

Learning about Legislation #2: Budget Buzzwords

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This week the budget was all over the political news, because of President Trump's deal with the Democratic Congressional leaders. It funded the government through December, pushed off the debt ceiling for an equal period of time, and provided an initial \$15 billion for Hurricane Harvey relief. But voting on the budget is a vague description.

The Constitution gives the power of the purse to the House of Representatives. In Article I, Section 9, Clause 7 it says, "No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law; and a regular Statement and Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of all public Money shall be published from time to time." With that wording in our founding document, it is no surprise that one type of bill is an "Appropriation." The other type is an "Authorization."

Appropriations set spending limits for departments, agencies and programs. They are usually voted on for a single fiscal year. Right now the House is working its way through a bunch of amendments in [H.R. 3354](#), which is an Appropriations act. For more on that, go down to Votes of Interest.

Authorizations make rules about how appropriated funds can and cannot be spent. The Senate's glossary of terms says "A law that establishes or continues one or more Federal agencies or programs, establishes the terms and conditions under which they operate, authorizes the enactment of appropriations, and specifies how appropriated funds are to be used. Authorizations acts sometimes provide permanent appropriations." Earlier this year Representative Fitzpatrick and some of his area colleagues in the House were triumphant about getting the Department of Defense to expend funds to deal with the water contamination issue from an old military base in the Warminster area. The Congress directed the DOD to spend that money via an Authorization bill ([H.R. 2810](#) - Section 1060).