

OBLIGATIONS INCURRED

There is no currently available, regularly issued series on the total obligations being incurred by Federal agencies. Since January 1958, this information has been made available annually in the budget document. The reporting lag is quite serious. Actual figures for a given year are not available until more than 6 months after the close of the year. Also, no monthly or quarterly breakdowns are prepared.

Annual series. Table 12 contains the figures for this series, as well as the series on new obligational authority and expenditures. Not all the obligations incurred will result at a later date in budget expenditures. The obligations of business-type enterprises such as the Post Office, which are reported "gross," are offset in good measure by the receipts from the sale of postage stamps, etc.; only a portion of the obligations actually result in net expenditures.

TABLE 12.—*Measures of the Government spending process*

[In billions of dollars]

Fiscal year	New obligational authority	Obligations incurred	Expenditures
1950	49.3	44.1	39.5
1951	52.9	83.1	44.0
1952	91.4	104.6	65.3
1953	80.3	85.6	74.1
1954	62.8	65.7	67.5
1955	57.1	74.7	64.4
1956	63.2	80.3	66.2
1957	70.2	69.0	69.0
1958	76.3	73.9	71.4
1959	81.4	80.6	80.3
1960	79.6	75.3	76.5

Source: 1962 Budget and earlier budget documents, and U.S. Bureau of the Budget, tabulations of obligations by object.

Although the relationship is not precise, it can be seen that often increases in the amount of new obligational authority granted by the Congress from one year to the next may lead to significant increases in the level of obligations incurred in that year or the next year and in actual expenditures in the following year. The experience during the period 1950-53 is a case in point which will be elaborated in the following chapter.

Quarterly series. Federal agencies furnish reports, generally at monthly intervals, showing the cumulative amount of obligations incurred under each appropriation account since the beginning of the fiscal year. These reports are received by the Bureau of the Budget on an individual appropriation account basis. No attempt currently is made to review this measure of the progress of government programs on an aggregate rather than a piecemeal basis. In earlier years, the Treasury Department issued monthly report, popularly known as the "White Book,"⁷⁵ showing the total amount of obligations incurred by Federal agencies. This publication was discontinued after the June 30, 1949, issue.

On the basis of a number of available sources, the writer has prepared a rudimentary series showing Federal Government obligations incurred, by quarters. This series is presented essentially for illustrative purposes. More exact series could be prepared by the Govern-

⁷⁵ U.S. Treasury Department, *Financial Statements Relating to the United States Government, Obligations, Expenditures, and Balances under Appropriations and Contract Authorizations*, Washington.