PAD 642

Overview

In this module, you learned how checks and balances shape the federal budgeting process. The executive branch proposes a budget, while Congress holds the constitutional "power of the purse" to authorize programs, appropriate funding, and oversee execution. Because Congress is a representative institution, budgeting is closely tied to democratic accountability, often summarized as "no taxation without representation." When the executive proposes programs and budget requests, Congress reviews those requests and makes authorization and appropriation decisions. Once Congress provides authorization and appropriation, the executive branch is expected to carry out spending in line with legislative intent.

You also learned that the modern federal budgeting process is structured by major laws, including the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 and the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974.

At the same time, the federal budgeting process faces persistent challenges, including structural imbalances between revenues and expenditures, and recurring difficulties in reaching agreement before the fiscal year begins on October 1, often leading to continuing resolutions and government shutdowns.

More recently, many observers argue that federal budgeting has become increasingly shaped by partisan politics, raising a core question for public budgeting and democratic processes: Is Congress effectively exercising its power of the purse as part of the system of checks and balances, or has the balance shifted toward presidential control?

Your task

For this discussion post, you will examine executive–legislative tension in the 2026 federal budgeting environment. In public debate, major fiscal decisions are often framed as being driven primarily by the president—through high-profile legislative packages (e.g., "one big beautiful bill") and/or executive orders and other actions—while Congress may appear less able, or less willing, to serve as a strong check.

Using relevant, credible sources, write a post of no more than 500 words responding to 2–3 guiding questions below. Your post should apply module concepts, especially checks and balances, authorization vs. appropriation, legislative intent, and legislative oversight of executive actions, to make an argument that is informed by your learning.

Guiding questions (Pick 2-3 of the questions below to guide your post)

1. What is Congress's "power of the purse" in practice? Briefly explain the roles of authorization, appropriation, oversight, and legislative intent.
2. Under what conditions can a president redirect, delay, or refuse spending that Congress has appropriated? What counts as discretion vs. a violation of legislative control?

3. What laws, procedures, and institutions are designed to limit executive control over spending? (For example: the appropriations process, impoundment rules, oversight mechanisms, court decisions, etc.)
4. Are checks and balances functioning effectively in the current year you research, or are they weakened?
5. If a president attempts to go around Congress on spending, what tools might be used, and what are the limits of the tools?
6. What can Congress do to reclaim or strengthen its role in budgeting?

Expectations

- I didn't provide additional sources besides Chapters 9 and 10 of the textbook. You are expected to find your own credible sources (for example, government documents, reputable journalism, research reports, and academic analysis).
- Apply course concepts in the discussion.
- Make a clear argument and take a position supported by your values, judgement, and knowledge.
- After posting, respond to at least one classmate with a substantive comment that adds evidence, challenges an assumption, and/or extends their analysis.

The use of generative AI

Do not use generative AI to write your discussion post. I want to read your thinking—your perspective, reasoning, and voice. Posts that appear AI-generated will receive lower scores. You may use AI as a learning and research aid, for example, to ask questions about what Congress can do, clarify budgeting concepts and legislative terms, identify relevant laws or institutions, or help you locate possible sources. However, you are responsible for verifying any information provided by AI with credible sources before using it in your work.