

# How Biennial Budgeting Would Work

## In odd-numbered years:

- President submits two-year budget
- Congress passes two-year budget resolution
- Congress enacts two-year appropriations bills

## In even-numbered years:

- Congress focuses on authorizations and oversight

## **Arguments For Biennial Budgeting**

- Congress has effectively moved to biennial budgeting already
  - since 1998, budgets passed in only two election years (2000 and 2008)
- Allows Congress to spend more time on oversight – providing more accountability
- Reduces use of continuing resolutions and omnibus bills
- Allows better long-term planning for federal agencies and programs

## **Arguments Against Biennial Budgeting**

- Reduces ability to respond to changing economic and geopolitical conditions
- Could result in more supplemental funding, especially in 2nd year
- Oversight through appropriations process could be diminished

## Why We Have Vote-a-Rama

- Budget resolutions and reconciliation bills allow passage with only 51 votes
  - rare use of “majority rule” in Senate
- Vote-a-rama protects minority rights
  - ability to offer amendments

## What's Wrong with Vote-a-Rama

- Back-to-back votes, often for several days
- Little time to review and debate many amendments
- Process has become a spectacle and results in few substantive changes

# **Vote-a-Rama Increasingly Used on Issues Unrelated to Budget**

## **Amendments filed during FY 2010 budget resolution debate:**

- **Prohibit legislation restricting 2nd Amendment rights**
- **Prohibit transfer of detainees at Guantanamo Bay to United States**
- **Require drug testing of TANF recipients**
- **Require Amtrak to allow passengers to check firearms in their baggage**
- **Prohibit climate change legislation from regulating “methane emissions from biological processes associated with livestock production”**

# Number of Amendments Offered to Budget Resolution Has Been Rising

*2007, 2008, and 2009 Among Top Five Years*

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Number of Amendments Offered</u> |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2009        | 121                                 |
| 2008        | 113                                 |
| 1998        | 106                                 |
| 1999        | 94                                  |
| 2007        | 91                                  |

Source: CRS  
Note: Calendar year

# Senators Taking More Votes on Amendments With Minimal Debate

| <u>Year</u> | <u>% Offered After<br/>Time Expired</u> | <u>Total Number<br/>of Votes</u> |
|-------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 2003        | 80%                                     | 50                               |
| 1995        | 71%                                     | 56                               |
| 2008        | 60%                                     | 40                               |
| 2009        | 60%                                     | 35                               |
| 2000        | 52%                                     | 25                               |

Source: CRS  
Note: Calendar year

# Potential Ways to Reform Vote-a-Rama

- Create filing deadlines for 1st and 2nd degree amendments
- Increase number of amendments debated prior to vote-a-rama by reducing time on each amendment
- Limit number of amendments during vote-a-rama
- Establish brief “lay over” period to review amendments
- Allow yielding back time only by UC