



DEMAND PROGRESS

EDUCATION FUND

How House Committees Get Their Money

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Committee funding in the House of Representatives is accomplished through a somewhat quirky process. Appropriators in the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Committee set a top dollar amount for the committees — they appropriate the funds — but it is the Committee on House Administration that provides (i.e. allots) the funds to each committee on a biennial basis.

At the beginning of each new Congress, each committee chair and ranking member jointly testifies before the House Administration Committee and requests funds for their committee. For the 115th Congress, the hearings took place on February 15th and 16th, 2017. Here is the [committee notice](#); the [written statements requesting funds](#); and video from [Feb. 15](#) and [Feb. 16](#).

On March 7th, the House Administration Committee introduced a funding resolution in the House, and on March 8, the committee held a markup on House Resolution 173 [that allotted funds](#) to the committees. You can [watch the very brief proceedings here](#). House Administration reported out the [committee report](#) a week later on March 15th, and the House [passed the resolution](#) on March 17.

HOW FUNDING FOR COMMITTEES HAS CHANGED OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS

What does this look like in practice? Drawing upon the excellent data in this CRS report, plus a little additional research on spending on the appropriations committee, we looked at:

1. Total committee spending from 1995 to present
2. The change in spending per committee from 1997 to present
3. Spending per committee in the last Congress

What did we find? Overall, committees have significantly fewer funds available than their recent historical counterparts, which undermines their ability to do their jobs.

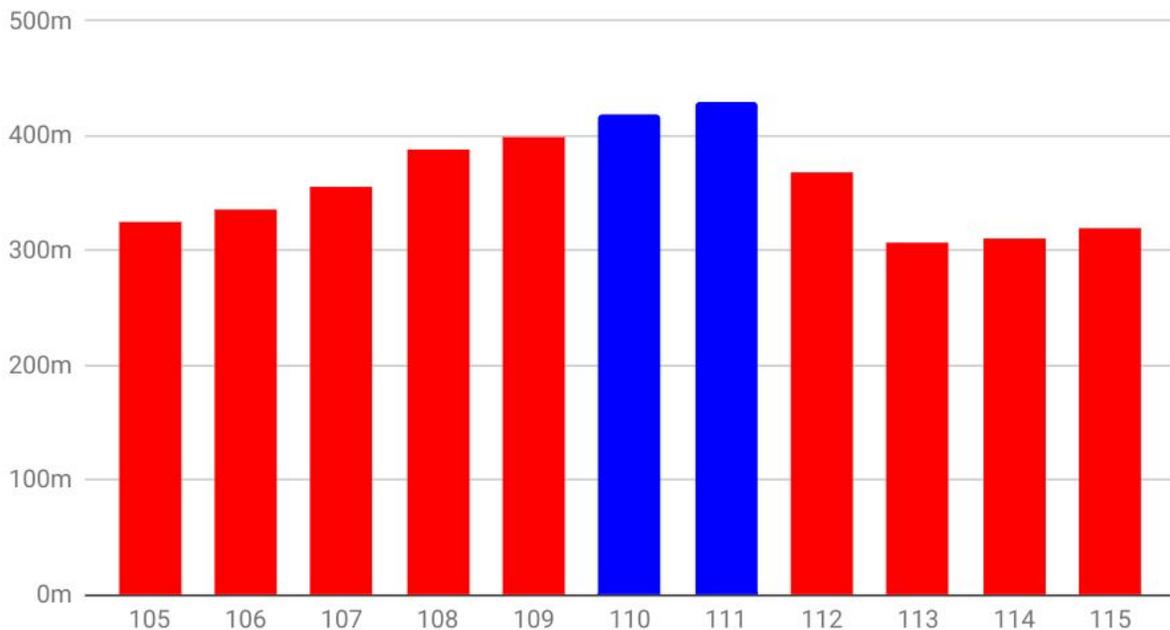
(Want to check our math? You can see our data here: [un-adjusted committee spending data](#) from 1994-2018 and [inflation-adjusted committee spending data](#) from 1994-2018.)

TOTAL COMMITTEE SPENDING

Total spending on committees is down by more than \$100 million from its peak, using inflation adjusted dollars. The House of Representatives put \$319,584,882 towards its committees in the 115th Congress, down from \$429,551,693 in the 111th Congress, which incidentally was when Democrats last controlled the House. This is a 25% cut in funding. As a point of comparison, Capitol Police salaries for FY 2018 alone amounted to \$351,700,000 in FY 2018, with an additional \$74,800,000 in general expenses.

What's interesting is that committee spending is down from when Republicans last controlled both the House and the White House, in the 109th Congress. At that time, committees received \$399,361,247 in inflation adjusted dollars, which is \$80m more than the most recent Congress.

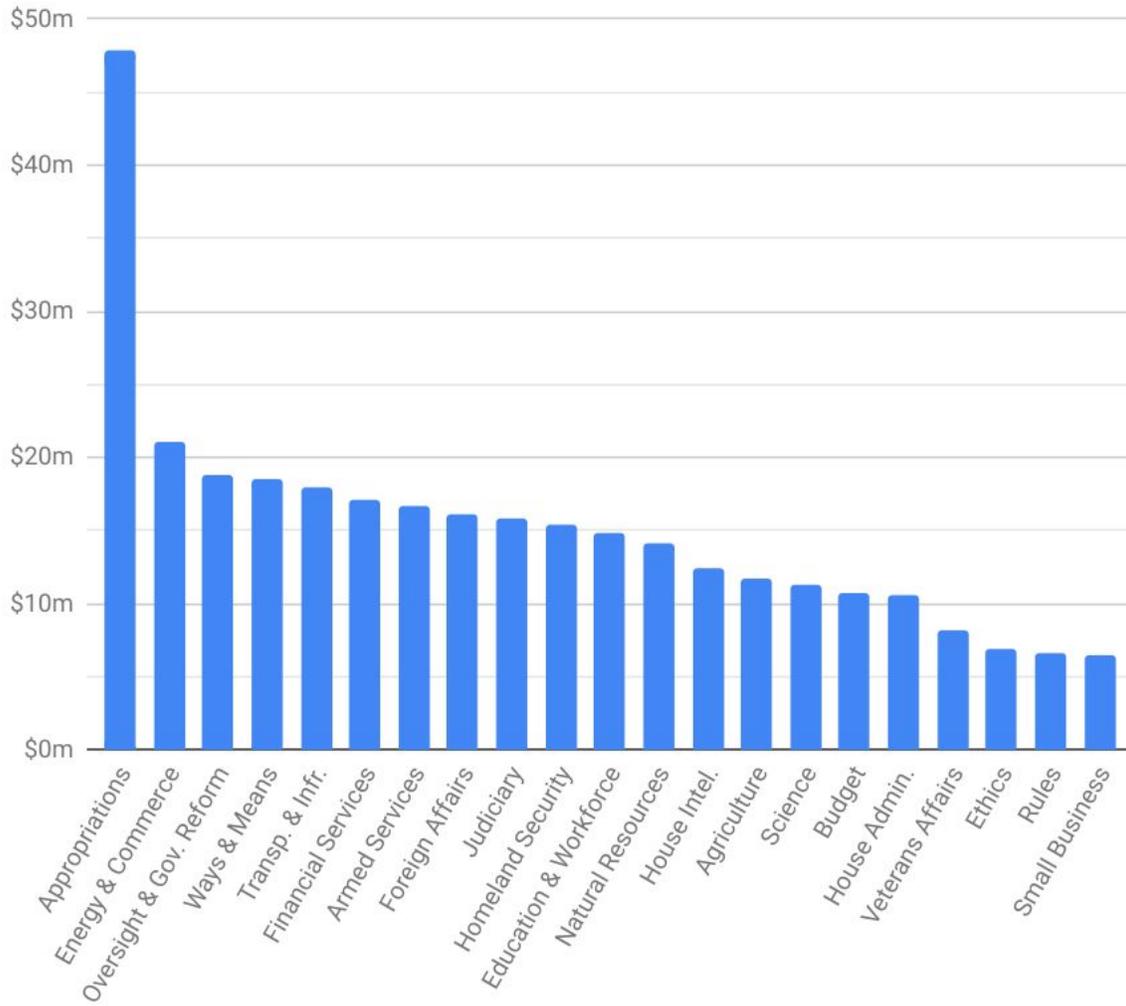
Committee Spending



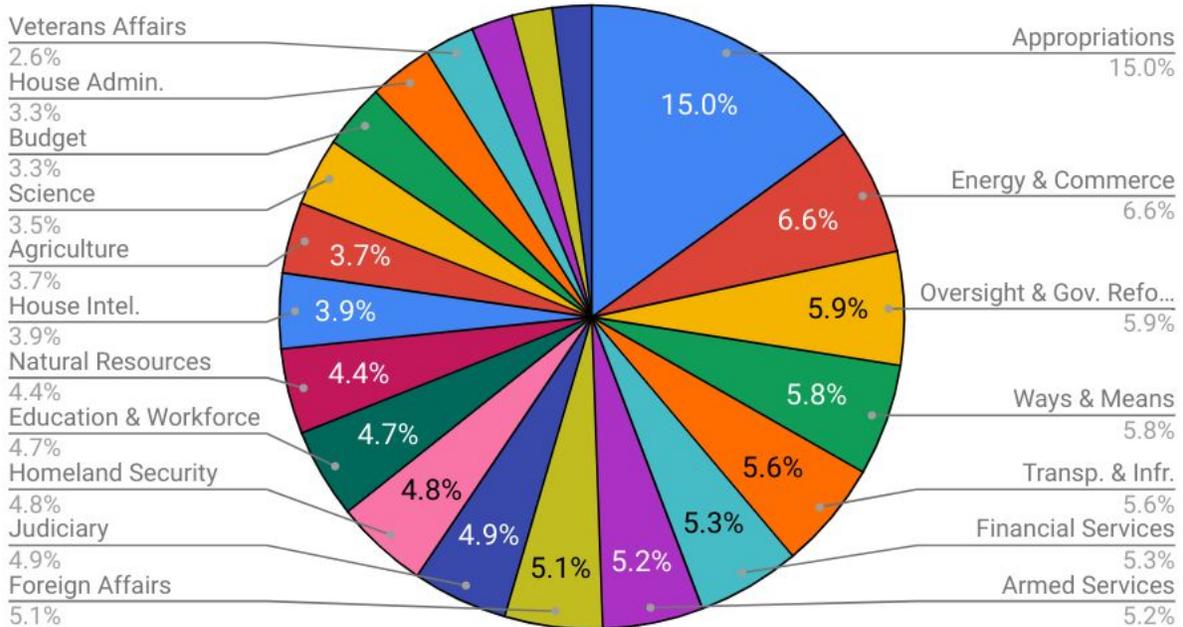
SPENDING PER COMMITTEE

In the 115th Congress, the appropriations committee received far and away the lion's share of committee funding, more than double the next closest committee. The following two charts show how the last Congress prioritized its committee spending. As mentioned above, it is worth noting that the overall pie has shrunk considerably.

Spending per Committee 115th Congress



115th Congress Committee Funding

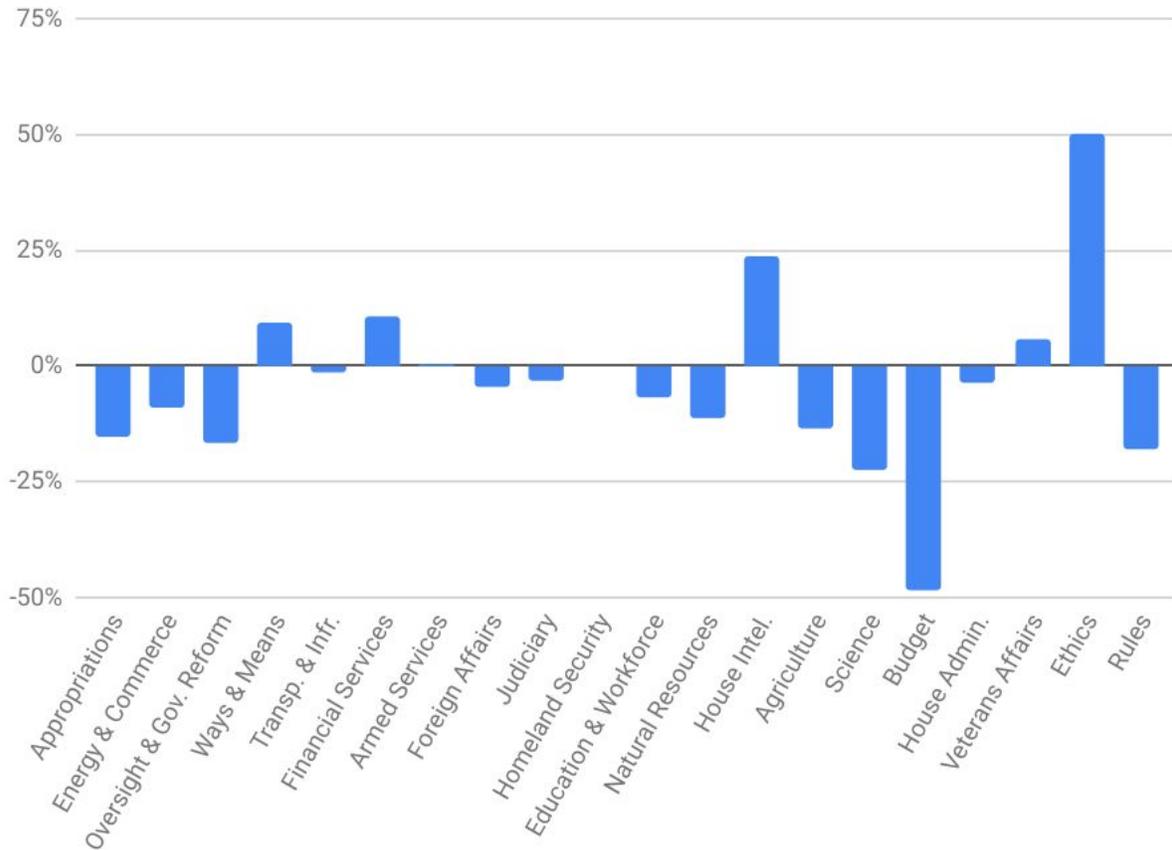


CHANGES IN SPENDING PER COMMITTEE

As the overall spending pie for committees has shrunk, who has come out ahead and who has lagged behind? Ethics, Intel, Financial Services, and Ways and Means are all up, but this is deceiving. Ethics (\$6.8m) and Intel (\$12.4m) have comparatively tiny budgets, as compared with quite well funded Financial Services (\$17m) and Ways and Means (\$18.5) committees.

Similarly, Budget, Rules, Appropriations, and Oversight appear down, but this too is misleading. Rules (\$6.6m) and Budget (\$10.7m) are comparatively small, whereas Oversight (\$18.8m) is the third largest committee, and Appropriations (\$47.8m) is the largest.

Change in Spending Per Committee 105-115th Congresses



WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

House Democrats could increase funding for committees by 20-25 percent and still be within historical norms for committee spending. Indeed, what the data shows is that the House's committees have been hollowed out in recent years.

The biggest likely constraints on returning to normal allotment levels are that the legislative branch budget is comparatively smaller than historical norms, and it will be hard to find the money. Spending on other items eat up a comparatively larger share of legislative branch funds.

This suggests that when Democrats start the Budget process, in which they will decide [how much money to make available to the 12 appropriations subcommittees](#), they should look to increase funds to the legislative branch.

A FEW FINAL NOTES

First, and not to make things too complicated, but the allotment process (the divvying up of funds among the committees) happens only once, at the start of each Congress, and the allotment resolution covers a two year period. By contrast, the legislative branch appropriations process, which is what okays the spending of money, happens every year. You can imagine the appropriation as Congress spending money to buy a pie, and the allotment process as cutting up pieces for each committee. The appropriation and allotment process run on different calendars, which can make things confusing.

Second, generally speaking, funds for a committee are further subdivided, with 2/3s available to be spent by the majority and 1/3 by the minority. This isn't always true, such as for the Ethics committee, and there can be other considerations, but that's generally how it works. In addition, the funds are generally allotted in two segments, for each year of the Congress.

Third, in some Congresses there is a separate reserve fund, just in case a committee overspends.

Fourth, while most committees are allotted funding, Appropriators appropriate funding specifically for the Appropriations Committee in a separate line item.

Finally, the last time there was a select environmental committee, back in the 111th Congress (2009-2010), the committee was allotted \$4,875,975 (in inflation-adjusted dollars).