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House Committee Funding: Description of Process and Analysis of Disbursements

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Summary

Funding for House committees (except for the Committee on Appropriations) follows a two-step process of authorization and appropriation. Operating budgets for all standing and select committees of the House (except for the Committee on Appropriations) are authorized pursuant to a simple resolution, and funding is provided in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill and other appropriations acts. Subsequent resolutions may change committee authorizations.

On March 17, 2017, the House adopted H.Res. 173, providing for the expenses of certain committees of the House of Representatives in the 115th Congress, by voice vote. The resolution authorized a total of \$266.3 million for committee expenses, \$132.7 million for the first session and \$133.6 million for the second session.

The use of committee funds is subject to chamber rules, law, and regulations promulgated by the Committee on House Administration, the Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards, and the Ethics Committee. Committee funds may be used only to support the conduct of official business of the committee. They may not be used for personal or campaign purposes. Information on individual committee spending is published quarterly in the *Statements of Disbursement of the House*.

This report is organized in three sections. The first provides an overview of the committee funding process in the House and analyzes funding levels since 1996. The second reviews House floor and committee action on committee funding in the 115th Congress. The final section summarizes the rules and regulations that structure the use of committee funds, and analyzes committee spending patterns during several previous years.

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Introduction

Funding for House committees (except for the Committee on Appropriations)¹ follows a two-step process of authorization and appropriation. Operating budgets for all standing and select committees of the House (except for the Committee on Appropriations) are authorized pursuant to a chamber funding resolution, and funding is provided by annual appropriations in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill and other appropriations acts.

On March 17, 2017, the House adopted H.Res. 173, providing for the expenses of certain committees of the House of Representatives in the 115th Congress, by voice vote. The resolution authorized a total of \$266.3 million for committee expenses, \$132.7 million for the first session and \$133.6 million for the second session.

The use of committee funds is subject to chamber rules, law, and regulations promulgated by the Committee on House Administration, the Commission on Congressional Mailing Standards, and the Ethics Committee, among other House entities. These regulations may be found in a wide variety of sources, including statute, House rules, committee resolutions, the Committee Handbook,² the Franking Manual,³ the House Ethics Manual,⁴ “Dear Colleague” letters, and formal and informal guidance. Committee funds may be used only to support the conduct of official committee business. They may not be used for personal or campaign purposes, or comingled with funds appropriated to any other source of official funds, such as the Member Representational Allowance (MRA). Information on individual committee spending is published quarterly in the *Statements of Disbursement of the House*.

This report is organized into three sections. The first provides an overview of the committee funding process in the House and analyzes funding levels since 1996. The second reviews House floor and committee action on committee funding in the 115th Congress. The final section provides illustrations of the rules and regulations that structure the use of committee funds, and analyzes actual committee funding spending patterns during six previous years.

House Committee Funding: Process

Contemporary funding for House committees (except for the Committee on Appropriations) follows a two-step process of authorization and appropriation. Operating budgets for all standing and select committees of the House continued or created at the beginning of a new Congress (except for the Committee on Appropriations) are authorized biennially pursuant to an omnibus committee funding resolution, and appropriations are included in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill.⁵

¹ P.L. 79-601, Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, §202(b), 60 Stat. 834, grants the Committee on Appropriations authority to include in appropriations bills funds for its own activities.

² Available at <http://cha.house.gov/handbooks/committee-handbook>.

³ Available at https://cha.house.gov/sites/repUBLICANS.cha.house.gov/files/documents/franking_docs/Franking_Manual.pdf.

⁴ Available at http://ethics.house.gov/sites/ethics.house.gov/files/documents/2008_House_Ethics_Manual.pdf.

⁵ The funds are contained under the heading “Committee Employees; Standing Committees, Special and Select.” For example, see Division I, P.L. 114-113, 114th Congress.

Authorization

Pursuant to House Rule X, clause 6, the Committee on House Administration reports an omnibus resolution to authorize the expenses of each standing and select committee of the House, except the Committee on Appropriations, for each two-year Congress.

For a two-year Congress, the omnibus committee funding resolution typically specifies a dollar amount limit for each committee that shall be available for its expenses (divided between the first and second sessions), in addition to a reserve fund for unanticipated expenses. This resolution does not appropriate funds; the actual appropriation for House committee expenses is provided in the annual Legislative Branch Appropriations bill. In effect, the dollar amounts specified in the omnibus committee funding resolution limit how much of the amount appropriated for committee expenses will be available for any particular committee.

In preparation for the omnibus resolution, House committees⁶ (except the Appropriations Committee) are required by regulations of the Committee on House Administration to submit an operating budget request for the two years of a Congress.⁷ The chair of each committee usually introduces a House resolution with his or her committee's proposed authorization. Typically, these actions take place during late February, with committees approving their proposed budgets at a committee organizing meeting.

The individual resolutions are referred to the Committee on House Administration, which may hold hearings on each committee's request. The chair and the ranking minority Member from each committee are typically the only witnesses who testify at these hearings, giving them an opportunity to explain and defend their budgets.

After completion of the hearings, the chair of the Committee on House Administration introduces the omnibus funding resolution for that two-year Congress, which, after its referral to the Committee on House Administration, serves as the legislative vehicle for committee markup. The resolution is typically reported out of committee without amendment. The omnibus resolution is usually considered by the House during March of the first session of a Congress, and agreed to with little debate.

Prior to this consideration, during the first three months of each new Congress, House Rule X, clause 7, authorizes interim funding for House committees based on their authorizations from the preceding Congress. Specifically, under Rule X, clause 7, between January 3 and March 31 of an odd-numbered year, a committee is authorized to spend in a single month 9% of the committee's last annual authorization.

⁶ Select committees may not initially follow this process due to the timing of their establishment. For example, the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming was established by H.Res. 202 of the 110th Congress, which also served as the primary expense resolution for committee funding. Since the Select Committee did not exist prior to the passage of the omnibus committee funding resolution, its funding during the 110th Congress was not preceded by an officially submitted operating budget or a resolution introduced by a committee chair. When the select committee was reestablished at the outset of the 111th Congress by H.Res. 5, provisions of the resolution made the select committee subject to the regular committee funding process.

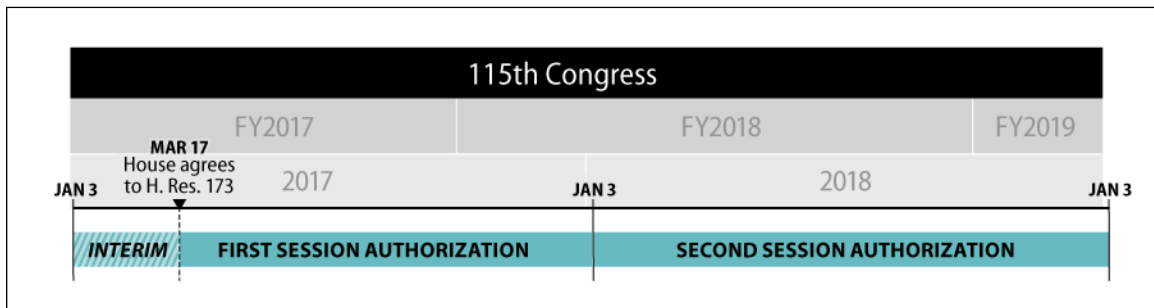
⁷ The budgetary requests include estimated salary needs for staff, costs of consulting services, printing costs, office equipment and supply costs, and travel costs for committee members and staff. Other costs (such as pension and insurance contributions for committee employees) are paid from other appropriated funds.

Appropriations

Funding for all House committees is included in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill. Line-item appropriations are not made for individual committees, except the Committee on Appropriations. Instead, funding is provided as a single total amount for all committees (except the Committee on Appropriations), under the heading “Committee Employees” and the subheading “Standing Committees, Special and Select,” within the House account “Salaries and Expenses.”

Since authorizations for committee funds are made on a biennial, calendar-year basis and appropriations are made annually on a fiscal-year basis, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the authorization and the appropriations in any given year. For any individual biennial funding resolution, funds may be drawn from money appropriated in three different fiscal years;⁸ for the 115th Congress, the overlapping timelines of fiscal years, calendar years, and committee expense authorization periods are visualized in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. House Committee Funding Timeline, 115th Congress



Source: H.Res. 173, “Providing for the expenses of certain committees of the House of Representatives in the One Hundred Fifteenth Congress.”

Finally, although appropriations are made annually for House committee funding, the language typically states that the funding shall remain available until the end of the second calendar year of the current Congress. For example, in both FY2015 and FY2016, committee funds were appropriated to remain available until December 31, 2016.⁹

Majority/Minority Funding

Clause 6(d) of House Rule X requires that “the minority party [be] treated fairly in the appointment” of committee staff employed pursuant to such expense resolutions. In recent years, the House majority leadership has encouraged its committee leaders to provide the minority with one-third of the committee staff and resources authorized in the biennial funding resolutions. Statements made by the chair and ranking Member of the Committee on House Administration at the beginning of its committee funding review in recent Congresses indicate a general consensus that all House committees should provide at least one-third minority staffing.

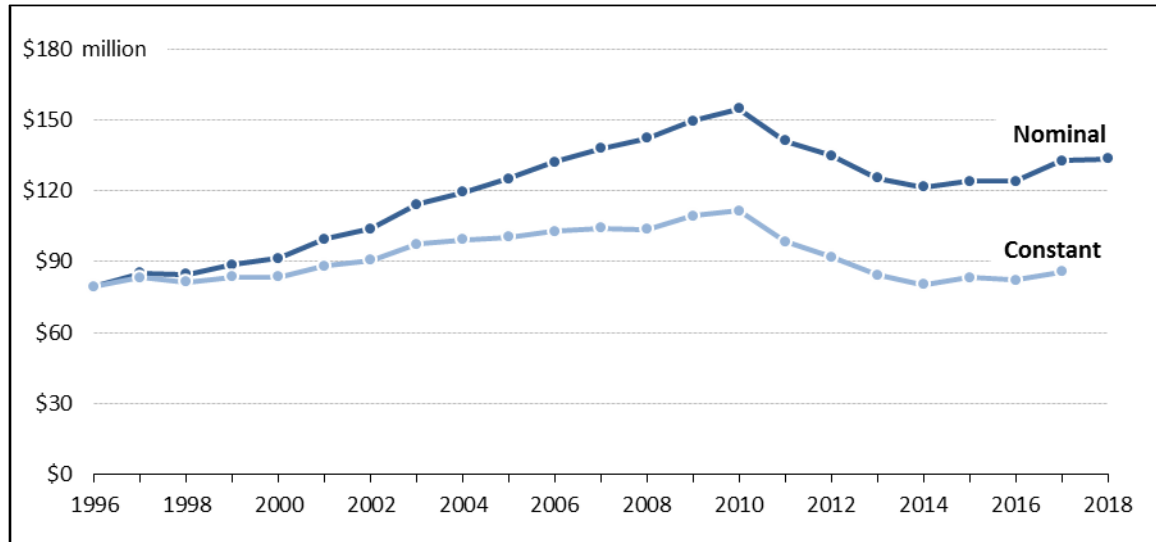
⁸ For example, during the 114th Congress, appropriations for committee funding were included in the FY2015 (October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015), FY2016 (October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016), and FY2017 (October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017) bills.

⁹ P.L. 113-235, 128 Stat. 2526. P.L. 114-113, 129 Stat. 2659.

Authorization Trends

Figure 2 shows the aggregate committee funding authorization level from 1996 to 2018, in both nominal and real dollars. Since 1996, aggregate committee funding has increased by slightly more than 68%, from \$79.4 million in 1996 to \$133.6 million in 2018, for an average annual increase of 3.1%. In constant dollars, however, aggregate funding has increased only 8.0% between 1996 and 2017, for an annual average real increase of less than four-tenths of 1%.

Figure 2. Aggregate Committee Funding Authorization
1996-2018, Nominal and Constant 1996 Dollars



Source: CRS calculations based upon omnibus committee funding resolutions. Constant dollars based on Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor).

Note: Base year = 1996. Totals do not include funding for the Committee on Appropriations.

House Committee Funding: 115th Congress

The Committee on House Administration held a hearing on committee expense requests on February 15 and 16, 2017.¹⁰ Chairs and ranking Members from each standing and select committee (except the Committee on Appropriations) testified on their budget requests.¹¹ Representative Gregg Harper, chair of the panel, indicated that the committee had “worked to strike the right balance” in providing funds for committees while remaining conscious of costs.¹²

During the hearing, the chairman and the ranking minority Member, Representative Robert Brady, reiterated the long-standing expectation that committee resources would reflect a

¹⁰ See <https://cha.house.gov/hearing/hearing-committee-funding-115th-congress>.

¹¹ Ibid. Individual expense resolutions introduced by committee chairs in the 115th Congress in anticipation of the Committee on House Administration’s development of the primary expense resolution were H.Res. 73, H.Res. 76, H.Res. 80, H.Res. 81, H.Res. 83, H.Res. 86, H.Res. 93, H.Res. 96, H.Res. 97, H.Res. 101, H.Res. 103, H.Res. 106, H.Res. 107, H.Res. 112, H.Res. 114, H.Res. 115, H.Res. 117, H.Res. 119, H.Res. 122, H.Res. 125, and H.Res. 126.

¹² House Committee on House Administration, *Committee Funding for the 115th Congress (Day One)*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEwASX-2uFo>.

distribution of two-thirds of the committee staff to the majority, and one-third to the minority, and a similar distribution of nonstaff resources.¹³ In their testimony, most committee chairs and ranking minority Members explicitly acknowledged mutually satisfactory arrangements had been reached regarding the distribution of committee staff and other resources.¹⁴

On March 7, 2017, H.Res. 173, providing for the expenses of certain committees of the House of Representatives in the 115th Congress, was introduced and referred to the Committee on House Administration. On March 8, 2017, the Committee on House Administration marked up H.Res. 173, which was reported to the House by voice vote.¹⁵

In the second session of the 115th Congress, on March 7 and June 26, 2018, the Committee on House Administration considered committee resolutions 115-9 and 115-19, respectively. These resolutions allocated funds from the reserve fund for unanticipated expenses, established by H.Res. 173. In both instances, the committee agreed to the resolution by voice vote and without amendment.¹⁶

House Floor Action

On March 17, 2017, the House agreed to H.Res. 173 by voice vote. The resolution authorized a total of \$266.3 million for committee expenses, \$132.7 million for the first session and \$133.6 million for the second session.

Appropriations

Appropriations for House standing and select committees are typically included annually in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill. The following amounts were appropriated for the expenses of House standing committees (except for the Committee on Appropriations) in recent appropriations bills:

- In FY2019, \$127.9 million was appropriated in H.R. 5895, the Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019, to remain available until December 31, 2020.¹⁷
- In FY2018, \$127.1 million was appropriated in H.R. 1625, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018, to remain available until December 31, 2018.¹⁸
- In FY2017, \$127.1 million was appropriated in H.R. 244, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, to remain available until December 31, 2018.¹⁹

¹³ House Committee on House Administration, *Committee Funding for the 115th Congress (Day One)*.

¹⁴ House Committee on House Administration, *Committee Funding for the 115th Congress (Day One)*.

¹⁵ U.S. Congress, House Committee on House Administration, *Providing for the Expenses of Certain Committees of the House of Representatives in the 115th Congress*, report to accompany H.Res. 173, 115th Cong., 1st sess., March 15, 2017 (Washington: GPO, 2017).

¹⁶ House Committee on House Administration, *Committee Business Meeting*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ney1Hu64G3c>; House Committee on House Administration, *Committee Business Meeting, Hearing on USCP*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5qgZRTQGa0>.

¹⁷ P.L. 115-244.

¹⁸ P.L. 115-141.

¹⁹ P.L. 115-31, 131 Stat. 572.

- In FY2016, \$123.9 million was appropriated in H.R. 2029, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, to remain available until December 31, 2016.²⁰

House Committee Funds: Usage

Regulations²¹

In accordance with the regulations contained in the Committee Handbook,²² “Committee funds are provided to pay ordinary and necessary expenses incurred by committee Members and employees in the United States.”²³ Ordinary and necessary expenses are defined as “reasonable expenditures in support of official committee business that are consistent with all applicable Federal laws, Rules of the House of Representatives, and regulations of the Committee on House Administration.”²⁴ All expenditures of a committee are subject to review by its committee chair. Funding “may not be used to defray any personal, political or campaign-related expenses, or expenses related to a Member’s personal office.”²⁵

Committees may employ permanent staff, consultants, detailees, fellows, interns, temporary and shared employees, and volunteers.²⁶ The terms and conditions of employment for committee staff are determined by the committee chair.²⁷ Total staff ceilings for each committee are set by the Speaker.²⁸ Employees of a House committee are covered by the Congressional Accountability Act.²⁹

Domestic travel including transportation, lodging, and meals (excluding alcohol) is reimbursable from committee funds.³⁰ Travel expenses may not be for personal or political campaign events and may not exceed 60 consecutive days.³¹ Foreign travel is coordinated through the State Department Travel Office and is subject to House Rule X, clause 8(b)(3), whereby each Member and employee on foreign travel must submit an itemized report of expenses to the committee chair.³²

Committee Funding in Practice

To better understand how committees have used their authorized funds, the following sections provide an analysis of annual committee expenditures during several different legislative years. Specifically, committee expenditures are analyzed to determine (1) the percentage of each

²⁰ P.L. 114-113, 129 Stat. 2659.

²¹ This section provides an illustrative overview of committee funding regulations, and is not meant to be exhaustive.

²² Available at <http://cha.house.gov/handbooks/committee-handbook>.

²³ *Committee Handbook*, Introduction.

²⁴ *Committee Handbook*, Introduction.

²⁵ *Committee Handbook*, General.

²⁶ *Committee Handbook* Committee Staff, Consultants, and Detailees.

²⁷ *Committee Handbook* Committee Staff, Consultants, and Detailees. In practice, most committee chairs delegate such decisions for minority staff to the ranking minority Member of the committee.

²⁸ *Committee Handbook*, Committee Staff, Consultants, and Detailees.

²⁹ *Committee Handbook*, Committee Staff, Consultants, and Detailees.

³⁰ *Committee Handbook*, Domestic Travel.

³¹ *Committee Handbook*, Domestic Travel.

³² *Committee Handbook*, Foreign Travel.

committee's annual authorization that is expended, and (2) major categories of committee spending.

Data

Data on yearly committee expenditures were compiled using the quarterly *Statement of Disbursements of the House*,³³ which reports all individual House expenditures disbursed during the previous quarter.³⁴

Because late-arriving bills for committee expenses may be paid for up to two years following the end of a fiscal year for which funds are appropriated, obligations incurred by a committee during a particular legislative year are often paid over the course of multiple calendar years.³⁵ For example, H.R. 244, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2017, provided that appropriations for House committees remain available until December 31, 2018.³⁶ This would suggest that financial obligations made by committees in 2017 may be paid with remaining FY2017 appropriations through the quarter ending December 31, 2020. Consequently, the total expenditures of a committee in any given legislative year are calculated using quarterly *Statement of Disbursements* reports from both the year in which the committee operated, as well as subsequent years.

The following analysis calculates total disbursements made for legislative years 2010 through 2015, years for which House *Statements of Disbursements* are available electronically, and the bulk of late-arriving bills as described above have been received.³⁷ In addition, data on disbursements from a sample of earlier legislative years—1997, 1998, 2003, and 2004—are analyzed in order to detect any longer-term trends in how committee funds have been used.

³³ The *Statements of Disbursements* are published as House documents and have been made publicly available in the Legislative Resource Center. Beginning with the quarter ending September 30, 2009, quarterly records of disbursements have been available on the House of Representatives website, at <http://disbursements.house.gov>.

³⁴ One general caveat accompanies this analysis. The data provide only a snapshot of committee expenditures in particular years. Although such data can be used to assess the general characteristics of committee spending patterns, they do not necessarily predict future spending, either by individual committees or in aggregate.

³⁵ Pursuant to law, late-arriving bills for committee expenses may be paid for up to two years following the end of an appropriation. This, however, does not provide flexibility in the timing of the obligation. The two-year period for late receipts for Congress is shorter relative to annual appropriations for much of the rest of the federal government, which is subject to a five-year period (31 U.S.C. 1551 et al.). This is discussed in the *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law*. This publication states: "For appropriations of the House and Senate, unobligated balances more than two years old cannot be used short of an act of Congress. Instead, obligations chargeable to appropriations that have been expired for more than 2 years 'shall be liquidated from any appropriations for the same general purpose, which, at the time of payment, are available for disbursement.'" 2 U.S.C. §102a. U.S. General Accounting Office, *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law*, Third Edition, vol. I, January 2004, <http://www.gao.gov/special.pubs/3rdEditionVol1.pdf>, pp. 5-76 – 5-77.

³⁶ P.L. 115-31, 131 Stat. 572.

³⁷ It is possible that expenditures from some obligations incurred in 2015 have not yet been disbursed, and would therefore not be included in the data. H.R. 2029, the omnibus appropriations act for FY2016, was passed on December 18, 2015, and made funds for House committees available through December 31, 2016 (P.L. 114-113, 129 Stat. 2659). Presumably, these funds could be used to liquidate obligations until as late as December 31, 2018. However, data gathered from House *Statements of Disbursements* suggests that such a time lag between committee operations and actual expenditures are uncommon, and thus are unlikely to significantly affect the aggregate statistics provided in this section.

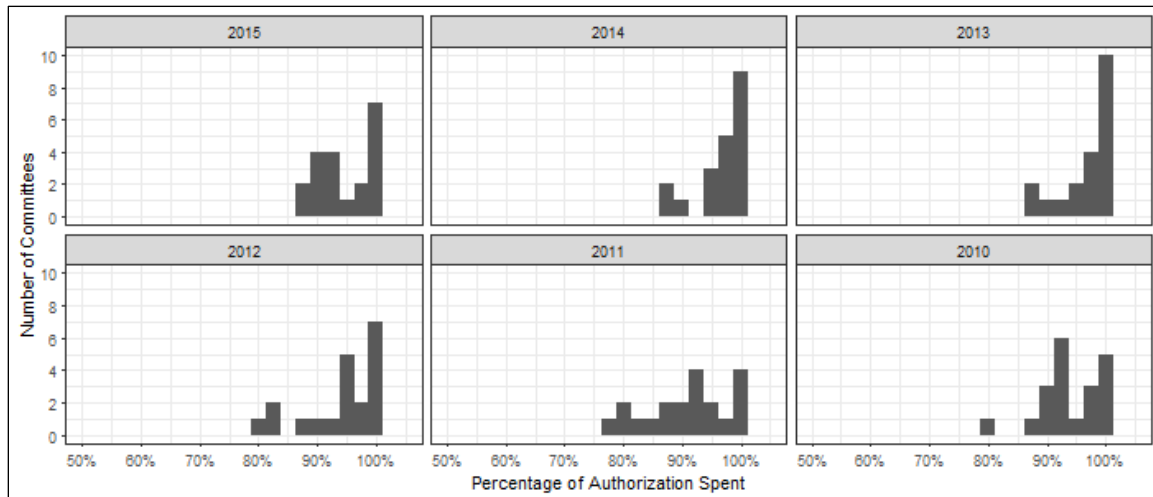
Expenditures as a Percentage of Authorization

As shown in **Figure 3**, the majority of committees between 2010 and 2015 used almost all of the funds authorized to them. Specifically,

- approximately 55% of committees spent 95% or more of their authorization;
- approximately 77% of committees spent 90% or more of their authorization; and
- approximately 98% of committees spent 80% or more of their authorization.

Figure 3. Percentage of Committee Authorization Expended

House Standing and Select Committees (excluding Appropriations Committee), Selected Years



Source: CRS analysis of *Statements of Disbursements* and House committee funding resolutions for 2010 through 2015.

Spending by Budget Category

House spending is categorized by the standard budget object classes used for the federal government.³⁸ These include

- personnel compensation;
- personnel benefits;
- travel;
- rent, communications, and utilities;
- printing and reproduction;
- other services;
- supplies and materials;³⁹
- transportation of things; and
- equipment.

³⁸ This classification system is derived from U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *OMB Circular A-11*, 2018 edition, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/a11.pdf>.

³⁹ This may include, for example, office supplies, bottled water for hearings, and publication/reference material.

The disbursement volumes also contain a category for franked mail.⁴⁰

Table 1 shows percentages for each object class. The largest category of spending, accounting for approximately 91% of total committee spending during the years analyzed, was for “Personnel compensation.” Beyond these staff expenses, committees spent an aggregate of 3.4% of their expenditures on “Equipment,” just over 2% on “Supplies and Materials,” and less than 1% on travel. The use of most committee funds on personnel is consistently true both across time and across individual committees.

⁴⁰ Certain expenses are not included in committee expenditures and are not reflected in the data in this section of the report. These expenses include the salaries of Members and certain benefits—including health and life insurance and retirement—for both Members and staff. Additionally, the range of items that may be covered by an office, as well as payment ceilings, have changed over time. For example, in a “Dear Colleague” letter of April 20, 2009, the Committee on House Administration announced that effective June 1, 2009, a transit benefit program previously administered in part by the committees would be administered centrally and available to all qualifying House employees. Previously, committees could determine whether or not to provide the transit benefit to their employees from committee funds. Those who offered this benefit would record the expenditure under the personnel benefits category. In addition to administrative changes, the maximum authorized level has also changed a number of times since the establishment of the program.

Table I. Committee Expenditures by Category

House Standing and Select Committees (excluding Appropriations Committee), Selected Years

Year	Total Committee Expenditures	%							
		Personnel Compensation	Personnel Benefits	Travel	Rent, Communication, and Utilities	Printing and Reproduction	Other Services	Supplies and Materials	Equipment
2015	\$118,467,525	90.8%	0.0%	0.5%	1.4%	0.1%	1.9%	1.9%	3.5%
2014	\$117,977,718	91.7%	0.0%	0.4%	1.3%	0.1%	1.5%	2.5%	2.5%
2013	\$117,094,104	93.5%	0.0%	0.3%	1.3%	0.1%	1.3%	1.6%	1.9%
2012	\$127,618,080	92.0%	0.0%	0.5%	1.3%	0.1%	1.6%	2.6%	1.9%
2011	\$128,812,735	89.7%	0.0%	0.6%	1.4%	0.1%	2.3%	2.4%	3.5%
2010	\$144,267,085	91.8%	0.0%	0.6%	1.2%	0.1%	1.4%	2.2%	2.7%
2004	\$111,029,836	90.2%	0.2%	0.7%	1.3%	0.2%	1.2%	2.2%	4.0%
2003	\$105,091,243	90.4%	0.2%	0.8%	1.2%	0.2%	0.9%	2.1%	4.3%
1998	\$80,697,007	88.5%	0.0%	0.7%	0.9%	0.6%	1.7%	1.7%	5.9%
1997	\$78,686,021	88.7%	0.0%	0.7%	0.8%	0.1%	2.1%	1.7%	5.9%

Source: CRS calculations based on the *Statements of Disbursements* for 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004, and 2010 through 2015.

Notes: Data presented in this table only represent spending supported by committee funds. For example, this does not include Member salaries, government contributions for employee benefits (which are paid through another House account), the cost of DC office space, and various services provided by other House administrative offices.

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