

Media – Budget Chairman Floats Plan to Eliminate His Own Committee (The Hill) April 17, 2018

The Hill

Budget chairman floats plan to eliminate his own committee

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The chairman of the Senate Budget Committee is floating the idea of getting rid of the Budget panel altogether, according to Republican sources.

Senate Budget Committee Chairman [Mike Enzi](#) (R-Wyo.) has noted that mounting deficits are making it much tougher to pass a spending blueprint, the sources say.

Enzi's seemingly radical suggestion comes as a special bipartisan committee prepares to hold its first hearing on reforming the budgetary process, which Speaker [Paul Ryan](#) (R-Wis.), a former House Budget Committee chairman, this weekend called "irreparably broken."

Enzi said in 2016 that he would be open to scrapping the Budget Committee as part of a larger effort to reform the congressional spending process, a GOP aide explained, adding that the chairman doesn't plan to shut down his own committee anytime soon.

Congress has missed the requirement set out by the Congressional Budget Act to pass a concurrent budget resolution by April 15, and GOP lawmakers say they do not expect to pass a budget before the end of this election year.

GOP leaders didn't make much of an effort to pass one because it was clear right away that it would have been very difficult to muster 51 votes in the Senate for an unpopular 10-year spending plan. In October, the Senate narrowly passed a budget blueprint that was key to passing a tax-cut bill that was not subject to a filibuster.

Passing a budget that balances within the 10-year budget window has been an article of faith for the GOP since Ryan chaired the House Budget Committee from 2011 to 2015.

But deficits are growing so quickly that it's become almost impossible to put together a budget that balances within a decade without resorting to drastic spending cuts or tax increases that lawmakers don't want to vote for.

When asked about his conversations with fellow GOP senators, Enzi told The Hill "it's getting very difficult" to pass a budget.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) last month projected that the federal deficit will exceed \$1 trillion by 2020, making the prospect of assembling a realistic budget that balances within 10 years very remote. Enzi last month voted against the \$1.3 trillion omnibus bill, which some conservatives criticized as reckless spending.

Enzi said the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform needs to change the budgeting and appropriations process to make his panel relevant.

"It means that I'm really counting on that special committee to come up with a way to make budgets valuable again," he said.

Enzi was formally elected as chairman of the Budget panel in January 2015 and has a six-year term, which will expire at the end of 2020. He has an additional six years of eligibility to serve as the ranking minority member of the panel.

Sen. David Perdue (R-Ga.), a member of the joint budget-reform panel and a member of the Senate Budget Committee, said Enzi is floating to colleagues the possibility of getting rid of the Budget panel entirely.

"Mike Enzi has said publicly that, given the size of the shortfall that's built up over the last decade, that we may not be able to produce a budget ever again under the rules of the 1974 Budget Act," Perdue said.

Perdue spoke to Enzi about the Senate Budget Committee's role at a private meeting last week.

"He also said that, given the lack of functionality of the Budget Committee, that we really don't need a Budget Committee. We could do away with it. And I agree with that," Perdue added, summarizing their conversation.

Enzi made a similar suggestion at a budget reform hearing two years ago.

"I feel seriously enough about this that I have volunteered to

eliminate the Budget Committee if it's irrelevant," he said in April 2016.

Ryan, in an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press" that aired over the weekend, said "the budget process we have is fundamentally broken — I think it's irreparably broken."

One option would be to streamline the spending process by having authorizing committees work more closely with the Appropriations Committee and reducing the number of annual spending bills, of which there are currently 12.

Perdue has led the push for budget reform within the Senate GOP conference and proposed a significant revamping of the spending process.

In 2016, he unveiled a proposal to require Congress to reauthorize Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid — three of the largest drivers of the federal deficit — on an annual or biannual basis, taking them off autopilot.

He also proposed simplifying the appropriations process by concentrating it into four bills.

"We've got to revamp our committee structure. The authorizing committees aren't authorizing anything," Perdue said.

Congressional budget resolutions, which do not have the force of law and are not signed by the president, set funding targets, but appropriators have the final say on funding decisions.

The Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform will hold its first hearing at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday. Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a former CBO director, will testify.

The inability to pass a budget has become an embarrassment for Republicans, who promised to pass a spending blueprint every year if they controlled the Senate.

"The law requires us to pass a budget," Senate Majority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (R-Ky.) declared in 2012, when Republicans were in the minority and he was asked whether Republicans would commit to passing budgets every year. "I don't think the law says pass a budget unless it's hard. So I think there's no question that we would — we would take up our responsibility."

At the time, Republicans criticized Senate Democrats for going more than a thousand days without passing a budget.

Democrats on Monday accused the GOP of hypocrisy.

“With their tax law polling in the gutter, the one major Republican accomplishment is that they’ve managed to lose all credibility on the deficit and the budget,” said a Senate Democratic aide.

The idea of getting rid of the Budget Committee as part of a larger reform effort is gaining traction with other Republicans.

“I’ve always thought, ‘Why do we need a Budget Committee that came in 1974?’ We have authorization committees; we have an Appropriations Committee. It worked for 200 years,” said one Republican senator who requested anonymity to discuss his views on the relevance of the Budget panel.

Another GOP senator said passing a budget is mainly a political exercise that has become more of a political liability than a benefit.

“There’s no point in passing a budget except as a political exercise and it’s a political exercise of marginal benefit,” said the lawmaker. “We can’t pass budgets that are realistic, and that’s a problem.”

But getting rid of the Budget Committee poses a variety of thorny technical challenges.

The Senate would have to come up with another mechanism to enforce a wide array of budget rules and to oversee the CBO.

One well-known budget rule, pay-as-you-go, for example, prohibits the consideration of any direct spending or revenue legislation that would increase the on-budget deficit for fiscal years through 2021.

The Senate routinely votes to waive budgetary points of order, but often legislation must be rewritten to fit within budget rules.

Proponents of the Budget Committee’s authority say this imposes additional fiscal safeguards on Congress, while critics say it has done little to curtail the rising deficit and often makes passing bills more cumbersome.

Link:

<https://budget.house.gov/press-release/joint-select-committee-budget-appropriations-process-reform-holds-first-public-hearing/>

