

CHAPTER 8

PUBLIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE BUDGET

The budget plays a vital role in the American democratic process. It is therefore essential that the public receive full and timely budget information, presented in a way that is readily comprehensible to all citizens who want to know what their Government is doing and proposing to do.

Serving the informational needs of the public is an extremely difficult task, given the enormous size and complexity of the Federal Government. Nevertheless, the Commission believes that the budget can be made the focus of a significantly improved information system between the Government and the public—not only at the time the President's annual budget proposals are transmitted to the Congress, but throughout the year.

The Nation needs a continuous picture of the changing activities and policies of the Federal Government, the largest single element in our national economy. The improvements needed are:

- *A unified budget concept, as described in Chapter 1, to replace the three or more that presently receive prominence;*
- *Updating of the budget estimates while the budget is under consideration, and afterwards within the year, to reflect congressional action and other changing circumstances;*
- *Some part-yearly breakdown of the aggregate budget estimates for the current and coming year;*
- *More information on budget prospects beyond the immediate budget year; and*
- *Some streamlining and refinement of the budget Appendix.*

Public understanding of the recommended budget concept

The Commission's discussions with representatives of the press and other well-informed persons have convinced it that a unified budget concept is a cornerstone for public understanding.

There are several ways in which the executive branch can direct congressional and public attention to the new budget concept. It will be essential for the executive branch itself to adhere to the unified budget concept—not only at budget submission time in January but throughout the year. For example, the charts prepared and distributed to the press each January when the budget is released will naturally use the new concept rather than the *administrative budget*, as they presently do. Similarly, the discussion