

Budget Submission After a Presidential Transition: Contextualizing the Biden Administration's FY2022 Request

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Like other newly inaugurated Presidents' Administrations, the Biden Administration was expected to submit its first formal budget request to Congress later than the usual January/February statutory deadline. Unclear in such situations is the timing and format of the formal submission and any preliminary communications that are sent in advance of the full submission. This CRS Insight discusses the Biden Administration's first-year submission of preliminary budget materials in the context of statutory requirements and past practices.

Background

The [Budget and Accounting Act of 1921](#), as codified in Title 31 of the *U.S. Code*, requires the President to submit a budget annually to Congress toward the beginning of each regular session. The deadline for submission of the budget has changed several times over the years. Most recently, [in 1990, the deadline was changed to](#) "on or after the first Monday in January but not later than the first Monday in February of each year." The 1990 change in the deadline made it possible for an outgoing President to leave the upcoming annual budget submission to his or her successor, an option that all outgoing Presidents have taken since then. Following the 1990 change, [all of the incoming Presidents](#) have submitted their full transition-year budgets after the statutory deadline.

In advance of submitting a full budget to Congress, recent Presidents have opted, in the first year of their Administrations, to present preliminary, shorter budget documents that [observers sometimes](#) colloquially refer to as "skinny" budgets. In an Administration's initial year, the full budget submission can be delayed due to the time needed to establish the new Administration's priorities and have key nominees confirmed. In the meantime, these shorter documents typically contain preliminary budget requests and basic economic projections. In the past, preliminary budget materials such as these have functioned as a preview of the complete President's budget to be submitted to Congress at a later date.

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The Declaration of Independence
The Constitution of the United States
The Bill of Rights
Amendments XI–XXVII
Gettysburg Address



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Prior Submissions of Preliminary Budget Documents

As discussed in [another CRS Report](#), recent Presidents did not submit detailed budget proposals until April or May of their first year in office, but each advised Congress regarding the general contours of their economic and budgetary policies in special messages submitted to Congress. In addition, each President submitted a preliminary budget document, what some observers have referred to as a “skinny” budget, to Congress providing overviews, summaries, economic plans, and initial budget proposals.

Table 1. Preliminary Budget Submission and Special Messages to Congress

Incoming Reagan Through Trump Administrations	
February 18, 1981	President Reagan submitted a document containing an economic plan and initial budget proposals for FY1982, <i>America's New Beginning: A Program for Economic Recovery</i> , in conjunction with an address to a joint session of Congress.
February 9, 1989	President George H. W. Bush did not submit a revision of President Reagan's FY1990 budget. Instead, he submitted a 193-page message to Congress, <i>Building a Better America</i> , in conjunction with a joint address to Congress on February 9, 1989. The message included revised budget proposals.
February 17, 1993	President Clinton submitted to Congress a budgetary document, <i>A Vision of Change for America</i> , to accompany his address to a joint session of Congress. The 145-page document outlined the President's economic plan and provided select budget proposals for FY1994.
February 28, 2001	President George W. Bush submitted a 207-page budget summary for FY2002 to Congress, <i>A Blueprint for New Beginnings: A Responsible Budget for America's Priorities</i> , the day after his address to a joint session of Congress. The document contained the President's 10-year budget plan, updated budget summary tables, and proposals for budget process reform.
February 26, 2009	President Obama submitted a 134-page overview of the FY2010 budget, <i>A New Era of Responsibility: Renewing America's Promise</i> , two days after delivering an address on his economic and budget plan to a joint session of Congress on February 26, 2009. The document contained select proposals for economic stimulus and updated budget summary tables.
February 28, 2017	On February 28, 2017, President Trump delivered an address to a joint session of Congress. He submitted a 53-page overview of the FY2018 budget, <i>America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again</i> , 16 days later. The document contained the President's priorities and summary tables.

Source: Prepared by CRS. A version of this table was originally created for use in CRS Report RS20752, *Submission of the President's Budget in Transition Years*, by Taylor N. Riccard.

The Biden Administration's Preliminary FY2022 Submission

On April 9, 2021, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) [released](#) President Biden's “[Fiscal Year 2022 Discretionary Funding Request](#).” [Observers reported](#) that the Biden Administration did not “intend to describe it by the popular moniker ‘skinny’ budget.” At the time, it remained to be seen if additional preliminary materials were forthcoming.

The April 9, 58-page [funding request](#)—which is structured as a three-page letter with three enclosures—“lays out the President's discretionary funding recommendations across a wide range of policy areas and outlines a strategy for reinvesting in the foundations of our country's resilience and strength.” According to an [accompanying press release](#), the funding request emphasizes investments in policy areas, including K-12 education, medical research, housing, and civil rights.

President Biden's discretionary funding request was delivered to Congress [approximately two months later](#) into his first term than preliminary budget documents submitted by Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. The Biden Administration has cited

a lack of customary cooperation between OMB and the Biden transition team during the presidential transition as a cause for delay. On May 28, 2021, President Biden submitted his full budget, including volumes titled *Budget of the U.S. Government*, *Appendix*, and *Analytical Perspectives*.

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