

Testimony of Senator Tom Carper
Before the United States Senate Committee on the Budget
Hearing on “Reforming the Federal Budget Process:
A Biennial Approach to Better Budgeting”
November 4, 2015

Mr. Chairman, fellow senators, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing. A great man named Albert Einstein once said, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results.” Unfortunately, we in Congress seem to struggle with embracing the logic of Mr. Einstein.

We talk a great deal about making government more efficient and better able to serve the people of this country. Yet, in the past two decades, we have completed all the required actions to fund the government by the end of the fiscal year—September 30—exactly once. We can’t expect better results until we address our inability to get the job done—on time.

Passing twelve appropriations bills every year is something that Congress is simply unable to accomplish, particularly in light of all the other work that fills up the calendar—including passing other crucial legislation, enacting authorization bills, conducting oversight, and so forth. At the same time, *annual* appropriations do little to foster longer-term planning either in Congress or among the agency decision-makers that make use of appropriated funds.

Fortunately, Chairman Enzi—and other senators, particularly my colleague Senator Isakson—have championed a common-sense solution that will help address these problems: a biennial appropriations process.

I've often referred to myself as a "recovering governor." You might not know that I'm a "recovering state treasurer," too. And while my home state of Delaware doesn't use the biennial appropriations model, nearly half the states do.

Our states are true "laboratories of democracy," and their experiences on this issue can be instructive. What I've heard from state officials makes a powerful case for adopting biennial appropriations at the congressional level.

A longer budget cycle allows for greater long-term strategic planning both in the legislature and Federal agencies. It also ensures greater certainty and predictability for agency officials who are tasked with implementing legislative decisions. In addition, a two-year appropriation allows for more time for thorough program evaluation and oversight during the second year—ensuring better-informed decisions about program spending in the budget cycle that follows.

I'm proud to be a cosponsor of Senator Enzi's *Biennial Appropriations Act*—which, each year, would call upon Congress to enact about half of the prescribed twelve appropriations bills.

This proposal would not only lighten the congressional appropriations workload—allowing greater time for other crucial legislative and oversight activity—but would also help reduce partisanship. That's because, under Senator Enzi's bill, Congress would take up the more "uncontroversial" two-year appropriations bills in even-numbered (election) years.

And then, we would take up the more "controversial" bills in odd-numbered years, which has the advantage of separating tough spending choices from partisan disputes that could derail full consideration and passage of these bills.

I'm grateful to Chairman Enzi for advancing this issue and holding this hearing to shine a spotlight on ways to make our appropriations process more effective. Again, I'd like to express my thanks to you for inviting me to testify, and I look forward to hearing what the witnesses to follow have to say on this crucially important subject.