



CRS Report for Congress

Committee Funding and Staff in the Senate

Paul S. Rundquist
Specialist in American National Government
Government and Finance Division

The Senate authorizes funds for two years for each of its committees (except Appropriations and Ethics) through an omnibus resolution, recommended by the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration and adopted by the full Senate at the beginning of each Congress. This resolution, in turn, is based on funding requests made by each committee in the form of an individual resolution. The unique powersharing agreement (S.Res. 8) the Senate adopted on January 5, 2001, arguably contributed to delays in the committee funding process for the 107th Congress. Under the agreement, each party (notwithstanding Senate Rule XXVII) receives equal staffing on all Senate committees, as well as equal space and access to facilities. Overall committee funding costs are to remain "within historic levels."

Technically, funding authority for Senate committee staff and other operations (except those of the Appropriations Committee) would have expired on February 28, 2001. However, pursuant to a unanimous consent request that day, committees were temporarily funded at their 106th Congress levels until March 10, 2001. On March 8, 2001, the Senate agreed to S.Res. 54, submitted jointly by Senators Lott and Daschle. The resolution provides funds through February 2003 to Senate committees at the level the committees had requested for the 107th Congress. (For more details, see CRS Report RS20885, "The Senate Powersharing Agreement: Key Features," and CRS Report RL30898, "Committee Funding Resolutions and Processes, 107th Congress.")

The Senate biennial committee funding process applies to all Senate committees except the Appropriations and Ethics committees, which have permanent authorization for their staff and operating expenses. The Senate Committee on Rules and Administration has jurisdiction over committee funding resolutions, and also issues regulations governing committee funding and staff. Committee funding and staff also are regulated by Senate rules, especially Rule XXVI, paragraph 9, and Rule XXVII, as well as by statute. The funds authorized by resolution are appropriated in Legislative Branch Appropriations acts.

Budgets for individual committees vary widely, depending not only on the size and salaries of the committees' staff, but also on their size and workload, the salience of their issues, Senate goals and priorities, and the overall fiscal climate. In general, staff salaries compose the largest portion of committee budgets.

Committee Funding. Soon after a new Congress convenes, generally by January 31 of the first session, each Senate committee requests funds for two years by reporting



a resolution. These resolutions are referred to the Rules and Administration Committee. Each committee supports its request by submitting supporting materials, including those specified by the Rules and Administration Committee. In recent Congresses, that panel has advised committees on the permissible increase, or required decrease, compared to the previous funding level. Committees requesting funds in excess of these guidelines have been asked to include a justification in their budget submissions.

The Rules and Administration Committee then holds hearings, during which committee leaders testify on their budget requests. Following the hearings, the committee meets to mark up the funding resolutions. Typically, it reports an omnibus resolution that identifies a funding level for each committee for two years, and allocates a portion for each of two periods. In recommending levels of funding, the Rules and Administration Committee distinguishes between regular committee activities and one-time needs, such as special investigations. Recurring needs form the base budget for the next Congress, while special needs are funded on a nonrecurring basis. In the 106th Congress, the Senate moved to a biennial funding process, primarily based on the fiscal year.

Committee funding resolutions take effect after being considered on the Senate floor and agreed to by majority vote. In the 106th Congress, the Senate agreed to an interim funding resolution and a final funding resolution, both by unanimous consent. S.Res. 54 of the 107th Congress was also agreed to by unanimous consent.

If a committee requires additional funds after the omnibus resolution has been agreed to, funds may be requested essentially in the same way as they were for its two-year budget. The Senate has minimized the need for supplemental funding, however, by allowing committees to use unspent funds from one period during the next funding period. The 106th Congress funding resolution also contained a special reserve from which unexpected funding needs by any Senate committee could be met from this fund upon the request of its chair and ranking member, and the approval of the chair and ranking member of the Rules and Administration Committee.

Committee Staff. In consultation with the Rules and Administration Committee, each committee establishes a maximum level of staff that its budget can accommodate. Staff size varies widely among committees, but committees often employ fewer staff than their authorized maximums. Committees have discretion over how to allocate staff among subcommittees.

Senate Rule XXVII requires that each committee's staff reflect the ratio of majority and minority committee members, and that the minority receive "fair consideration" in the appointment of staff. By resolution, a majority of the minority party members of a committee may request at least one-third of the personnel funds for hiring minority staff. This ratio is calculated after excluding funds for staff who perform administrative and clerical functions for the committee as a whole, if any, as agreed to by the chair and ranking minority member. Committee staff may be supplemented by consultants and staff detailed to the committees from federal agencies, subject to such restrictions as the Committee on Rules and Administration may impose.