Announcer: Welcome to Civil Discourse. This podcast will use government documents to eliminate the workings of the American government and offer context around the effects of government agencies in your everyday life. And now your hosts, Nia Rodgers, public affairs librarian and Dr. John Aughenbaugh, political science professor.

J. Aughenbaugh: So, in a previous podcast episode, we talked about the first part of the federal government's budget process. And that is the president's budget. The fact that, anytime a president submits a budget, it's basically an 18 month, year and a half long process. And where we left off with that particular podcast episode was that the president had finally delivered their budget to the United States Congress. And that's where we are.

N. Rodgers: So now what? Okay, my first question is delivered how? I know they don't print it anymore because of the-

J. Aughenbaugh: Paperwork Reduction Act, which-

N. Rodgers: 1995-

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: Which is our, I think should be our mascot document since everything comes back to that. So clearly they're not going to print the thing because it's 8 trillion pages or whatever. So they're going to send an electronic file. Do they send that to the clerk? Do they send that to Mitch McConnell and Nancy Pelosi? How, who gets the actual file that is the budget?

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. It typically gets sent to the following individuals. The speaker of the house, which currently is Nancy Pelosi. The Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell, but also the chairs of the quote unquote budget committees in the house. There's two committees, one is a budget committee, and then the other one is the appropriations committee. And likewise in the Senate. The-

N. Rodgers: Wait, wait, wait. There's two committees that deal with money. And I'm sure they get along really well all the time and they have constant agreement and it's all fabulous.

J. Aughenbaugh: Not really.

N. Rodgers: Okay.
J. Aughenbaugh: So the way to conceptualize these two committees is that the budget committee basically will go ahead and set overall amounts, right. So let's say the federal government's budget submitted by the president is, I'm just making this up guys, right. I have looked at the current presidential budget, but we're now like talking a lot of zeroes. So let's say like, I can't remember how many trillions, but let's say the president's budget is $30 trillion.

N. Rodgers: That's a good round number.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: I like 30.

J. Aughenbaugh: All right. Now the first thing that both houses of Congress are going to do in their budget committees, is make a decision. Do we agree with the overall amount of expenditures that the president wants to make? And that's the decision of the budget committees. Okay. The budget committees will go ahead and decide, yeah, we agree with the president. We should have a federal government budget starting... And you remember when.

N. Rodgers: February 1st no, no. The budget starts October 1st.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's correct. That's right. The federal government's fiscal year begins on October 1st and runs through September 30th.

N. Rodgers: And so it's for the current October 1st, like the one that went in, that was supposed to go in February 1st and it wasn't too late because-

J. Aughenbaugh: It wasn't too late. I mean...

N. Rodgers: I mean, it's not, it didn't come in, in the summer or anything.

J. Aughenbaugh: No.

N. Rodgers: So that's for February in 2019 the budget that they get is going to start October, 2019 like the same year.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Okay. And so they say, so the budget committee says 30 trillion seems like a good round number to us. We're okay with that?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. And then at that point, the appropriations committees will then do the hard work of trying to decide how do we divide up that $30 trillion?
N. Rodgers: Oh, so the budget committee peaces out. They're like, okay, we're done. We've given you the amount that you can spend. It's like your parents, your parents give you an allowance.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right. And then they say-

N. Rodgers: And then you have to figure out how you're going to allot that over the next week or two weeks or however long [crosstalk 00:04:41].

J. Aughenbaugh: Long it's going to be.

N. Rodgers: So you could go for beer and bit well on that beer. Because if you're getting allowance, you probably not not old enough to have beer. You can have pizza and coke, right. Or, pizza and soda. And then-

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. Yeah. Do you spend it on candy? Do you spend it on comic books? Do you spend it on-

N. Rodgers: But if you spend it that first day-

J. Aughenbaugh: Then-

N. Rodgers: Two weeks with nothing. That's just how that works.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's how it works, right. And as you pointed out, there is a tension between the budget committees and the appropriations committees, because the appropriations committees, it's a desired committee assignment, because you're basically getting to decide who gets the money, right. So members, other members of the house or other members of the Senate are going to want you to allocate money that's going to benefit their district and states, right. So that's a lot of authority. If you sit on the appropriations committees, right.

N. Rodgers: So you get schmoozed a lot.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh my goodness. Yes.

N. Rodgers: Do you get schmoozed by lobbyists too. I mean, is that a-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, lobbyist do it.

N. Rodgers: So people take you out to dinner all the time.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.
N. Rodgers: And tell you how fabulous you are and they like your new haircut and whatever.

J. Aughenbaugh: You are fabulous. You represent a very important state or district and oh yeah. Hey, by the way, some-

N. Rodgers: We sure could use some of that in Ottumwa Iowa is that where radar was from?


N. Rodgers: Thanks.

J. Aughenbaugh: I actually have a mash t shirt. It's like one of my, anyways, I digress. So appropriations can be members. This is a desired committee responsibility because, you get to decide which agencies get which money, right? And when we talk about the federal government budget, we mentioned this in the previous podcast, but I think it's really helpful for our listeners to understand that there isn't a single budget bill passed by Congress. They actually break it up typically into like 10 to 12 appropriations bills. Because if they combined it all into one-

N. Rodgers: It'd be really big.

J. Aughenbaugh: It would, one, it would be really big, and two, it would increase the likelihood that the budget would never get passed by Congress on time. So if you break it, if-

N. Rodgers: Why? Because people would argue?

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh yeah.

N. Rodgers: People would vote against it because there's something in it they don't like.

J. Aughenbaugh: [crosstalk 00:07:13] That's right. So if you go ahead and break it up and do it in pieces and they typically do this, it's by and large subject matter related. Right. So there's just one appropriations bill for defense because it's so big. Right.

N. Rodgers: How much of the budget goes to defense, do you know? Percentage wise?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah percentage wise it's, of recent vintage. And when I say recent vintage, pretty much since the 911 attacks, it's usually somewhere between 25 to 30% of our federal government's budget is for defense.

N. Rodgers: Really?
J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: It's quite a bit.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean really the two biggest categories, budget categories are defense and entitlement spending. Entitlement programs are programs like social security or welfare-

N. Rodgers: Medicare, sort of thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. An entitlement program is basically, if you meet certain criteria, you're entitled to receive money from the government. Okay.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: And...

N. Rodgers: So that can also vary because, when there's high unemployment, more people are getting the unemployment insurance, they're getting paid unemployment.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yup.

N. Rodgers: But when we're... Like we are now where unemployment is lower, then that's less costly. So some of those costs go up and down-

J. Aughenbaugh: Down, but here's-

N. Rodgers: A little bit. But you also have-

J. Aughenbaugh: But also-

N. Rodgers: Some cost that stay pretty large, right? Like your... No offense intended to the old folks who are listening, but you're old folk contingent that gets social security in currently now is a fairly large number of people, right? Because that's a demographic issue.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. American society is great, right? I mean most Western democracies are getting older. So if you have an entitlement program, like for instance, social security, you basically know that the expenditures, the outlays are only going to increase because your population is getting older and is meeting the eligibility requirements to receive money from that program. And that's a thing. Most western democracies, United States isn't any different than pretty much almost any other western developed democracy. Our entitlement spending has increased, roughly in the last 50 to 60 years, we have created more entitled by
programs. If you think about, for instance, the affordable care act, it basically says all Americans are entitled to healthcare. The question is who's going to pay for it? Right? So if you are poor and your employer doesn't offer you health care, okay, well then you are entitled to receive a subsidy from the federal government.

N. Rodgers: To encourage you to get health care.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right. We have other kinds of entitlement programs. If you think about, for instance, subsidized student loans. If you meet certain criteria, because we have the program, you're entitled to a loan that is subsidized, that is protected by the federal government. Okay. That costs money, right? So if you combine defense and entitlement spending, that's nearly 60% of the federal government's budget.

N. Rodgers: Wow.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: So that's a huge-

J. Aughenbaugh: And here's the thing. Nobody's ever run for Congress saying, we're going to cut defense. And with entitlement programs, usually they create stakeholders who say, you can't cut my program.

N. Rodgers: Well, yeah, I mean, I think we've discussed the power of the AARP.

J. Aughenbaugh: For instance.

N. Rodgers: In previous instances. And other groups that are interested in making sure that their particular-

J. Aughenbaugh: Their constituents, their members-

N. Rodgers: Constituents, yeah thank you, are protected.

J. Aughenbaugh: Their members are protected. I mean, and again, we could have a debate about whether or not, what needs to change in regards to social security because at some point we're going to have a demographics issue, right? We're going to have too many people entitled to receive benefits from Social Security and not enough younger people paying into it. We can have that discussion. But, think about all those Americans who have worked for decades paying into the system and they basically have been promised by the government what's going to be waiting for them when they hit retirement age. A check from social security.
N. Rodgers: So if we don't deliver on that, there's some pretty extreme outcomes.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. We have a government trust issue. Okay. A huge government trust issue. And in the previous podcast we talked about how if you think about the government budget, it's a statement of priorities. When the president submits their budget, the president is saying, here are my priorities, right? Then congress gets a whack at it. Congress then gets to go ahead and say to the president and to the country, well, here are our priorities.

N. Rodgers: Okay, so that's a philosophical [crosstalk 00:12:39] difference obviously between the White House and the Congress.


N. Rodgers: But the congress actually controls the purse strings-

J. Aughenbaugh: That's correct.

N. Rodgers: ... In the sense of-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: ... The president can say all he wants, I want a budget with, I want, I don't know, let's just make up a number. Let's just pretend that, he says, this year, I wanted the defense budget to be $800 billion or whatever it is, which turns out to be in the overall percentage. I don't know. Now I'm lost in the math, but so let's say he ups it to 40%, they can take that back down to 30%.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure, yes.

N. Rodgers: Back down to previous year's spending with no, like they don't have to go back to him and negotiate.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, I mean-

N. Rodgers: Will do that.

J. Aughenbaugh: They do, because though Congress controls the budget, the president still has to sign it. So it's much like how a bill becomes a law.


J. Aughenbaugh: Nina just rolled her eyes at me.
N. Rodgers: I did.

J. Aughenbaugh: Because she was like-

N. Rodgers: Are you getting your business cards made up on dream killer [crosstalk 00:13:55]?

J. Aughenbaugh: Right. But it's multiple bills. Appropriations bills have to first go through the house. That's actually in the constitution. The framers wanted the people's House of Congress, the House of Representatives, to start the budget process, right? So the House of Representatives will act first in terms of passing appropriations bills. Then it goes to the Senate. Now, if there is a difference, if there are significant differences between the house appropriation bills, and the Senate appropriation bills, then they create a joint committee. And we talked about this in a previous podcast, right? Then there's a joint committee to iron out the differences. By the way, if I had to venture a guess, we're going to see the creation of a joint committee with this year's budget because the house is controlled by the Democrats. The Senate is controlled by the Republicans. When president Trump submitted his budget almost immediately, speaker of the house, Nancy Pelosi went ahead and said, this budget doesn't work for us.

N. Rodgers: She hadn't even read it, because I know, I mean it's huge.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oh it's huge.

N. Rodgers: The summary is 150 some pages.

J. Aughenbaugh: ... Some pages. Right.


J. Aughenbaugh: I read the executive summary and then I read the rest of the budget. Like I tell my students to read books that I signed them skip and skim. Right. And even that took like an entire afternoon. The speaker of the House has other more important stuff than to read every single line of the president's budget.

N. Rodgers: Which brings me to a question.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: Okay. So before we get to joint committees and all that other kind of stuff, so you have the appropriations committee, and they get this ginormous budget, so then they start parsing it and pulling it out. They break it into 10-
J. Aughenbaugh: 10, 12 bills.

N. Rodgers: 10 or 12 bills. So are they arguing at the line item level? Are they arguing at sort of the broad, okay, well we like NASA, so let's give NASA $580 million or whatever. Like-

J. Aughenbaugh: The answers-

N. Rodgers: Do they get to tell NASA how to spend all the money that they get?

J. Aughenbaugh: They could, but typically they don't. It's huge. It's actually somewhere in between the two poles that you just described. Okay. Congress hardly ever tells an agency. We see you have a line item for a half a million dollars for copying. We're going to cut that to a quarter of a million. Congress hardly ever gets to that level of specificity. Occasionally Congress will, if they are upset, disappointed, angry with a particular agency. And again, we can use the analogy-

N. Rodgers: So we're like, come on over here, Department of Agriculture, we've decided to go through your budget line by line.

J. Aughenbaugh: Right? And again, the analogy to children with their parents is appropriate. Because I don't know about you, but I know with my mom if I spent money unwisely in the future, my mother's level of oversight increase dramatically.

N. Rodgers: Yes.

J. Aughenbaugh: Right?

N. Rodgers: Yes.

J. Aughenbaugh: On the other hand, if I do-

N. Rodgers: Level of oversight.

J. Aughenbaugh: Oversight. On the other hand, if I did something really like smart with money, my mom would be less committed to the oversight. Right.

N. Rodgers: She might actually give you more.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: She might reward you for good behavior.
J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: So you can conceivably come back. The congress could conceivably come back and reward an agency with more money. Well not reward, but they could give more money. If they-

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, I mean, in some ways-

N. Rodgers: If they see a need or, if they see a particularly well done administration of the previous budget, they might say, okay, you know what, you’ve asked for more money, but you really well spent the last money we gave you, we’ll actually give you more money this time.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean-

N. Rodgers: So Congress is all of the agencies’ parents.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: Ooh.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. And in this appropriations process, the appropriations committee, first the chair, and then the ranking member will decide, which agencies they want to come and testify at hearings. Right. So to just to give you an example the federal judiciary makes a request of the United States Congress for money to operate all the federal courts. A couple of weeks ago, two members of the US supreme court, basically had to go in front of a joint appropriations committee hearing, to go ahead and justify the request that the judicial branch made in the federal budget. The two justices were Elena Kagan and Sam Alito. And for a geek like me, this is like, this is high entertainment. Right. Okay. I knew it was on some-

N. Rodgers: First of all that sounds like a comedy duo. Kagan and Alito. [crosstalk 00:19:37] that just sound like the next comedy hour kind of show, not to insult justices, they’re comedians but still-

J. Aughenbaugh: But you can tell-

N. Rodgers: That’s not an insult, really.

J. Aughenbaugh: But it’s awkward for them for, because they don’t testify in their robes.

N. Rodgers: I was going to ask you, do they wear their robes? So they are in street clothes.
J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: That's weird.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. And-

N. Rodgers: I don't know whether I've seen Elena Kagan without a robe. Like-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean-

N. Rodgers: Because every time she's in an official portrait or she's doing official business.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, Right. So, there they are, okay in professional attire.

N. Rodgers: In their mashed t shirts.

J. Aughenbaugh: That would be sweet. I've seen Justice Alito that, you have a grateful dead concert shirt on, would you care to explain?

N. Rodgers: Oh my goodness.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, the summer of 85. Anyways-

N. Rodgers: That would be awesome.

J. Aughenbaugh: That would be awesome, right. But, but there they are. And they're talking about the budget and of course, members of Congress use that as an opportunity to talk about other issues. So they explored with both Kagan and Alito, so why don't you guys allow cameras during oral arguments, right? I mean and that's the thing. Congress with appropriations hearings, well, not only ask about budgets, then they'll ask about programs, activities, et cetera.

N. Rodgers: So when your mom gives you your allowance...

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: And you say, I'm going to the movies and then you come back and all your money's gone. She's like, well, who did you go to the movies with?

J. Aughenbaugh: Movies with?

N. Rodgers: Right. And that has nothing to do with the budget that she gave you.

J. Aughenbaugh: No.
N. Rodgers: But now she’s using that leverage to find out.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: ... If you're, who you're going to, who you might be seeing, what's going on in your life.

J. Aughenbaugh: And I tell my students this all the time. One of the ways Congress does its oversight function of the executive branch or in the example we just talked about, the judicial branch, is to use budget hearings. Because they know, okay, the agencies or the judicial branch want money. All right? And it’s just like parents, if the parents know you want something from them, that’s the leverage they have than to go ahead and explore anything that they might want to explore with you. Right.

N. Rodgers: So what are your grades like? Wait, what does this have to do with-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, I still remember a conversation I had with my mom before my freshman year of high school where I knew I was going to be trying out for the varsity baseball team. Right. And I was already told more than likely the head coach was going to not only ask me to play catcher but also first base. I had a catcher's Mitt. But I didn't have a first baseman's Mitt. So I asked my-

N. Rodgers: We have two different Mitts and baseball?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes, well, there's actually multiple, right? Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Huh.

J. Aughenbaugh: So there's a catcher's Mitt. Okay. It needs to be bigger and softer because they're catching pitches that might be thrown really fast. First Baseman's Mitt needs to be big because throws from the infielders sometimes are a little erratic. So you need to have a bigger mitt to catch, the other infielders want smaller mitts because they want that control function. And then outfielders, so there's like four or five different types of mitts, but because I knew it was going to be maybe forced to try out at first base and I didn't have a first baseman's mitt, I said to my mom, hey mom, could I have some money to get a first baseman's mitt?

J. Aughenbaugh: Well then as you just pointed out, she used that as an opportunity to remind me of certain commitments in regards to my grades that perhaps I was not spending as much time on in the recently completed eighth grade and I'm like, really? This is what I need to endure to get this money for this mitt. And as far as my mom was concerned, yes. And then she used it to explore other things. Like I
notice you're hanging out with so-and-so. And I'm like, oh, you've got a problem with them. Right. And you're not really helping out, you're helping your sisters out with various tasks.

N. Rodgers: I haven't been seeing you more as often as I was expecting, so it just grows an-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right? And members of Congress will do the same thing, right? I mean, because in part this is their opportunity. I mean, agencies are there for money. So they will explore while, hey, you guys want this amount of money. In the president's budget, you said you need X, we'll use NASA as an example, right? You need this amount of money to go ahead and send a satellite to Mars. Okay, well, did you guys send a satellite to Mars like a couple of years ago? I mean, has Mars changed that much in the last two years? Aren't there other planets we might want to explore? And can we go ahead and outsource this? Are there other countries that perhaps benefit from all the research we do on Mars? Can't we go ahead and get them to pitch in?

J. Aughenbaugh: And those slacker, other nations? These are the kinds of questions that get asked, right? And it's all because you're going there as an agency and basically saying, yeah, we need this money, right? We have all these people that rely on us to do X and members of Congress are like, okay, so what are we getting for this money we've given you in the past.

N. Rodgers: Well and in fairness-

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: They're held responsible for that.

J. Aughenbaugh: Sure.

N. Rodgers: Like if you allow massive deficits to grow and you allow all that stuff to happen on your watch, that's going to affect whether you're going to get reelected or not. There's going to be all kinds of things that happen to you if you don't show fiscal responsibility. And the other part of that is some of that is legitimate. No, really I need to understand why we're doing this thing so that I can defend it to other people. But also so that I just have a better understanding of what we're doing as a government. So I can see where they do that. But I can also see where it could get out of hand with... It could get, no, let me scratch that and say not out of hand. It could get partisan. Where you can be trying to pin things on or hide things from other people depending on what you were trying to do.
J. Aughenbaugh: And there's a fine line. And increasingly any kind of oversight is perceived by the opposition political party as political. This is too political. But as I remind my students, we want the legislative branch to show oversight. Remember we have a system of government that's separate but shared powers. The budget responsibility shared between the Congress and the executive branch. The executive branch is tasked with executing the law. If Congress has delegated authority to the executive branch and given a whole bunch of taxpayer money to the executive branch to do things, don't we kind of want to make sure that the executive branch has done what they've been told to do or what they promised they would do? Oh, okay, and again, that's hardwired into our system. Now you can go ahead and say, a congress that grills a particular agency head is being partisan.

J. Aughenbaugh: All right? Maybe there is some partisanship, but at the same time, it is a system of government that has accountability checks and balances written into the system. Remember unless this is no longer a value and I say this to people, and they're like, well, of course it's still a value. And I'm like, okay, well if it's no longer a value holding the other branches of government accountable is necessary in a democracy, because it's a lot of power that they've been given. And if we're giving them citizen money-

N. Rodgers: That's my money. Thank you very much. And I want you to spend it properly. I mean, I obviously do not pay trillions of dollars in taxes, but I pay my part and everybody who pays their part has the right to say, hey, I want that spent for something appropriate or useful or that's going to benefit us as a nation. I don't want that to be spent on junk that isn't going to be in the longterm useful to everybody.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Maybe because, Nia, you and I've talked about this before we recorded this episode of the podcast, and the previous one about the president's budget. There's a lot of things the federal government does that doesn't benefit you, me or us together, but we know it's good for the nation, right? It's a public good. Right? But we want to know, well, are we getting these public goods, right? If a whole bunch of money is taken out of my paycheck for social security, right. I want to know that somebody is like asking the commissioner of the Social Security Administration, are you guys getting the checks to grandma?

N. Rodgers: You're right. Are they going out on time? Are they being delivered properly?

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Are they not being delivered to dead people? I mean, making sure they're still alive.

N. Rodgers: But we do, you and I are both, thank goodness not yet at the age of being retired.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, but we just used it as an example, but I mean yeah.

N. Rodgers: But we both know people who are. We both people who are older folks, and we would want to see them taken care of because that's a common good that we both perceive as a common good.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean if-

N. Rodgers: I don't have children, but I firmly believe that part of my tax money should go to helping educate children because eventually those children will be the people who will run the government, the people who will do all the things in the cities that do affect me and I wanted them to have the best education possibly. That's an investment in my future. So but I want that money spent wisely. I don't want that... I mean sometimes, I wonder sometimes with the local school districts, right? Like how things are being spent and a little worrisome so I can see where they would want to ask questions and say, why can't we raise teacher salaries? Why can't we have green spaces on these campuses? Why can't we do things that we know help children? Why can't we feed them breakfast? Right?

N. Rodgers: Because we know it's better when they eat. That kind of thing. So I see both sides and I agree. I'm glad that they go over it. I'm a little amused by the idea that you can talk to the Supreme Court Valet. Well, why don't you have cameras? That seems a little, not hostile but off topic.

J. Aughenbaugh: Off topic. Yeah. But-

N. Rodgers: But if it's the only chance you're going to get, you ask them until next year when they come back for money.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Because, it's not like the Congress can go ahead and say, to the chief justice of the Supreme Court, hey, we haven't grilled you in four or five months so-

N. Rodgers: come on over.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. When you get-

N. Rodgers: We have some questions.
J. Aughenbaugh: So yeah. When you get done with oral arguments next week, come on over so we can go ahead and score some serious political points. Right. Get on national TV, have some fun at your expense. No, they can't do that. Right.

N. Rodgers: They know they have to wait for the opportunity.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, right.

N. Rodgers: So there opportunities they, so they've made these bills and now, so the house makes a set of bills. Does the budget committee in the Senate agree with the Budget Committee in the house about the amount of money?

J. Aughenbaugh: No.

N. Rodgers: Okay. So they're not even working from the same-

J. Aughenbaugh: Same script...

N. Rodgers: Amount?

J. Aughenbaugh: Nope.

N. Rodgers: So the first thing they have to do is figure out how much money they're going to spend.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah uh-huh (affirmative).

N. Rodgers: So that's the first fight they have.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: And then they have to take those bills and-

J. Aughenbaugh: The appropriations bills.

N. Rodgers: An [inaudible 00:32:05] them.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Okay. So, the budget process takes approximately 17 years, right? I mean, that seems like, well, it's not surprising to me. I think you said in the last episode that not one single budget has ever been delivered by the October 1st deadline?
J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Since 1974 when the congress changed the federal government's fiscal year from July 1st to October 1st. The United States Congress has never passed a complete budget. All the appropriations bills on time. And there's a good reason. I mean, you just went ahead and pointed this out. You got to get agreement between the two houses. And by the way, while they're negotiating this stuff, right, there's always the president looming in the background, because the president gets to veto bills.

N. Rodgers: And the president gets to talk to the press in the entire time this is happening, saying, yeah, I sure hope they don't cut defense, because I'm going to be peeved about that. I mean, he can mention his priorities.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, I'll just give you a recent-

N. Rodgers: Pretty regular.

J. Aughenbaugh: An example that happened this week, right? So eventually the appropriations committees, so, president Trump submitted the president's budget.

N. Rodgers: Which we will link to.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. About a month late, which isn't all that unusual. I mean, it got delivered this month, right? The appropriations committees in both houses started to go through the budget with a fine tooth comb, and they reported to the press that the budget for the federal government's contribution to Special Olympics in the United States was being cut by, I think $17 million. Right? So Congress reports this to the press. And of course, the press has a field day with this. So yesterday. Okay. The day before we recorded this particular episode of the podcast, the Trump administration is like, yeah, we're going to go ahead and cover the Special Olympics. Right. This is a kind of, this is the negotiation that occurs. Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: The president's budget had somewhere between eight to $9 billion in even more spending on building the wall on our southern border with Mexico. Right. Not only did speaker of the House, Pelosi say, yeah, that's a nonstarter, but the chair of the appropriations committee in the house said, yeah, that's a nonstarter. Right. What we haven't heard yet from me is the chair of the appropriations committee in the Senate. Now the Senate is controlled by Republicans. They're taking their cues more than likely from both Mitch McConnell, but also the president, same political party. At some point in time. Okay. All that public negotiation will occur behind closed doors.

N. Rodgers: It'd be real negotiation instead of posture.
J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Because right now they’re feeling-

N. Rodgers: Everybody’s driving out there, or they’re stating out their position, they’re putting out their positions.

J. Aughenbaugh: That’s right. They wanted to see when it got leaked to the press. It wasn’t licked, it was actually, it was in the budget.

N. Rodgers: Is somebody going to fold, is somebody going to [inaudible 00:35:37].

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay. The Democrats were trying to figure out is the cut to Special Olympics a big deal. And it was. Okay. So now they found out and the president’s like, okay, fine, you want to restore funding for Special Olympics? I got no problem with that. But that’s $17 million. Do you think that the Republicans on the Senate Appropriation Committee are already saying to Democrats in the Senate but eventually Democrats in the house. So-

N. Rodgers: Where are we going to find that 17 million.

J. Aughenbaugh: That’s right. Okay.

N. Rodgers: If we’re all going to say, let’s just say that we agree on 30 trillion, that 17 million’s got to come from somewhere.

J. Aughenbaugh: That’s right. And again-

N. Rodgers: And 17 million starting to be money.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. That’s where you-

N. Rodgers: I mean, it’s so weird to me that you announced, that you talked about [crosstalk 00:36:29] because when you say, they’re going to deal with finding $17 million for Special Olympics. I think to myself, I will never see even a tiny percentage of 17 million of trillion, I mean $1 million. That’s just so out of my imagination.

J. Aughenbaugh: I’ve had former students who have worked as staffers for both the House and the Senate appropriations committees. And I’ve gone ahead and said, isn’t it a little uninspiring to be dealing with that much money? And then, almost all of them to a person who said, hey Augie, all we do is just drop the zeroes. So it’s not 17 million. It’s just 17. So it becomes-

N. Rodgers: [crosstalk 00:37:14] say it would help your mental health.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.
N. Rodgers: Because you going to be trying the process.

J. Aughenbaugh: Because they're just like, a couple of them were like, hey, the first couple of months we're just like, I can't believe that I was in a meeting and they're negotiating for $5 billion. Right. And I said, well, how do you get your head around that? They're like, yeah. Eventually we just like stopped talking about, millions, billions, trillions. We just talk about numb... 17 or 5 billion, because you got to get it done.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: I mean, and-

N. Rodgers: And it would be overwhelming if you thought about it in the truest sense of what that budget looks like.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: I mean, you think about the budget of the United States is, I'm assuming significantly larger than the budget of just about any other country on earth besides probably China and Russia.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. The United States federal government budget is the largest in the world.

N. Rodgers: Yes.

J. Aughenbaugh: Among all nations states.

N. Rodgers: So then you just kind of, at some point you'd get too mind blown to just, to be able to do and, to be able to function. Okay. So you have your joint committees because you know you're not going to get agreement.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: And the joint committees fight it out and they schmooze it out. Right. There's a combination. I'm sure there's some velvet glove and then there's some iron fist kind of things that happen. And then you get these appropriation bills.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: That have come out of, and then they go back for a vote, like all bills do, they go back for vote and everybody's onboard, because everybody says Dang it, you better sign it, because we worked for seven months on this thing.
J. Aughenbaugh: Right.

N. Rodgers: And the money runs out next week or whatever. And then it goes to the president. And barring truly egregious changes to the president's overall vision, he's probably going to sign it.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I mean because-

N. Rodgers: Or sign them, I should say, not it because there's a them, there's 10 or 12 of these things. So do we get shutdowns and kicking the can down the road when we can't get that joint committee to agree on what to spend or how to spend money or...

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, there are a couple of variables that have led to the government shutdowns that we've seen.

N. Rodgers: Let me back up and ask you a separate question. Sorry to interrupt you.

J. Aughenbaugh: No, it's all right.

N. Rodgers: Excuse me, October 1st rolls around. It's been seven months, they still haven't come to an agreement.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Does the government just not spend money?

J. Aughenbaugh: No. Typically what happens if the appropriations committees have concluded that they're not on the same page and they've put together a joint committee and they're like, hey, we can't get to agreement here. They will let the speaker know. And the Senate majority leader, so the speaker of the house, the Senate majority leader, and also the president. At that point then the discussion about the next fiscal year's budget turns to something more immediate, which is all right, can we come to an agreement on just continuing to fund the government? And what I'm talking about is what's known as a continuing resolution. And those who work in Congress referred to it as a CR, a continuing resolution. And continuing resolutions basically are short term funding bills that fund agencies at their current amount of funding.

N. Rodgers: Okay. So they have some measure of budgeting because they know roughly, how much, whatever they got last October, they're going to get this October or until there's a new bill.
J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah, a new appropriations bill. All right. But that used to be commonplace. So in the 1970s and 80s, okay. That used to be commonplace. In the 90s when there was, the government shut down when President Clinton and the Republican controlled Congress in particular, the House, led by Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, they played high stakes poker with one another and it led to the government shutting down because the Republicans were like, we're not passing a continuing resolution. And President Clinton was like, well, if you guys don't you send me an appropriations bill that has this stuff in it, I'm not signing it, I'm going to veto it. And the government shut down.

N. Rodgers: Was that the first time?

J. Aughenbaugh: That had been the first time in decades.

N. Rodgers: Okay.


N. Rodgers: So that just was not a thing.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Now it's-

J. Aughenbaugh: Now it's become much more-

N. Rodgers: [crosstalk 00:42:08]. A lot of it.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. It's become more commonplace. Because we had two in the Obama administration, two government shutdowns. We've already had one in the Trump administration, which was remarkable because the one that occurred in the Trump administration is when both houses of Congress were controlled by the Republicans. Right. Usually you see these government shutdowns about the budget because one house of Congress is of a different political party than the president.

N. Rodgers: So we would, we should not be surprised if there is another shutdown.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Given the current makeup of Congress.
J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. It wouldn’t shock me. Particularly because the president’s budget and what the House Democrats have already said about it, it would not shock me. It would not shock.

N. Rodgers: But that wouldn't happen until the fall.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: Because there’s a current budget budget for Texas till October.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: Okay.


N. Rodgers: So they have seven months to work out their differences.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes they do.

N. Rodgers: And they might, we can be optimistic.

J. Aughenbaugh: We can be optimistic, but also recognize this, there are other imperatives that may intervene. So for instance, we know historically that most members of Congress leave Washington DC in the summer to go home and do campaigning and constituent work.

N. Rodgers: Yeah. I think we decided that summer in Washington was not a good.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Hot and humid summer in Washington not so great.

J. Aughenbaugh: An yes, the capitol has air conditioning, but I mean, hey, it's a government town and at some point in time, even those who are working 50, 60, 70 hours a week, they need a break.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: And they do it in the summer.

N. Rodgers: And their constituents are home in the summer because if their parents, their kids are not in school. So it's a good time to kind of meet people and have town halls and figure out what your constituency wants.
J. Aughenbaugh: So we know that with this budget process that not all the appropriations bills are going to get passed by October 1st. I mean, it would really shock me if it happened with the Kurt congressional makeup in terms of parties and the president being of the opposition party compared to the House of Representatives. So we know that. We also know too, that with the partisanship that we have discussed in this podcast that other political commentators and scholars have talked about... The budget process for congress used to go more smoothly because of things like earmarks. Congressional earmark is where a member of Congress would convince the Appropriations Committee that a specific project in that member of Congress's district or state needed to be funded. And the funding would be as specific as VCU is going to get $1 million to study X.

N. Rodgers: Platypus.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes. Right.

N. Rodgers: The Platypus.

J. Aughenbaugh: Right.

N. Rodgers: My favorite thing to study.

J. Aughenbaugh: The classic example was... What was it? Ah! The year of Hurricane Katrina.

N. Rodgers: Oh my. Are you going to talk about Pam?

J. Aughenbaugh: No, I'm going to talk about the bridge to nowhere. Okay.

N. Rodgers: Because they ran a scenario like six weeks before Katrina. That was Katrina. Which is Hurricane Pam. And I used air quotes. Sorry, I used air quotes, podcast. Just because you can't really see those, but...

J. Aughenbaugh: So hurricane-

N. Rodgers: Bridge to nowhere.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. The bridge to nowhere. So before Hurricane Katrina hit, a number of appropriation bills had already been passed and been signed by the second President Bush. One of the appropriations bills was the transportation appropriations bill. And in that was a specific earmark for the State of Alaska and was put in there by Senator Ted Stevens. May he rest in peace.

N. Rodgers: A much beloved senator of Alaska.

N. Rodgers: I was going to say he served forever-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. Five, six years. [crosstalk 00:46:50].

N. Rodgers: 40 years or something.

J. Aughenbaugh: Easily. Yeah. Easily six or seven terms. Right. He had placed in the transportation appropriations bill funding for a bridge for Nowhere Alaska. There's actually a community called nowhere. This bridge-


J. Aughenbaugh: Okay.

N. Rodgers: That's awesome.

J. Aughenbaugh: Right. This would be a bridge that would connect one of the villages with another village and it affected maybe 10 people. Right. But he justified it as this would be, would contribute to economic development in Nowhere, Alaska. Because without the bridge, there would be very, it would be very difficult for the people of one village to interact with the people in the other village. And again, Alaska is very rural, so you need things like bridges to connect people, right? Hurricane Katrina hits and the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama need a whole bunch of federal relief money and FEMA was like, hey, our coffers are dry.

J. Aughenbaugh: Whatever you guys funded us for this fiscal year, we've already spent for other natural disasters. And by the way, we didn't ask you in the current budget for something like Katrina.

N. Rodgers: Right? Level five hurricane that's going to hit a major city.

J. Aughenbaugh: Major city.

N. Rodgers: And then the levies and the whole [crosstalk 00:48:24], just everything.

J. Aughenbaugh: So the house and the Senate do an appropriations bill, a short term appropriations bill to give FEMA some money. And basically almost every member of the house and every member of the Senate gave up ear marked projects that would benefit them either in their district or their state to come up with this part of money that then FEMA could then reallocate to help out the residents of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Senator Stevens said, uh-uh
(negative) not going to do it. He goes, I got this money and my citizens are just as important as the citizens of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

N. Rodgers: Wow.

J. Aughenbaugh: And it raised this huge stink about earmarks and at... So what you saw was congress passed legislation to discourage the use of earmarks, but earmarks used to be one of the ways to grease the appropriations process.

N. Rodgers: Oh yeah. You give me an earmark, I'll give you an earmark. So when you say, I want to give the Defense Department 78% of the budget, and I say, I want to give them 30% of the budget, we have a reason to work together to come to a compromise.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right.

N. Rodgers: Because we both have things in the bill that we want.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: That we're going to help each other get.

J. Aughenbaugh: Right. So, Nia, you say, I want $5 million to study the platypus. And I say, I want $5 million to go ahead and study the making of baseball mitts. Right. And you're like, I don't care about baseball. And I'm like, I don't care about plat... What's the plural?

N. Rodgers: Platypi.


N. Rodgers: I think. But that's where we're going to say.

J. Aughenbaugh: Okay, but you know it's important to me.

N. Rodgers: Right.

J. Aughenbaugh: And I know it's important to you. And I'm like, well hey, 5 million in a budget that's got 30 trillion, okay, whatever. Right? But the good, the balanced budget, the folks who are like, the federal government needs to have a balanced budget or like, hey, all these earmarks add up, it adds up to deficit spending. We need to get control of this. So they get rid of this. Well now you've got members of Congress who are like, oh, you're not going to go ahead and fund my study of platypi that would benefit my local university-
N. Rodgers: More than to heck with your baseball mitts.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right. And I don't care if Rawlings Sport Corporation who makes a whole bunch of mitts happens to have their headquarters in your district, sorry pal. Okay. Now all of a sudden you've got people who are like fighting with one another, whereas in the past, the budget, okay, was a way for people to come together.

N. Rodgers: Hence why we get shut down Zim and 90s, because we're starting to lose that.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah.

N. Rodgers: Although Katrina was 2005.

J. Aughenbaugh: Five but nevertheless, okay. That-

N. Rodgers: So that's why it's become so much more contentious.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Than it was.

J. Aughenbaugh: And again, and I do this when I teach public policy, right? I usually take a local government budget or a state government budget and it's like in a nice little pie chart. And I say, okay guys, if we take this amount of money out, all right, it will help us balance this government's budget. That's a good thing. Right? And they're like, yeah. And I said, oh, but if we decrease this amount of money, say for local law enforcement, look at the effect it's going to have on these communities.

N. Rodgers: Right?

J. Aughenbaugh: And then all of a sudden some of the students are like, but I live in those communities. Oh, so you don't... So what are you willing to give up? And they're like, well, I don't... I'm young so I don't need programs for the elderly. I said, oh, so you don't have any grandmothers and you don't have grandfathers, you don't have any elderly uncles, you don't have any parents who are close to retirement age? Oh No. Yeah, I do. And I said, oh, okay.

N. Rodgers: Right. Everything touches some-

J. Aughenbaugh: Some [inaudible 00:52:47] So-
N. Rodgers: I mean, if it were that simple, they could just cut out the things that don’t matter. But they matter to someone. They matter to a lot of someones. And those someone’s vote and those someones are citizens and they should have their needs met as much as any other citizen. I mean, I hear, I actually, it’s sad to me because I hear what senator Stevens was saying about my constituents are just as important. I think it was a little short sided considering the amount of destruction and death that happened from Katrina. But, I also in part, understand him saying, but that’s my job. My job isn’t to worry about the people in Louisiana and Mississippi and Texas and whatever.

J. Aughenbaugh: In Alabama.

N. Rodgers: In Alabama. My job is to worry about the people in Alaska. And I want the people in Alaska to feel represented. I have to stay the course.

J. Aughenbaugh: And one of his biggest defenders on the Senate floor was a senator from the opposition party. Senator Robert Byrd, a Democrat from West Virginia, who was just like, no, I agree with my colleague, senator Stevens. Because Robert Byrd was known and again, he was in the Senate for a long time. He was known for being the king of pork. I mean, he brought a lot of projects to the state of West Virginia. A state, by the way, that without federal government spending, that state’s economy would have been even worse because that was a state that relied on coal mining. Okay. So for Robert Byrd, federal government spending helped ease the economic decline in his state, he gets reelected and a number of times because the citizens of West Virginia are like, this guy’s looking out for us.

N. Rodgers: Right. And same with senator Stevens.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's true.

N. Rodgers: You get reelected in part because you’re seen as being responsive to your local constituents and to what their needs are. Abigail Spanberger just recently said she needed to be responsive to the people in her district who are more on the conservative side, even though she, I think she identifies Democrat, doesn't she? But she’s very moderate because she, her district is very moderate. It's very-

J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. In one of our future podcasts, we’re going to take a look at, more than likely, the difficulties both political parties have going forward. Because, you can't just go ahead and say the Democratic Party is only made up of liberals or progressives or whatever. Abigail Spanberger represents a district that has Western and Rayco county, parts of Goochland, et cetera. It’s a more
conservative district and say for instance, the district that speaker of the house, Nancy Pelosi represents in San Francisco.

N. Rodgers: Right. They have different needs.

J. Aughenbaugh: That's right. Likewise in the Senate, senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine. Virginia senators. They represent a state that has a very high percentage of the state's Gross Domestic Product tied to or based on federal government defense spending. So anytime they hear, usually their colleagues in the Democratic Party, you say, well, we need to cut back on defense.

N. Rodgers: They say, oh no.

J. Aughenbaugh: Whoa, whoa, Whoa, wait a minute here.

N. Rodgers: Let's talk about this.

J. Aughenbaugh: Let's talk about this. Don't we... National security's important, right.

N. Rodgers: Right?

J. Aughenbaugh: Likewise, the state of California. California has even a higher percentage of its state Gross Domestic Product tied into federal government defense spending. You won't think about in terms of California, but California has a whole bunch of bases. The different branches of the military are well represented throughout that state, and both of their senators are Democrats and neither one of them has spoken against let's shrink the defense budget request of president Trump. So the budget in many ways could, and particularly in the past when you had earmarks, when you had more quote unquote pork barrel spending, was a way to bring members of Congress of both political parties together. But you get rid of pork barrel spending, you get rid of earmarks, and then all of a sudden people who used to like to cooperate with one another are like, whoa, whoa, whoa, you cut that, you're harming me.

N. Rodgers: I'm not going to help you.

J. Aughenbaugh: I'm not going to help you. And-

N. Rodgers: And it hasn't changed the deficits situation either.

J. Aughenbaugh: No. I mean-

N. Rodgers: So, this was just the all bad channel.
J. Aughenbaugh: Yeah. I'm sorry guys, and he was like, yeah, he's just crushing another one of my dreams. The budget and again, if you think about it in your own personal life, okay, discussions about budgets, about spending, et cetera, there are difficult. It's made worse when you think about the federal government's budget is about taking everybody's money and then making decisions on how to spend everybody else's money. I mean, it's taxpayer money.

N. Rodgers: I think that money is the number one cause of divorce in this country, which so, I mean, if you just look at it that way, then the budget is just... That times about eight trillion. I mean, it's no wonder we can't get along.

J. Aughenbaugh: We can't get along.

N. Rodgers: It's no wonder we're basically having a slow motion giant divorce.

J. Aughenbaugh: Yes.

N. Rodgers: Okay. Well, on that happy note we're going wrap up for this episode. Thank you so much for explaining the congressional budget.

J. Aughenbaugh: Well, thank you.

N. Rodgers: And I feel certain we'll come back to these topics soon.

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