

Budget Experts Across Partisan Divides Agree Congress Should Use Consistent, Rational, and Transparent Measures of Costs and Savings

April 4, 2025

The signatories on this letter have substantial differences when it comes to budget policy. But we all agree that how the costs and savings of legislation are measured and enforced should be consistent, rational, and transparent. The Senate majority has signaled its intent to abuse a provision of the Congressional Budget Act to ignore official scores from CBO and JCT and instead fabricate their own scores on the spot. That approach is diametrically opposed to these budgeting principles, and it would significantly undermine what's left of budget enforcement.

The most fundamental rule of budget enforcement is that any expected fiscal impact is counted and recognized. Ignoring official cost estimates to instead invent numbers breaks that rule, and no Congress has ever done so to prevent trillions of dollars of fiscal impact from ever being scored or enforced.

Congress may increase deficits if it wants. But it should do so according to a rational interpretation of its own rules and Congressional Budget Act requirements, using consistent and transparent accounting.

If Congress can simply assert that its bills cost whatever it wishes, it can then make budget provisions it favors appear free while making provisions it doesn't favor appear expensive. This lets a Senate majority set aside its own budget enforcement rules – the existing Senate points of order – which by law can be waived only by a vote of 60 senators. It thus allows a Senate majority to completely sidestep and effectively nullify Senate rules it doesn't have the votes to waive or amend.

Abusing the Congressional Budget Act to score costs relative to a “current policy baseline” would open the floodgates for further abuse. If Congress passes expensive spending or tax provisions that are in place for only a year, this precedent would let it assert that extending those provisions permanently just a year later has no cost. Taken further, the act of fabricating their own cost estimate could allow future Congresses to assert that creating a new entitlement program actually reduces federal spending or that cutting taxes increases federal revenues.

The Congressional Budget Act is predicated on using official and credible cost estimates to adjudicate its budget enforcement rules. Using fabricated scorekeeping renders much of

the Congressional Budget Act pointless and acts to evade responsibility for the resulting bottom line numbers. Congress cannot budget responsibly if it refuses to ever consider what policies actually cost. There is no point of budget enforcement if Congress gets to pick the score it wants.

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**Note: The signatories above have signed this letter in their individual capacities. Their signatures do not represent the endorsement of the institutions with which they are affiliated.*