NATIONAL PRIORITIES PROJECT
Bringing the Federal Budget Home

Educator Toolkit

Group Lesson
1-2 class periods

A People's Guide to the Federal Budget
Chapter 3

Historic Events and the Federal Budget

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Objective:
Students will analyze the changes in government spending
in relation to historic events throughout the 20th Century.

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Description:
Using Chapter 3 of *A People's Guide to the Federal Budget* and National
Priorities Project's website (www.nationalpriorities.org), students will understand
the potential impact of social, political and economic events on federal spending
and revenue from the 1960s to the present.

1. Students will read Chapter 3 from *A People's Guide to the Federal Budget.*

2. Using the text and NPP's Federal Budget 101 glossary
   (http://nationalpriorities.org/en/budget-basics/federal-budget-
   101/glossary/), students will define the following terms:
   - GDP
   - Social Security
   - Outlays
   - Revenues

3. Invite the students to reflect on and respond in writing to the following
   questions:
   - What are society's expectations of the federal government?
   - What are your expectations of the federal government?
   - Should the government actively work to avert economic crisis?

4. Divide the students into groups of two. Ask each pair to reflect on Figure
   3.4 in Chapter 3 (*Mandatory and Discretionary Spending and Interest on
   the Debt* since 1962) and create a timeline highlighting the key social,
   political and economic events of the last 50 years.

5. Once the students have completed their timeline, ask them to write a brief
   narrative detailing the impact they believe these events could have had on
   federal spending. Once complete, have each pair of students present to
   the class and follow with an all-class discussion.

6. If the students have enjoyed this exercise, you can extend it by asking them to consider the impact on federal revenue (taxes) of the same social, political and economic events they surfaced above. Note: Figures 5.3 and 7.1 in *A People's Guide to the Federal Budget* could be particularly helpful with the revenue-focused exercise.