



CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE
U.S. Congress
Washington, DC 20515

Phillip L. Swagel, Director

June 5, 2019

Honorable Mike Enzi
Chairman
Committee on the Budget
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: CBO's Work in Progress

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I welcome the opportunity to work with you as I begin my term as Director of the Congressional Budget Office. I am committed to ensuring that CBO is responsive and transparent as we provide the Congress with timely, thorough, and nonpartisan analyses to support the budget process.

I am writing to provide information about CBO's work in progress—and to indicate that the agency will be providing new quarterly updates about work in progress. To give a sense of the breadth of capabilities involved in CBO's work, I have also included some information about the agency's staff.

Work in Progress

CBO's work in progress as of the beginning of this month included 51 cost estimates and 21 analytic reports for which the fact that the agency is working on them is public. (For a list, see Attachment A.)

Cost Estimates. Most of CBO's cost estimates for public proposals are prepared after authorizing committees order legislation to be reported before it is considered by the full House or Senate, as required by the Congressional Budget Act. That CBO is working on such estimates is public knowledge. Other estimates prepared for public proposals, usually at the request of committee leadership, include those for some bills passed by a full chamber and for bills posted on committees' websites prior to their markups. When completed, these cost estimates are posted on the CBO website. The agency makes estimates related to other public proposals—such as many bills on the suspension calendar—available to interested Members of Congress and their staff. More generally, if a legislative proposal is public, then CBO can discuss whether the agency is working on estimating its cost.

In addition, CBO routinely works with Congressional committees and leadership to provide information and analysis when they are evaluating alternative proposals but have not made specific proposals public. In such situations, CBO recognizes that confidentiality is critical to the legislative process; for example, committees need the flexibility to modify their proposals before making them public. The existence of work in progress is therefore kept confidential. Sometimes that work is provided only as background information and technical assistance, and sometimes it underlies subsequent cost estimates. Once a proposal becomes public, CBO's estimates for that version of the legislation are publicly available. The confidential assistance is provided equitably to the majority and minority in both chambers.

Analytic Reports. CBO produces a number of reports specified in statute; the annual *Budget and Economic Outlook* is the most well-known such report. The fact that CBO produces these reports and related work such as the *Monthly Budget Review* and the *Long-Term Budget Outlook* is public. Similarly, a variety of other reports, working papers, and other products explain the analytical methods that underlie CBO's cost estimates, projections, and analysis generally and thus enhance transparency.

Other analytic reports are requested by lawmakers—generally committee Chairs, Ranking Members, or Congressional leadership—to address fiscal policy proposals or broad policy issues. Those reports provide information to support the legislative process. Lawmakers often find it helpful to that process if the agency keeps their request for such work confidential. In some circumstances, however, CBO makes it known that the agency is working on the projects—for instance, when the requester makes his or her request of CBO public or permits CBO to make the work public in order to gain outside feedback most effectively. CBO also makes known when the agency is producing an analytic report in response to interest expressed by many lawmakers.

When CBO's plan to publish an analytic report is confidential, the agency generally provides public notification on the preceding Thursday that the report is about to be released (as it does for other reports). For example, this year CBO has released the following reports of this type:

- *The Role of the Federal Housing Administration in the Reverse-Mortgage Market* (May 2019),
- *The Personnel Requirements and Costs of New Military Space Organizations* (May 2019),
- *The Post-9/11 GI Bill: Beneficiaries, Choices, and Cost* (May 2019),
- *Social Security Replacement Rates and Other Benefit Measures: An In-Depth Analysis* (April 2019),
- *Expected Costs of Damage From Hurricane Winds and Storm-Related Flooding* (April 2019), and
- *The Effects of the Partial Shutdown Ending in January 2019* (January 2019).

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At the time of public release, CBO makes its work available simultaneously to interested Members of Congress and their staff, the Chair and Ranking Member of the committees of jurisdiction, and the budget committees. At about the same time, the agency posts the work on its website. In addition, an email service, Twitter announcements, and RSS (really simple syndication) feeds notify subscribers.

Staffing of the Congressional Budget Office

To undertake work in support of the Congress, the agency employs analysts with many types of expertise, along with managers and support staff. At the beginning of this year, 245 positions at CBO were filled, with the largest concentration in the area of health. (For details, see Attachment B.) The agency is in the midst of a three-year expansion of its staff aimed at enhancing the transparency and responsiveness of its work.

I hope this information is helpful to you. I look forward to working together as CBO continues to provide objective, impartial analyses of budgetary and economic issues to support the Congressional budget process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phillip L. Swagel", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Phillip L. Swagel
Director

Attachments

Identical letters sent to the Honorable Bernie Sanders, the Honorable John Yarmuth, and the Honorable Steve Womack.

Attachment A: Work in Progress

As of June 1, the Congressional Budget Office was working on 51 cost estimates for bills that have been ordered reported by a committee or are the subject of a motion to be placed on the House consensus calendar (see Table A-1).

The agency was also working on 21 analytic reports it expects to complete in the coming months for which the plan to publish them is public. As usual, CBO will undertake additional reports throughout the year.

One forthcoming report is statutorily required: the *Budget and Economic Outlook: An Update*.

Several other reports under way are produced on a regular basis to provide budgetary or economic information:

- *Monthly Budget Review,*
- *Long-Term Budget Outlook,*
- *Long-Term Projections for Social Security,*
- *Long-Term Implications of the Future Years Defense Program,*
- *Analysis of the Navy's Shipbuilding Plan,*
- *The Distribution of Household Income,* and
- *Projections of Federal Receipts and Expenditures in the National Income and Product Accounts.*

Others explain the analytical methods that underlie CBO's work:

- A description of CBO's model to roughly approximate the budgetary effects of broad changes in the economy;
- A description of how CBO estimates the effects of employers' matching and default contribution rates on federal employees' own contribution rates for the Thrift Savings Plan and on the government's costs;
- A nontechnical explanation of how CBO treats uncertainty in cost estimates;
- A reexamination of CBO's original estimate of the cost of the legislation establishing the Department of Defense Medicare-Eligible Retiree Health Care Fund;
- A review of the accuracy of CBO's outlay and revenue projections for the previous year;
- An analysis of the accuracy of CBO's past projections of deficits and debt;
- An explanation of key scorekeeping rules and how CBO has used them to provide cost estimates for recent legislation;
- An evaluation of the accuracy of CBO's economic forecasts;

- Brief explanations of some important concepts related to the Congressional budget process—for example, the difference between rescissions and reappropriations; and
- Descriptions of the data and analytical methods underlying the microsimulation model that CBO uses to analyze potential changes to the cost-sharing structure of Medicare’s fee-for-service program and to medigap coverage.

Three requested reports that are in progress are the following:

- A study of the effects of an increase in the minimum wage on employment and family income,
- An analysis of income-driven repayment plans for student loans, and
- An examination of the effects of federal student loan policies on borrowing, loan repayment, cancellation, discharge, and forgiveness.

CBO makes known occasions when the agency is producing an analytic report in response to interest expressed by many lawmakers, as is the case for the study on the minimum wage. CBO also makes it known that the agency is working on analytic reports, such as those on student loans, when the requester makes his or her request of CBO public or permits CBO to make the work public in order to gain outside feedback most effectively. Other analytic reports requested by lawmakers are in progress, and the plans to publish them are confidential. Upon completion, they will be widely distributed.

Table A-1.**Forthcoming Cost Estimates for Bills Ordered Reported by a Committee or the Subject of a Motion to Be Placed on the Consensus Calendar, as of June 1, 2019**

Bill Number	Title	Committee
House Bills		
H.R. 5	Equality Act	H. Judiciary
H.R. 31-S	Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019	S. Foreign Relations
H.R. 549	Venezuela TPS Act	H. Judiciary
H.R. 553	Military Surviving spouses Equity Act	Motion for House Consensus Calendar
H.R. 693	PAST Act (Prevent All Soring Tactics)	Motion for House Consensus Calendar
H.R. 748	Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act of 2019	Motion for House Consensus Calendar
H.R. 1079-S	Creating Advanced Streamlined Electronic Services for Constituents Act of 2019	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
H.R. 1146	Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act	H. Natural Resources
H.R. 1311	A bill to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to ensure that unmet needs after a major disaster are met.	H. Transportation and Infrastructure
H.R. 1425	State Health Care Premium Reduction Act	H. Energy and Commerce
H.R. 1585	Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2019	H. Judiciary
H.R. 1639	CBP Workload Staffing Model Act	H. Homeland Security
H.R. 1648	Small Business Advanced Cybersecurity Enhancements Act	H. Small Business
H.R. 1654-S	Federal Register Modernization Act	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
H.R. 1815	A bill to require the Securities and Exchange Commission, when developing rules and regulations about disclosures to retail investors, to conduct investor testing, including a survey and interviews of retail investors, and for other purposes.	H. Financial Services
H.R. 1988	Protect Affordable Mortgages for Veterans Act of 2019	H. Financial Services
H.R. 1988	Protecting Affordable Mortgages for Veterans Act	H. Veterans' Affairs
H.R. 2083	Homeland Procurement Reform Act	H. Homeland Security
H.R. 2113	Prescription Drug Star Act	H. Ways and Means
H.R. 2142	A bill to amend the Small Business Act to require the Small Business and Agriculture Regulatory Enforcement Ombudsman to create a centralized website for compliance guides, and for other purposes.	H. Small Business
H.R. 2156	RECLAIM Act	H. Natural Resources
H.R. 2345	Clarifying the Small Business Runway Extension Act	H. Small Business
H.R. 2409	Expanding Access to Capital for Rural Job Creators Act	H. Financial Services
H.R. 2476	Securing American Non-Profit Organizations Against Terrorism Act	H. Homeland Security
H.R. 2513	Corporate Transparency Act of 2019	H. Financial Services
H.R. 2514	Coordinating Oversight, Upgrading and Innovating Technology, and Examiner Reform Act of 2019	H. Financial Services

Bill Number	Title	Committee
House Bills (Continued)		
H.R. 2515	To amend the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934 to amend the definition of whistleblower	H. Financial Services
H.R. 2534	Insider Trading Prohibition Act of 2019	H. Financial Services
H.R. 2539	Strengthening Local Transportation Security Capabilities Act of 2019	H. Homeland Security
H.R. 2574	Equity and Inclusion Enforcement Act	H. Education and Labor
H.R. 2615	United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act	H. Foreign Affairs
H.R. 2639	Strength in Diversity Act of 2019	H. Education and Labor
Senate Bills		
S. 178	Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019	S. Foreign Relations
S. 249	A bill to direct the Secretary of State to develop a strategy to gain observer status for Taiwan in the World Health Organization, and for other purposes	S. Foreign Relations
S. 580	Presidential Allowance Modernization Act of 2019	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
S. 906	Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act	S. Commerce, Science, and Transportation
S. 1025	Venezuela Emergency Relief, Democracy Assistance, and Development Act of 2019	S. Foreign Relations
S. 1207	A bill to approve the settlement of the water rights claims of the Navajo Nation in Utah, and for other purposes.	S. Indian Affairs
S. 1215	National Defense Authorization Act for FY2020	S. Armed Services
S. 1228	Preventing Illegal Radio Abuse Through Enforcement (PIRATE) Act	S. Commerce, Science, and Transportation
S. 1275	Federal Agency Customer Experience Act of 2019	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
S. 1294	Broadband Interagency Coordination Act	S. Commerce, Science, and Transportation
S. 1321	Defending the Integrity of Voting Systems Act	S. Judiciary
S. 1328	DETER Act	S. Judiciary
S. 1333	Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
S. 1340	Ebola Eradication Act	S. Foreign Relations
S. 1388	Supply Chain Counterintelligence Training Act of 2019	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
S. 1420	Setting Manageable Analysis Requirements in Text Act of 2019	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
S. 1430	Representative Payee Fraud Prevention Act of 2019	S. Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
S. 1439	Maritime Administration Authorization and Enhancement Act	S. Commerce, Science, and Transportation
S. 1589	Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2018, 2019, and 2020	S. Select Intelligence

Source: Congressional Budget Office.

CBO's designation of "S" at the end of a bill number indicates consideration by a Senate committee.

Attachment B: CBO's Staff

CBO employs analysts with many types of expertise, along with managers and support staff, as shown in the table below.

Table B-1.

Allocation of CBO Staff

	Number of Staff
Principal Areas for Analysts	
Health	45
Education, Immigration, Income Security, Labor, and Retirement	26
National Security, Veterans' Programs, and International Affairs	24
Macroeconomics	20
Energy, Environment, Natural Resources, and Transportation	17
Taxation	17
Budget Outlook	10
Finance and Housing	10
Appropriations	7
Mandates	5
Commerce, Justice, Science, and General Government	2
Principal Types of Activities for Other Staff	
Information Technology	14
Human Resources, Financial Management, and Other Support	10
Publication Services	10
Clerical Support	8
General Management	8
Legal Services	5
Website	5
Interns	2
Total	245

Source: Congressional Budget Office.

Numbers are positions filled as of January 2019. Although staff are assigned to a primary type of analysis or activity in this table, they often work in many areas.