but the same dynamic of external pressure for change
versus internal resistance should be evident where the proposed changes would
substantially effect the existing distribution of power within the institution. Major
jurisdictional reorganizations, for example, should be subject to the same kinds of
problems and tensions as budget reform.

While further research on the impact of budget reform in the Senate, or in
bicameral state legislatures that have made similar shifts between systems is needed to
test the generalizability of the findings presented here, the evolution of the budget process
in the House since 1974 has shown that the same factors that proved critical in producing
the original Act have continued to strongly influence the prospects for further reform. In
particular, general concern about the state of the economy, a president of the opposing
party, a highly unified and vocal opposition minority party have repeatedly led to calls
for reform from members of the beleaguered majority party. The path-dependent
development of the budget process in the House, however, has reproduced the high levels
of internal resistance to change that characterized the prereform Congress. While further
reforms have been regularly proposed since the late 1970s, very few have been taken up
by the House and even fewer have been approved, in spite of high levels of member
dissatisfaction with the process and considerable external pressures for change.

The pressure from a president of the opposing party proved to be critical in
pushing members toward reform in 1973, but this role seems unlikely to be repeated.
Congress has repeatedly clashed with the president over budget policy since 1974 but
very seldom on issues of process reform. Presidents have occasionally mentioned
changes that they would like to see occur (as was the case with Clinton and biennial
budgeting in 2000), but none have lobbied to the extent that Nixon did in 1971-72. Even
if they had, it is unlikely that they would have had much success as the political
conditions that gave Nixon the leverage he enjoyed in the early 1970s have long since
vanished. Nixon’s respectable approval ratings through his first term and the ease of his
reelection in 1972 gave him considerable influence over conservative Democrats and
helped him to exploit his divided congressional opponents on many issues, including that
of budget reform. Divided government may have become the norm in the years since
Nixon’s resignation but the increased polarization of the parties (combined with the
virtual disappearance of presidential coattails) has made it much more difficult for
presidents to influence a congressional majority of the opposing party.

The most relevant partisan factor in terms of the passage of 1974 Act and its
consequences has not been party unity or cohesion but competition between the two
parties; whether at the congressional electoral level or in terms of a president of the
opposing party. The pressure of party competition successively led the majority party to
support the 1974 Act, the new process in the House, efforts to strengthen that process and
finally, to consider new and more sweeping changes to it. This ebb and flow of reform
proposals since 1975 has shown that internal reform is rarely an issue when a majority party is highly unified in support of an agenda. Only when the majority is fractured or divided--and under pressure from their opponents--do members once again give serious consideration to the possibility of changing the budgetary rules.

While direct presidential/external pressure for internal reform has not been as directly brought to bear on Congress as it was in the early 1970s, partisan competition between the branches does seem to have played a significant part in encouraging Congress to consider certain kinds of changes. The budgeting-by-formula experiments of the mid-1980s, for example, were greatly driven by members’ growing frustration with the Reagan White House, and similar sentiments led the current Republican majority to renewed consideration of significant reform of the system as a way to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the Democratic administration. Like the 1974 Act itself, subsequent reform proposals have also tended to be politically defensive reactions on the part of the majority party, either to pressure from the president or from more general, collective concerns about prospective electoral losses.

The 1974 Act, the first use of reconciliation in 1980, the passage of Gramm-Rudman in 1985, the consideration of budget reform proposals by the JCOC in 1992, as well as the HBC process reform bill (Nussle-Cardin) and biennial budgeting proposals in the past two years have all occurred at times when there has been no significant consensus on fiscal policy within the majority party. Under such conditions, the political problems that generated the reform proposals in the first place would remain likely to prevent them from having the intended effect, even if they had been approved. The 1974 Act succeeded in part because there was clearly an organizational need for some kind of
planning or coordinating mechanism within Congress and the newness of the proposals helped heighten member uncertainty about its consequences.

This tendency for the proposal of further budget reforms by majorities under pressure can be partly explained by the separation of the process from the committee system in the House that was deliberately built in to the 1974 Act. If a majority is secure in its electoral position and has an agenda that most of its members agree on, then that agenda might be expected to proceed relatively smoothly through such channels, with the role of the budget process/Committee unlikely to be of any particular consequence.

The 1990s showed that in spite of the generally poor performance of current congressional budgeting arrangements, it was still not possible to attract sufficient member support for significant procedural reforms. From the Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress (JCOC) proceedings in 1992-93\textsuperscript{4} to the HBC reform bill of 1998, and the recent push for biennial budgeting, there has been no shortage of recent calls for further reform.

The recent spate of unsuccessful budget reform proposals within the House are the latest casualties in a long chain of such efforts that stretches back to the late 1970s. What is perhaps most notable about these latest proposals, however, is that they have failed in spite of the deep dissatisfaction of many members of the Republican majority with existing arrangements, and a growing concern with the possibility of electoral losses as a result of continued problems. When the Republican Congress failed to pass a budget resolution in 1998 for the first time since the process was introduced in 1975, the ensuing breakdown in the appropriations process and the massive omnibus spending bill that became necessary at the end of the session only hurt them at the polls that November.
While the passage of a budget resolution would not necessarily have prevented these losses, it would not have provided such an easy target for their Democratic opponents.

Current political conditions, therefore, suggest that the potential is there for the same kind of electoral/constituency connection that helped convince Democrats to support reform in 1973, but the major stumbling block for the current Republican majority has been numbers; a similar level of internal resistance combined with their wafer-thin majority has made action all but impossible. The Democratic majority of the early 1970s may have shown that a large infusion of new members was not necessary precondition for reform, but it would have been a much more difficult task without their substantial majority.

When the majority is divided and/or under pressure from the president or the minority party, the process is much more likely to be used to aggressively advance its agenda in the House in the hope of circumventing the inertial tendencies of the traditional committee system. Such efforts are likely to be problematic at best, however, as the institutionally weak process and committee do not easily allow it to play such a central role. As its very limited institutional authority and the widespread reputation of the resolution as a ‘political document’ suggest, the budget process and Committee in the House may be important agenda-setting tools but are themselves of inherently limited use in securing specific policy outcomes.

As noted above, in the case of budget reform, the tendency has been for further reform proposals to emerge only after the deterioration of a governing coalition. Political problems have consistently been cited as evidence of structural or procedural failings and have led to renewed calls for reform. While members and commentators are often quick
to criticize this apparent confusion of political and structural problems, it should be recalled that while political conditions have changed a great deal since the mid-1970s, there has been very little in the way of any structural adaptation to these changes. The basic budget process and committee have not been significantly altered since they were first introduced to the House in 1975. As described here, the Act deliberately created a weak system that was one step removed from the House as a whole. This was done partly to protect the existing distribution of power within the chamber but also reflected the reality of a majority party that was deeply divided—particularly on issues of fiscal policy.

Out of all the various proposals for further reform, the one most likely to make the most difference is also the one that would provoke the most internal opposition. When asked what they would like to change about the existing system, many members interviewed for this project stated that they would support efforts to reduce the overlap and duplication of responsibilities between authorizers, appropriators and budgeteers. There continue to be significant factions within both congressional parties but none that approach the numbers or influence of the conservative coalition in the 1970s and early 1980s. Without this partisan rationale, the current system is now being kept in place by the forces internal resistance and inertia that have been strengthened by a lack of external political or economic pressures to come up with a feasible alternative.

The case of the 1974 Act and its consequences reveals a deep and consistent reluctance on the part of members of the majority party to support major additional changes to internal rules and arrangements. The Constitution gives members of Congress the right to change these rules at any time, but only under a very particular combination
of constituency, partisan and internal conditions is sufficient support for significant and lasting reform likely to emerge. Even when it does so, this study has also shown the ease with which it can produce unintended consequences that stretch well beyond those envisioned by its original supporters. The consequences of the 1974 Budget Act can explain a great deal about why members have since reverted to their typical reluctance to support reform; its consequences have not only be difficult to predict but also to control.

Notes

1 Member motivation to support reform appears to have been entirely consistent with Arnold’s ‘Logic of Congressional Action’ (1990).

2 By the fall of 1973, the high cost of living was overwhelmingly cited as the most important problem facing the country and, by the following summer, Gallup also reported that the percentage of respondents who named the government as most responsible for inflation had risen by nine points over the past year, to a new high of 48 percent (Gallup 1978).

3 Earl Pomeroy (D-SD), interview with author, August 5, 1999.

4 See Thurber 1999 for a full description of the various proposals reviewed by the JCOC.
APPENDIX A
PERCENT SUPPORT FOR FINAL PASSAGE: HOUSE BUDGET RESOLUTIONS AND HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS BILLS, 1975-1998
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Budget Res (s)</th>
<th>Legis</th>
<th>Defense</th>
<th>Military Construction</th>
<th>Interior</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
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* Empty cells indicate no recorded vote was taken on final passage of the bill. The bill would either have been passed by voice vote (v.v), included in a continuing resolution (C.R.) or simply not brought to the House floor as, for example, was the case with respect to the Defense, Transportation and Foreign Aid bills in 1984.
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROCEDURE AND INTERVIEWEES

The members, former members and staff personnel that were interviewed for this project are listed below. Where the interview was conducted on the condition of anonymity, a committee and/or party affiliation is given. All staff members interviewed were assured anonymity but I began each interview with current or former Representatives by asking their permission to quote them in my work and their response determined whether or not their name was used.

The populations of interest varied over time. The interviews were not conducted on a random basis but with the goal of securing a reasonable number of first-hand accounts across each of the major periods in question. With respect to the buildup to reform, this population included members from the different committees and leaders that had been most closely involved in putting the plan together or most potentially effected by it. This included members of the HAC and the HWMC as well as the House Rules Committee that actually produced the bill. This population was limited in several respects; many of the key figures have since passed away and for many of the remaining group, contact information was not readily available.
To maximize the number of former members that I requested interviews from I worked out of the Directory of the United States Association of Former Members of Congress. I also benefited from the generous assistance of Bill Frenzel, a former member who pointed me in the right direction on numerous occasions and put me in touch with such budgetary luminaries as Leon Panetta and Bill Gray (whose schedule, unfortunately prevented my numerous attempts to set up an interview).

I continued to request interviews from those former party leaders and HBC members whose details were listed in the directory across each of the postreform periods specified. Requests for interviews were faxed to current members that had been the most active (in terms of speaking in markups, offering amendments, news coverage, etc.) during their tenure on the HBC. I estimate that I requested interviews from approximately 85 current and former members and staff personnel. Out of this number, 15 declined, no response was received from roughly another 25 individuals, and arrangements fell through with another 2 who had granted the initial request.

A total of 43 interviews were conducted between August 1997 and September 1999. Democrats were overrepresented but that was probably unavoidable given that they had been the majority party for almost the entire period of interest. There did not appear to be any striking bias in the response rate; Republicans and Democrats from all areas of the country and from all time periods were among those that either failed to respond or declined outright.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain a detailed understanding of how participants in the process viewed it through the lens of their own personal experience and so the format was semi-structured and length and content varied a great deal.
according to the background and opinions of each individual. When an interviewee clearly had no strong opinion of the events in question, or simply no recollection, the remainder of those questions in that section were skipped. Virtually all members and former members gave me permission to tape record our conversation but I also made brief notes to use as backup for the tapes. In the three instances of recorder failure that I experienced, I wrote up these notes as soon as I realized what had happened. I decided on a case-by-case basis whether to tape staff conversations and relied on notes in some situations. The following questions represented the core of the interview format, though adjustments were made on an individual basis.

Preface: I’m interested in the politics and evolution of the budget process in the House. I have read a lot about what happened – what I’m interested in today are your personal views and perspective on what went on…

1. PREREFORM/ ROAD TO REFORM
I understand that a variety of reasons and motivations led members to support budgetary reform in 1973 – if you had to rank them, however, which one or two would you say were the most dominant?

Why did you support it?

Do you recall if you had a strong view or position on Budget reform prior to it being formally taken up by the Joint Study Committee early in 1973?

FOLLOWUPS – ASK AS NECESSARY:
Did your constituents show much interest in or support for the issue of budget reform?

Would you characterize budget reform as a partisan issue, either within Congress or in terms of relations with the executive branch?

To what extent would you say that your membership of the Ways and Means/ Appropriations Committee shaped your views on reform?

Key legislative moments:
Do you recall what your initial reaction to the Joint Study Committee proposal?
In October 1972, the House approved debt ceiling increase legislation that gave the president unlimited authority to make cuts in order to keep total spending below $250 billion. I notice that you supported giving this authority to the president – why did you decide to support this?

What factors or developments convinced you that structural reform was necessary? Why not just work through existing arrangements to bring down the deficit?

Ideology/ party:
It seems strikingly apparent from the historical record that prior to reform, Republicans were far more unified than Democrats on issues of fiscal policy. Do you recall any concern/ awareness among Democrats/ Republicans that a unified budget process might strongly disadvantage/ advantage them politically within the House?

Do you recall how active or interested your party leaders were as budget reform was being considered by the House? Did they take a clear position, get involved, or not really? How unified would you say your party was on the issue? Any major points of division, contention come to mind?

REPBUS ONLY – Would you say that most House Republicans in 1973 were strong supporters of budget reform?

DEMOS ONLY – I was hoping you could help me understand the liberal position on Budget reform – DSG released a scathing report on the Joint Study Committee proposals [WOULD LOCK BUDGET INTO CONSERVATIVE… quote] and Bolling advocated giving responsibility to Apps instead of creating new committees – Was this the dominant liberal position? Why would they want Appropriators to run the process?

Was there any awareness at the time that this new process might cause problems for House Democrats in the future?

2. 1974 ACT
Passage – there no floor amendments on new process in December 1973 but support for the JSC proposal among Democrats was mixed – where/ how were these differences worked out?

Provisions
The Act that was finally signed into law by President Nixon in June of 74 reflected a series of compromises, mostly among the various factions of the Democratic party? How satisfied were you with the provisions of the final Act? Do you recall noticing any particular strengths or weaknesses at the time? Did you have any reservations about superimposing a new layer of process and committees onto existing arrangements?
Were you at all concerned about its ability to function effectively given the entrenched power of the established money committees?

Is there ANYTHING you felt could have been done in the Act that would have made a difference to the system it ultimately set up?

EXPECTATIONS:
What effect did you hope that the new process would have when you voted for it in 1974? What difference did you hope it might make? Did you get the impression that many of your colleagues held similar expectations or would you say members held different sets of goals and expectations or did different members have different hopes for the new process?

Would you say that the introduction of the new process made your or other members you worked with think differently about how you might best act to achieve your policy or political goals?

3. SERVING ON BUDGET

Why did you want to be on Budget? Was it your first choice?

Was it a good fit with district politics and interests or was it more your personal concerns that led you to serve on the committee?

Did you see any connection between the ideas or platform you campaigned on and serving on the Budget Committee?
Did you hear much from your constituents about the budget/ your service on the Committee?

Did you make a point of talking about it with your constituents, bringing it up during campaigns? Did your opponents?

[ if not on the Committee ] Did you pay much attention to the new committee and the resolutions it produced in the first few years after 1975?

Now, the new process was very conflictual - right from the get-go – did this surprise you? Apps, Ways and means had all run fairly smoothly in the past – why do you think it was so difficult to get a resolution out of Committee, let alone passed on the floor? In your opinion, what was missing? Could anything have been done to make it operate more smoothly?
Congress had previously experimented with a legislative budget back in 1946, a process that was quickly dropped after various problems and embarrassments – did you ever feel that the same fate might befall the process introduced in 1975?

As a DEMOCRAT, how concerned were you by the problems that beset the new process between 1975 and 1982? Did you expect there to be any political fallout from these problems?

As a REPUBLICAN, how did you feel about the problems that beset the new process between 1975 and 1980? Did you feel that your party benefited from these Democratic problems?

During the first few years of the process, the resolution was considered under very open rules on the House floor. Do you think this reflected a lack of confidence in the new Committee? Tax bills from Ways and Means, for example, had previously been considered under closed rules…

What was your reaction to the regular use of reconciliation instructions after 1980? Did you feel that this was a positive development?

Were there any particular programs or causes that you found yourself defending while you were on the Committee? Did you have any favorite targets in mind as far as cuts were concerned?

Membership:
Can you generalize at all about what kind of members seem to end up on the Budget Committee? Are they quite similar or would you say they have a lot in common?

Did you ever experience and difficulties or tensions in serving on both [the HAC/HWMC] and Budget? A lot of members on both Committees were against the introduction of the new committee and process – did you ever get the sense that they continued to resent its presence in the years after 1975?

[ANYONE ALSO ON WAYS/MEANS, APPS] – how would you describe the attitude of your major committee toward Budget? Is it pretty constant over time or did it change much?

What is your view of the rotating membership rule?

4. REAGAN BUDGETS
The budget defeats of 1981 and 1982 must have had a huge impact on the Democratic leadership – can you give me an example of anything that changed or was done differently in response to those defeats? What do you think their main impact was?
[Reps also – do you think that over the long term, members in general saw the process in a different light after 1981?]

In 1981, Tip O’Neill seemed to take a very hands-off approach toward the process? Did you feel that the leadership needed to be more involved, active?

RULES:
After the consideration of endless floor amendments and alternatives through 1982, the Rules Committee in 1983 finally allowed only the reported resolution and a GOP alternative to be considered – did you see this as a positive development?

5. POST-REAGAN, 1990s
In recent years, the markup has often consisted of a series of minority amendments that are all voted down, followed by party-line approval of the chairman’s mark. Does it bother you to see such high levels of party voting within the committee? Does it really mean that members of each party have no common ground whatsoever?

Would you say that partisanship on other committees you have served on has been, on average, higher, lower, or about the same as you experienced on Budget? Why do you think this has become such a partisan committee? I mean, other committee operate in a variety of different atmosphere but here it seems as if it’s just straight down-the-line party politics. Why do you think that is?

In RETROSPECT
To what extent did serving on the Committee live up to your expectations? Did the Committee change much during your service on it?

Was there anything about serving on the Committee that particularly surprised or disappointed you? What did you like or dislike about it?

How would you compare your experience on Budget with other committees you have served on? Working climate, level of conflict, debate, discussion?

[followups – if necessary/ appropriate]
Is there anything particularly distinctive about serving on Budget? How were relations with other committees when you served on Budget? Do you know how Budget was generally regarded when you were on it?

Chairmen:
During your service as chairman, how did you go about putting your mark together? How much input did you seek or receive before the Committee markup? Do you recall non-committee members ever having much interest in influencing your plan?
6. GENERAL QUESTIONS
Obviously a lot of provisions of the 1974 Act were intended to keep the House Budget Committee relatively weak and ineffectual – from threatening pre-existing power centers such as the HWMC and the HAC – in your view is the Committee too weak or are these constraints a good idea?

One of the recurrent problems for the Committee has been finding the balance between specifics and general guidelines – obviously other committees don’t want to be dictated to but on the other hand, how much difference can the Committee make if it refrains completely from discussing or debating any kind of specifics at all? Where do you think the balance lies?

For a long time, it seemed as if economic difficulties, mounting deficits were driving disagreements over budget policy, but here we are – a healthy economy, prospective surpluses – and divisions still run deep? Are you surprised by this? What do you make of it?

Were you surprised by what happened last year (no resolution)

The Committee’s track record suggests that bipartisan agreement occurs only during years in which the president takes an active role? Isn’t this ironic given that the system was set up to counter executive control over the budget?

7. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS (ASK OF EVERYONE)
Since the 1970s, there have been numerous – and regular efforts to reform or adjust the process in one way or another – do you think further changes are necessary? If you could change anything about the way Congress handles the federal budget, what would it be?

In 1974, many members felt that the new process was necessary in order for Congress to reassert its control over the federal budget – in retrospect, do you think it has done so? Do you think than further refinements could improve the process or are its problems simply due to the nature of the institution?

What difference do you think the process has made? Is it worthwhile? Useful? What do you see as its strengths, weaknesses?

Finally, do you see any connection between the introduction of the new process and the renewed conflict and partisanship within the chamber? Would this have happened anyway under the prereform system?
Former Members Interviewed:

House Budget Committee Democrats:

Sam Gibbons (D-FL), interviewed 4/22/99; served 1963-97; Ways and Means 1969-97, on HBC 1975

Elizabeth Holtzman (D-NY), interviewed 4/26/99; served 1973-81; on HBC 1975-81

James R. Jones (D-Okla), interviewed 4/23/99; served 1973-87; on HBC 1979-81

Chairman 1981-85

Jim Slattery (D-Kansas), interviewed 6/3/99; served 1983-95; on HBC 1985-91

Harry Johnston (D-Fl), interviewed 8/18/97; served 1989-97; on HBC 1993-97

Butler Derrick (D-SC), interviewed 4/13/99; served 1975-95; on HBC 1975-79, 1983-89

Leon Panetta (D-Ca), interviewed 5/27/99; served 1979-1993; on HBC 1979-84,

Chairman 1986-91


Beryl Anthony (D-Ark), interviewed 6/8/99; served 1979-93; on HBC 1981

Neal Smith (D-Iowa), interviewed 6/8/99; served 1959-95; HAC 1963-95, on HBC 1975

Jim Mattox (D-Tx), served 1977-85; on HBC 1977-82

Norman Mineta (D-Ca), interviewed 6/23/99; served 1975-95; on HBC 1977-83

Tom Downey (D-NY), interviewed 6/15/99, served 1975-93, Ways and Means 1979-93; on HBC 1981-87

Former Member, interviewed 8/3/99; Ways and Means, HBC.

Stephen Solarz (D-NY), interviewed 6/16/99; served 1975-93; on HBC 1979-83

Donald Fraser (D-Minn), interviewed 7/21 and 7/30/99; served 1963-79; on HBC 1977-78

Paul Simon (D-Ill.), interviewed 8/10/99; served 1975-85; on HBC 77-82; also Senate 1985-97 on Senate Budget 87-97

Jerry Huckaby (D-La.), interviewed 8/11/99; served 1977-93; on HBC 1989-93.

House Budget Committee Republicans:

Bill Frenzel (R-Minn) interviewed 11/4/97; served 1971-91; Ways and Means1975-91; on HBC 1979-85, Ranking Republican 1989-91

Bill Gradison (R-Ohio) interviewed 8/2/99; served 1974-93; Ways and Means; on HBC 1983-93; Ranking Republican 1991-93

Barber Conable (R-NY) interviewed 7/7/99; served 1965-85; Ways and Means; on HBC 1975-81

Jack Buechner (R-Mo.); interviewed 8/5/99; served 1987-91; on HBC 1987-91

From other related Committees:

James Corman (D-Ca); interviewed 4/21/99; served 1961-81; member, Ways and Means,1969-81

Tom Bevill (D-Ala); interviewed ; served 1967-97; on HAC 1973-97.

Elford A. Cederberg (R-Mich), interviewed ; served 1961-79; ranking on HAC 1973-79, on HBC 1975, also Joint Study Committee on Budget Control 1972-73.

John Anderson (R-Ill), interviewed; served 1961.;on Rules Committee, 1973

Mark Andrews (R-ND), interviewed; served 1963-81 (House) on Appropriations; Senate 1981-87, on Senate Budget
Incumbents Interviewed:
Charlie Stenholm (D-Tx) interviewed 8/4/99; took office 1979; on HBC 1993-99
David Price (D-NC), interviewed 8/4/99; served 1987-1995; took office 1997; Appropriator; on HBC 1993-95, 1999-
Dan Miller (R-FL) interviewed 11/4/97; took office 1993; on HAC 1995-; on HBC 1993-99
Earl Pomeroy (D-ND), interviewed 8/5/99; took office 1993; on HBC 1993-99
Bill Goodling (R-Pa), interviewed 8/12/99; took office 1975; on HBC 1985-89

Personal Staff Interviewed:
Pomeroy (D-ND) interviewed 8/29/97; member on HBC 1993-99
Shays (R-CT) interviewed 9/2/97; member on HBC 1991-
Oberstar (D-Minn) interviewed 11/4/97; member on HBC 1987-91
Stenholm (D-Tx.), interviewed 9/2/97; member on HBC 1993-99
Nick Smith (R-Mich) interviewed 11/3/97; member on HBC 1993-
Franks (R-NJ), interviewed 11/3/97; member on HBC 1993-

Committee Staff (House) interviewed:
CRS/ Budget Committee, interviewed 6/1/99.
Budget Committee, Republican side, interviewed 6/2/99
Obey/ Appropriations, interviewed 6/2/99
REFERENCES


*Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. Various volumes. Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press,


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fiona Mary Wright grew up in Scotland and developed an interest in American politics in her teenage years, largely due to the fact that British politics was very uninspiring at that time and Americans also happened to speak (roughly) the same language. She attended Boroughmuir High School in her native Edinburgh and went on to major in American Studies at the University of Hull in England. She attended UC Berkeley for her junior year abroad in 1988-89, and graduated from the University of Hull in 1991. After two years of working and traveling in various European countries, she returned to the U.S. in August 1993 to pursue a Ph.D. in political science at the University of Florida. She received her master’s degree in May of 1995. During the course of completing her Ph.D. she was awarded a Fellowship from the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C. and spent a year doing dissertation research there in 1998-99. She received her Ph.D. degree in August 2000 and left Gainesville to take up a position as an Assistant Professor in Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.