

Omnibus Appropriations: Overview of Recent Practice

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Congress makes decisions on discretionary spending through the annual appropriations process, which currently consists of the development and consideration of 12 regular appropriations bills for each fiscal year. Historically, regular appropriations bills were considered individually and enacted as standalone laws. In recent practice, however, Congress has often taken procedural action at some point in the appropriations process to combine some or all of the regular appropriations bills into a single measure. These measures are commonly referred to as “omnibus” or “consolidated” appropriations measures. (Consolidated appropriations legislation containing only some of the regular appropriations bills may also be referred to as a “minibus.”)

Omnibus appropriations measures have played a significant role in completing the appropriations process for many fiscal years in recent decades. This has been particularly true since FY1997, the last time all regular appropriations were enacted by the October 1 start of the fiscal year. Since then, Congress has passed continuing resolutions (CRs) to provide interim funding beyond October 1 until regular appropriations have been enacted. For many fiscal years over this period, minimal progress on the consideration of some or all regular appropriations bills, paired with impending funding deadlines, has made the legislative efficiency associated with omnibus measures advantageous or necessary for completing the appropriations process. As a result, most regular appropriations bills signed into law in recent decades have been enacted as part of omnibus measures.

This Insight examines three issues related to omnibus appropriations that have been of congressional interest: the frequency of enacting omnibus appropriations, the extent to which Congress considered regular appropriations bills prior to including them in omnibus measures, and the inclusion of unrelated legislative provisions in such measures.

Frequency of Omnibus Appropriations

For nearly two centuries, regular appropriations bills were considered and enacted as individual measures. In 1950, Congress undertook what was considered at the time a one-time experiment intended to improve legislative efficiency by enacting all of the regular appropriations bills for FY1951 in a single measure (P.L. 759, 81st Congress). The following year, for FY1952, Congress returned to the practice of considering regular appropriations bills individually. This practice continued until 1982, when Congress

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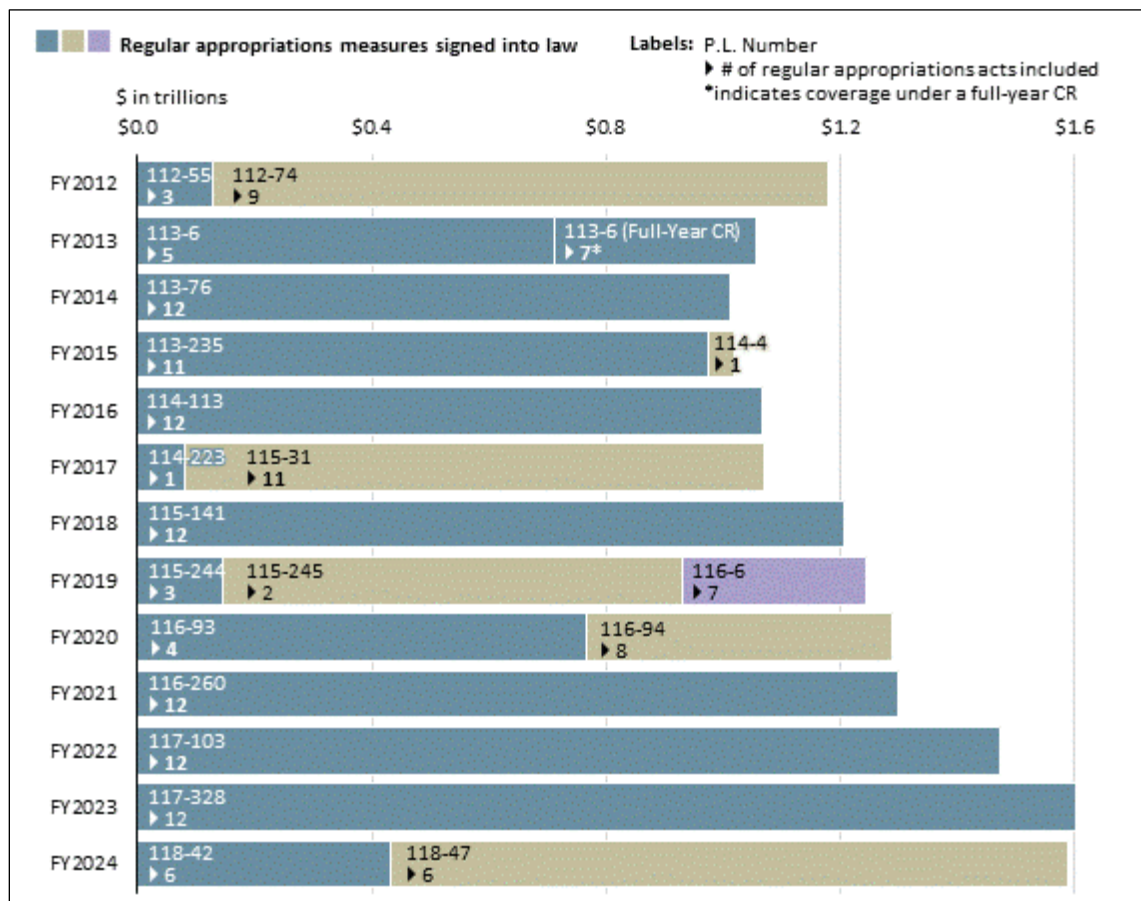
enacted an omnibus appropriations measure containing three of the regular appropriations bills for FY1983 (P.L. 97-377).

Omnibus appropriations have been a common feature of the appropriations process since 1982. At least one measure containing two or more regular appropriations acts has been signed into law for 29 of the 42 fiscal years from FY1983 through FY2024. In total, 36 omnibus appropriations measures have been enacted since 1982, serving as the legislative vehicle for 276, or 52.6%, of the 525 possible regular appropriations bills over this period.

In recent practice, the vast majority of regular appropriations bills have been signed into law as part of omnibus appropriations measures. At least one omnibus measure containing multiple regular appropriations bills was enacted for each of the 13 fiscal years from FY2012 through FY2024 (see **Figure 1**). Over this period, all but two (147 out of 149) regular appropriations bills signed into law were enacted as part of omnibus appropriations measures. (Seven regular appropriations bills for FY2013 were covered under a full-year CR [Division F of P.L. 113-6]). For seven of these fiscal years (FY2013, FY2014, FY2016, FY2018, FY2021, FY2022, and FY2023), all full-year appropriations (either regular or, in the case of FY2013, covered under a full-year CR) were enacted in a single omnibus measure. FY2006 was the last fiscal year for which all regular appropriations bills were enacted individually.

Figure 1. Enacted Regular Appropriations by Measure: FY2012-FY2024

Base Budget Authority (in Trillions)



Source: Figure created by CRS using information compiled from the Congressional Budget Office's *Status of Discretionary Appropriations* reports for the House for FY2012-FY2024, CRS's *Appropriations Status Table*, and Congress.gov.

Notes: This graphic shows base discretionary appropriations (budget authority) enacted for each fiscal year from FY2012 through FY2024 by measure (P.L. number). All but two regular appropriations bills enacted over this period were enacted in omnibus measures. The two exceptions to this were the Homeland Security Appropriations Act for FY2015 (P.L. 114-4) and the Military Construction-Veteran's Affairs appropriations bill for FY2017 (Division A of P.L. 114-223). This graphic includes only base discretionary budget authority enacted for each year, meaning that it excludes certain types of spending that are exempt from budget enforcement rules (such as spending for emergencies, disaster relief, and overseas contingency operations).

Prior Consideration of Regular Appropriations Bills

Some Members have voiced concern that the use of omnibus vehicles to complete the appropriations process may reduce the opportunities for debating and amending the regular appropriations bills that are incorporated into such measures. This concern may be lessened if the House or Senate previously considered and passed the regular appropriations bills incorporated into omnibus measures prior to action on a final version.

From FY2012 through FY2024, there were a total of 147 regular appropriations bills enacted in 18 omnibus measures. Of these regular appropriations bills, the House Appropriations Committee had previously reported 139 (94.56%), and the House had passed 72 (48.98%) on initial consideration prior to their enactment in omnibus measures. The Senate Appropriations Committee had previously reported 103 (70.07%) of these regular appropriations bills, and the Senate had passed 17 (11.49%) on initial consideration prior to their enactment in omnibus measures.

Inclusion of Legislative Provisions

Due to their scope, timing, and various other political factors, omnibus appropriations measures have often been used as vehicles to address other legislative priorities. Eleven of the 18 omnibus appropriations measures enacted from FY2012 through FY2024 included at least one additional division containing legislation unrelated to the appropriations process for that fiscal year (i.e., provisions unrelated to regular, supplemental, or continuing appropriations). These additional divisions have often included legislation related to the extension or amendment of existing authorizations, as well as legislation establishing new programs, projects, or activities (for example, see Divisions M through MM of P.L. 117-328, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023).

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