

CRS Report for Congress

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Legislative Research in Congressional Offices: A Primer

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Summary

Because Members of Congress have a multitude of research needs, many kinds of information contribute to and result from the legislative policy research process. The type of research to be performed depends in large part on how a Member intends to use the findings.

Successful research depends in large part on the attributes of the researcher—a knack for finding appropriate sources and facts; skepticism; inventiveness; thoroughness; precision; and objectivity. Successful researchers appreciate the importance of assessing the validity and relevance of data and evaluating the cogency of arguments set forth by advocates of varying points of view; and they present findings and alternative courses of action in an organized, clear, and concise manner, both orally and in writing.

Although there are many ways to perform legislative policy research, four steps are common to most such undertakings: (1) definition of the scope of the research and of the questions to be addressed; (2) identification of the information needed, assessment of its availability, and collection of the information itself; (3) analysis and incorporation of the information collected; and (4) presentation of findings.

For relatively simple research assignments, each step is likely to be easy. For more complex assignments, each step may consist of a series of tasks, some of which may be difficult or time-consuming. Moreover, as researchers proceed with their work, they may discover new information or new insights that require them to change some or all of their study design. On the other hand, they may find that the information they need is not available. Experienced researchers are not surprised when such circumstances arise in the course of their work. They allow time for adjustments.

Some congressional staff prefer to do all their legislative research themselves. Others rely to varying degrees on congressional support agencies like CRS. Some use congressional support agencies for data, copies of government documents, periodicals, and reference sources. In such cases the CRS reference centers and congressional reading rooms may have readily at hand the materials that are needed. Other congressional staff draw upon CRS professionals for technical advice, statistical help or extensive policy research and analysis.

Even when you are able to allocate ample amounts of time to legislative research, it is seldom necessary to start from scratch. Much of what is needed may have been done already by others. When time is your most valuable and scarcest resource, it is especially important to find and use what is already prepared, and to draw upon specialized, in-depth knowledge that may be quickly available.

Contents

Introduction	1
Conducting Research	2
Scope of the Research	3
Issues	3
Background	3
Proposals	3
Questions	3
Form of Presentation	4
Collection of Information	4
Anecdotal Information	4
Sources	4
Evaluating Sources and Information	6
Analysis	7
Facts and Values	8
Precedents or Analogies	8
Impacts	8
Money	8
Statistical Analysis	9
Political Support and Opposition	9
Presentation of Findings	9
The Problem of Time	10
How CRS Can Help	11
CRS Services and Products	11
Analytic Services and Products	11
Research services	12
Reference, information, and bibliographic services	12
Seminars and conferences for Members and staff	12
Appendix: Computerized Research Tools	
Available from the Library of Congress and CRS	13
THOMAS	13
Current activity in Congress	13
Legislation	13
Congressional Record	14
Committee Information	15
Legislative Information System	15
Floor Activities and Schedules	16
Committees	16
Senate and House Links	16
Other Government Links	16
Legislation/Congressional Record	17
News and Commercial Sources	17
Support Agencies	17

User Assistance and Guides	17
Previous Congresses	17
CRS on the World Wide Web	17

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Introduction

Members of Congress need many kinds of information and analysis to support their legislative, oversight, and representational work. They may, for example, need quick facts, or they may want to improve their understanding of a complex set of issues. They may need information to help them draft legislation or plan congressional oversight hearings. They may have to decide which bills to support, and so may want to enhance their grasp of the similarities and differences among them. On the other hand, they may want information to answer questions raised by constituents.

Doing the work to meet these needs for information, research, and analysis often falls to new legislative assistants, for whom this guide has been prepared. The guide does not pretend to present a uniquely correct way to conduct legislative research. There are many ways to proceed. Circumstances, which vary from assignment to assignment, determine opportunities and constraints: the amount of time available; how the Member intends to use the research findings; the availability of information; and the skill, knowledge, and insight of the researcher.

The type of research to be performed depends in large part on Members' varied needs and the use to be made of the research findings in their legislative, oversight, and representational work. As part of a Member's staff, you may be asked to develop information on legislative procedures or congressional administration, to evaluate the operation of a federal program, to assess the political viability of a legislative proposal, to arrange for a legal analysis, to estimate the impact of a proposed bill on a Member's state or district, to collect the views of interest groups, or to compile survey research data and public opinion poll results. You may also be called upon to answer questions requiring economic analysis, estimates of costs and benefits, or projections of current trends. The list is limited only by the imagination.

Given the variety of congressional needs and purposes for research and analysis, you will need certain attributes to be successful. Among those attributes are the following:

- ! A knack for finding appropriate sources and facts;
- ! A detached skepticism about what one is told, and a commitment to finding evidence to support assertions;

- ! Inventiveness
- ! Thoroughness, precision, and objectivity in defining the research issues, in gathering and evaluating relevant information, and in presenting findings (even when research will be used ultimately for partisan purposes or to support a particular point of view).
- ! An ability to estimate the time required to perform the research task assigned and to set and maintain a realistic deadline for completion;
- ! An aptitude for assessing the validity, relevance, and reliability of data;
- ! Insight into the cogency and logic of arguments set forth by advocates of varying points of view;
- ! The ability to develop well-structured options for addressing policy issues;
- ! The ability to make clear, concise presentations both orally and in writing; and
- ! A sound grasp of the Member's principles, constituency, and intentions.

Conducting Research

There are many ways to perform legislative research. Your approach should be selected to be appropriate to the task and issues at hand. Nonetheless, four steps are common to most legislative research undertakings:

1. Definition of the scope of the research and of the questions to be addressed;
2. Identification of the information needed, assessment of its availability, and collection of the information itself;
3. Assimilation and analysis of the information collected; and
4. Presentation of findings.

When an assignment is relatively simple, each step is likely to be easy. For more complex assignments, each step may consist of a series of tasks, some of which might be difficult or time-consuming to complete. Moreover, as you proceed with your work, you may discover new information or have new insights that require you to change some or all of your research design. You may also find that the information you need is not available. Experienced researchers are not surprised when such

circumstances arise in the course of their work. Plan your work so as to allow time for such eventualities.

The following discussion offers a number of comments on the tasks that may be involved in completing each of the four steps.

Scope of the Research

The essential first step in legislative research—so obvious that it is sometimes done carelessly or even overlooked—is to define concrete questions that need to be answered. Some assignments are so specific that this step is easy. At other times, however, an assignment is relatively broad or not well defined. Successful completion of such an assignment depends on the your ability to understand what aspects of the assignment really matter to the Member, to perceive the central issues, to frame concrete questions, and to limit the study so that it will be useful, manageable, and timely.¹

In determining the scope of the work to be done, a number of considerations come into play. These considerations will determine not only the work you will need to do and information you will have to collect, but also the content of your final presentation. Among them are the following:

Issues. What are the problems and issues to be addressed in your research? How are they related to other problems and issues that are also currently of concern? To what extent is there agreement on the facts underlying problems or issues?²

Background. What has led to the current issue or problem at hand? In other words, how did we get to this point? What is the context of the present situation?

Proposals. Have any proposals been made to deal with the issue or problem? Are they plausible? Have any of them been submitted to analysis, rigorous or otherwise? Are other options plausible?

Questions. What are the likely consequences of implementing each alternative? How likely is each to achieve its purposes? What secondary effects are likely? What new problems might arise because of the implementation of each option? What are the political implications of each alternative? What support or opposition is each

¹ To the extent feasible, try to work with your Member or supervisor in defining the scope of the research to be undertaken in order to clarify expectations of all concerned. Ask for as much information about the assignment as you can—the purposes of the research, how the results are to be used, what format would be most helpful, and so forth. Establish a deadline for preliminary review, to ensure that expectations mesh with preliminary results; and set a clear and realistic deadline for final completion.

² Facts are sometimes obscured in political discourse. Advocates and opponents of specific proposals select the facts they choose to report. In some instances, what is said to be a fact may be merely an often-repeated assertion, a matter of speculation, or an error. This places a heavy responsibility on the researcher, who must keep a clear sense of the range of fact applicable to the matter at hand.

likely to generate? Where might points of compromise be found? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative from your Member's point of view? From other points of view?

Form of Presentation. Sometimes the assignment specifies the form your presentation is to take—e.g. a position paper; a policy paper assessing specific questions; a personal briefing; a staff workshop.

These and other considerations set the range of the research to be undertaken, indicate the types of analysis that are appropriate, determine what kinds of information sources are to be drawn from, and set the basic framework for the presentation of your findings.

Colleagues, committee staff, and staff of congressional support agencies can help you define the scope of your research task. The Congressional Research Service (CRS), for example, has analysts who are likely to be knowledgeable in the topic to be researched and who are available to assist you. Washington, D.C. contains professional experts in virtually all subject areas. Part of your growth in legislative policy research is learning how to contact the ones you need.

Collection of Information

The questions to be researched determine the types of data you need and the most appropriate sources and format of the data. You may need several types of information, but be selective in the information you gather. More information may be available than you can assimilate and use. Much of it may be irrelevant, biased, or both. Target your information collection effort, and keep in mind the issues you are addressing and what is important to your Member.

In some instances, the most effective means of collecting information may be through the Internet and Web sites, telephone calls, letters, or FAX transmissions.

Anecdotal Information. In the political process, anecdotal information may be more persuasive than analytical information. A trenchant example can often bring dry analysis to life. Look for such examples to enhance your own understanding of the issues you are addressing and to enrich your presentation. Beware, however, of generalizing from anecdotal information. A good story can be evocative, illustrative and persuasive, but it is not analysis.

Sources. This guide is much too brief to list every source of information you may need in your research. The following list illustrates the types of sources you may wish to consult.

Basic Reference Publications. Publications used for legislative research can often be found in Members' offices and in committee offices. They can also be found in CRS congressional reading rooms (in the Jefferson and Madison buildings of the Library of Congress) and in the CRS reference centers in House and Senate office

buildings. These basic reference sources can be consulted easily and often serve as good starting points for legislative research.³

Congressional Support Agencies. The Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and the General Accounting Office provide distinct services to Congress. They provide services upon request and in anticipation of congressional needs. They serve the Congress with reports, memoranda, consultations, seminars and workshops, and various forms of close support to Members and committees.⁴

Party Organizations. In each chamber of the Congress, the two major political parties have a variety of organizations that are often sources of useful information for the legislative researcher. They are especially appropriate sources of information on the party's position on issues before the Congress.

Informal Congressional Groups. Despite recent elimination of official funding, various congressional caucuses, coalitions, ad hoc task forces, and other informal groups can provide information on legislative issues surrounding the matters in which they are interested.⁵

Executive Branch Agencies. The White House, presidential advisory organizations, executive departments, independent agencies, and other executive branch entities can supply information on legislative issues, federal programs, and public policies within their areas of responsibility. (See Evaluating Information from the Executive Branch on page 7.) The District of Columbia white pages telephone directory includes within its blue pages section a listing of some federal and District

³ A list of these basic sources is given in: *Basic Reference Sources for Congressional Offices: An Annotated Selection of Publications and Services*, CRS Report 95-57 C, by Maureen Bearden.

⁴ Contact congressional support agencies directly for a description of the services each offers Members and committees, or access information via their Internet home pages. The Congressional Budget Office can be accessed at [<http://www.cbo.gov>]. The Congressional Research Service's (CRS) home page can be accessed at [<http://www.crs.gov>] and at [<http://www.loc.gov/crs>]. The General Accounting Office (GAO) Internet home page can be found at [<http://www.gao.gov>].

⁵ *Congressional Yellow Book*. Leadership and Member Organizations. (Washington: Leadership Directories, 2001). Updated quarterly. See also: *Informal Congressional Groups and Member Organizations: An Informational Directory, 106th Congress*. CRS Report RL30288 by Sula P. Richardson.

of Columbia Government agencies and services.⁶ Moreover, most executive agencies have congressional liaison offices.⁷

Institutes, Associations, and Other Private Organizations. Interest groups, research institutes, industry organizations, labor unions, professional associations, and the like can be important sources of information for legislative research. The “associations” listing in classified telephone directories (Yellow Pages), especially for Washington, D.C., can be useful, as can other published lists of organizations.⁸ CRS reading rooms and reference centers also have reference collections helpful in identifying and locating organizations that may be sources of useful information on matters bearing upon their purposes and interests.

Computerized Information. Information valuable for legislative research is available to congressional offices through House Information Systems, the Senate Computer Center, and the Library of Congress. Congressional offices also have access to vast amounts of information on the Internet and the World Wide Web. For example, the congressional support agencies, party organizations, and some informal groups, institutes, associations, and other private organizations have their own web pages. Moreover, many basic reference sources are also available in full text by way of the Internet and the Web. For a brief summary of computerized information sources available to congressional offices can be found in the appendix to this report.

Evaluating Sources and Information

Always be skeptical about information. Put it to the test. Be alert for errors which can occur inadvertently in any human enterprise, and for misinformation, which could conceivably be given to you intentionally. Evaluate the information and the source carefully, keeping the following points in mind:

- ! Is the information current? Who provided the information? Are they associated with a particular point of view or special interest? Is the information they provided free of bias?⁹ If the information is based on sampling, is the sample design suitable for your purposes?

⁶ For more detailed information see: Ann L. Brownson (ed.), *2000 Federal Staff Directory* (Mt. Vernon, VA: Staff Directories Ltd., 2000). The keyword subject index and staff information it provides may be particularly helpful: See also: National Archives and Records Administration, Office of the Federal Register, *The United States Government Manual, 2000/2001* (Washington: GPO, 1995). As the official handbook of the federal Government, it provides comprehensive information on the agencies of the three branches of government, with a focus on programs and activities.

⁷ For a list of approximately 200 congressional liaison offices see: *Congressional Liaison Offices of Selected Federal Agencies*. CRS Report 98-446 C by Suzy Platt.

⁸ See, for example, *Encyclopedia of Associations*, (Detroit: Gale Research Co. 3 vols.) Updated editions are published from time to time.

⁹ Biased information does not necessarily need to be discarded. If you understand the bias, your approach may allow you to take the bias into account in your analysis and appropriately to characterize it in your findings.

- ! Does the information come from a primary source? That is, did the source itself generate the data, or is the source merely reporting data or summarizing information collected or compiled by others? If the source is secondary, it may be worthwhile to get the information from the primary source to avoid reporting errors or “interpretations” that may reflect the biases of the secondary source.
- ! Is the information hearsay? This can be a special problem when dealing with such political information as who supports or opposes proposals being researched. Always try to corroborate such information.
- ! Be especially careful with information provided by a specialized expert affiliated with organizations that have policy positions on the matter you are researching. Compare that information to information provided by other specialized experts. Be cautious in the use of uncorroborated “expert” information.
- ! Be alert for information that has been offered less to inform you than to persuade you or to disrupt or delay your efforts.
- ! Beware of “common knowledge,” the origin of which no one can quite recall.

Evaluating Information from the Executive Branch. The guidelines given above are especially important when a congressional office solicits information from an agency in the executive branch. Executive agencies have their own biases and policy goals, so do not expect total objectivity from them. Their natural and understandable desire is to make their programs and policies look good. An official request for information will result in an official reply that reflects the agency’s official position. From time to time, you may find reliable agency technicians who are willing to provide data and other information unencumbered by their agency’s official position. But remember that the agency may not stand behind such informal information.

When assessing information provided by an executive branch agency, seek out the views of other agencies, individuals, and organizations—e.g., competitive agencies, think tanks, academics, the General Accounting Office (GAO), CRS, public interest groups, or state and local agencies.

Analysis

As noted earlier, there are as many different approaches to analysis as there are purposes for legislative research, perhaps more. Selecting the appropriate way to analyze the information you collect during your research requires that you keep in mind the kind of information you have available and the kind of answers you need to the questions you are trying to answer.

Keep in mind that analysis is not something that begins after all the necessary information is collected. It begins as soon as you start thinking about the research

assignment. Analysis continues as you identify the kinds of information needed and as you assess the quality of the information you are collecting. As your research work proceeds, you will need repeatedly to revisit a series of analytical matters:

Facts and Values. What are the facts of the situation? Is the situation, problem, or issue concretely defined; or is it amorphous? Do all who are involved agree on the central facts? To what extent is there disagreement? Or is disagreement over facts really a disagreement about values? Do different legislative proposals derive from different sets of facts or from different sets of values? Keep in mind that disputes about the facts can blur important issues, which frequently turn not on facts but on value judgments.

Precedents or Analogies. Research on legislative problems or situations that are in some way similar to the problem or situation you are addressing can sometimes serve as a model to be emulated or avoided in your own work. Look for such situations. How are they similar? How are they different? What analyses were conducted to illuminate those situations? What lessons can be drawn from the earlier experience?

Impacts. The impacts of legislation can be analyzed at various levels of sophistication, depending on one's needs. The central questions in assessing impact are three: Who would benefit either directly or indirectly? Who would bear the costs? Who would make the operational decisions were the legislation enacted and implemented, and how would they be held politically accountable? Other questions of impact will depend upon the nature of the proposal you are researching. For example, impacts on the environment, on foreign policy, or on the international, national, or regional economies may be of importance, and long term consequences may differ greatly from immediate effects.

Money. When you are considering the dollar costs associated with legislation, be careful with the concepts and terms you use. Be sure you understand the federal budget and appropriations processes and such terms as budget authority, authorization, contract authority, outlays, obligations, expenditures, and the like. Explanation of budgetary terms is found in the Budget of the United States (see the volume entitled *Analytical Perspectives*), in the CRS Report 98-720 GOV, *Manual on the Federal Budget Process*, and in a glossary of budgetary terms prepared by the General Accounting Office.¹⁰

When you analyze trends in, say, appropriations, keep in mind that inflation makes a difference from year to year. Be alert to the need to adjust for inflation by

¹⁰ U.S. General Accounting Office. *A Glossary of Terms Used in the Federal budget Process; and Related Accounting, Economic, and Tax Terms* (Washington: 1993). 144 pp.

calculating constant dollars using the appropriate index for the adjustments. Selecting the appropriate index is important and must be done with care.¹¹

Statistical Analysis. If quantitative data are being used in the analysis, the researcher may need to call upon analysts with specialized statistical skills for assistance. Interpreting frequency and percentage distributions can sometimes require special skills. Special training is also helpful if the data you intend to use result from sample surveys. Such things as sample design and the research methods used to collect the data can directly affect the extent of error in the survey results and may have important implications for making legislative policy decisions.

Political Support and Opposition. Analysis of political support and opposition on legislative issues requires collection and assessment of information for many sources: public opinion research, position statements from key lobbyists, statements of Members, reports in the general press and in such specialized publications as *Congressional Quarterly* and *National Journal*, and statements published in committee hearings and other documents. But do not feel limited to published documents. It is often helpful to have direct person-to-person conversations with committee and member staff and with representatives of organizations interested in the matter you are researching.

It is important to know who opposes and supports the alternatives you are examining, but it is far more important for the analyst to understand *why*. Make every effort to know and understand your opponents' best arguments as well as you know your own.

Presentation of Findings

Members of Congress are extraordinarily busy, balancing many competing demands for their time. Few can devote much time to chatting with a researcher or reading a lengthy report. So whether you present your findings orally or in writing, get straight to the point.

Members of Congress, like most people, prefer some modes of presentation over others. Some prefer written reports; others prefer oral briefings. Some Members want the big picture without having to wade through the details; others want all the details. In all likelihood a Member's preferences about presentations will vary with circumstances, the most important of which are likely to be the availability of time and the use the Member intends to make of the research findings. You will be able to communicate with Members most effectively if you know your Member's preferences, are sensitive to the circumstances of the moment, and shape your presentation accordingly.

¹¹ For example, the Office of Management and Budget publishes historical and projected budget deflators. See U.S. Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables, Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2001* Table 10.1-Gross Domestic Product and Deflators Used in the Historical Tables: 1940-2002 (Washington: GPO, 2000).

Nonetheless, there are some principles that are generally applicable to most legislative or oversight situations where you must present research findings. Bear them in mind as you design your own presentation and remember that most of them hang on the admonition, “Get to the point.”

- ! Define the important issues at the beginning of the presentation. This sets the basic framework for the rest of what is to be said and helps the reader or listener understand the relative importance of what you are going to present.
- ! Present only enough background information to adequately set the context of the issues. Avoid anything that is irrelevant to the assignment.
- ! It is usually preferable to present the big ideas before getting into the details so that the reader or listener will be able more easily to see the importance of and connections among the details.
- ! Use plain words. Do not try to be fancy or to sound “intellectual.” Beware the professional jargon of academic and governmental writers.
- ! Make every word tell. Say only what is necessary to communicate the important ideas and information. Eliminate the dead wood. This will yield a more forceful and effective presentation and will take less of the reader’s or listener’s valuable time.
- ! Data are often more easily grasped and understood when presented graphically.
- ! Be scrupulously objective in presenting research findings. Point out options.
- ! Remember that most important policy decisions turn on value judgments. Structure your presentation so that discussion of the “facts” does not obscure the essential values involved in the issues at hand.

The Problem of Time

Although legislative research can sometimes be conducted at a relatively leisurely pace, with plenty of time for thoroughness of research and analysis, the usual assignment must be completed on fairly short notice. When faced with such a situation, make every effort to draw upon research and analysis conducted by others and on readily available reports and other documents. Some policy organizations post their reports on their Web sites. Other organizations will send you their reports by fax or mail. CRS, for example, provides analysis of legislative issues on its Web site [<http://www.loc.gov/crs>] or [<http://www.crs.gov>]. You can also get prepared CRS

Reports, Issue Briefs and Info Packs quickly at the CRS Product Distribution Center (LM-212 of the Madison Building) or order them via the CRS web site, by phone or fax. You can also ask CRS for analysis designed to meet your specific needs.

Although CRS and other legislative support agencies may be able to respond to requests for new work relatively quickly, new research and analysis may take more than the time available to you. Be sure to speak to subject specialists in CRS and other support agencies whether or not the deadline is short. They may be able to provide quick oral briefings, pointing out the current legislative issues, providing helpful background information and alternative sources of information suited to your needs. They may also be able to estimate how much time would be required to fill your research needs.

How CRS Can Help

Some congressional staff prefer to do all of their research themselves, drawing upon support agencies like CRS only for data, copies of government documents, periodicals, or reference publications. Others prefer to draw upon CRS or other experts for assistance. Much is available directly from the CRS Web site at –

[<http://www.loc.gov/crs>] or [<http://www.crs.gov>]

The CRS product distribution center, reference centers, and reading rooms also provide readily available the materials you may need.

CRS Services and Products

CRS provides a variety of analytical products and services ranging from background information for general distribution to expert technical assistance and analyses on key issues.

Analytic Services and Products

- ! In-depth policy analysis of legislative issues
- ! Legal analysis
- ! Economic analysis
- ! Confidential memoranda responding to specific questions
- ! Bill comparisons
- ! In-person and telephone briefings for Members and staff
- ! Support for legislative and oversight hearings
- ! Advisory assistance at mark-ups and conference committees
- ! Expert testimony
- ! Computer modeling and simulations

Research services

- ! Materials to support hearings or develop legislative proposals
- ! Facts and statistics
- ! Technical information on legislative issues
- ! Legislative histories
- ! Materials for offices to use in drafting speeches for Members
- ! Biographical materials
- ! Background information on virtually any subject

Reference, information, and bibliographic services

- ! Quick facts: Hotline telephone service
- ! Compilations of CRS products and articles on current topics
- ! "Legislative Alert," which lists products analyzing issues scheduled for floor debate during the week
- ! Summaries of current legislative issues
- ! Books or other material borrowed from the Library's collections
- ! Copies of specific items: Journal or newspaper articles, scientific or technical reports, legal or government documents
- ! Bibliographies on virtually any subject
- ! Foreign language translations and related services
- ! Assistance with responses to constituents
- ! Full-text retrieval from specialized databases
- ! On-line legislative documentation

Seminars and conferences for Members and staff

- ! Seminars and workshops on public policy issues
- ! Legislative institutes: courses on the legislative process
- ! Conferences for new Members
- ! Orientation for district and State staff
- ! Weekly briefings on CRS services
- ! Lectures on Federal law developments
- ! Assistance with committee retreats

For CRS assistance, call 7-5700.

[<http://www.loc.gov/crs>]

or

[<http://www.crs.gov>]

Appendix: Computerized Research Tools Available from the Library of Congress and CRS

Prepared by Michael Kolakowski

The Library of Congress and the Congressional Research Service offer a wide variety of computerized resources for legislative research by way of the Internet and the World Wide Web. The Library's computerized resources are available to congressional offices and to the general public, while CRS computerized resources, are available *only to congressional offices*.

THOMAS

[<http://thomas.loc.gov>]

THOMAS is a collection of legislative information on the World Wide Web available to the Congress and the general public via the Internet. Designed and produced by the Library of Congress, THOMAS gathers data from various sources within the Library, the Congress, and other government agencies and provides uniform searching capabilities across the various types of data. There is extensive, very current information in three major areas – Legislation, Congressional Record, and Committee Information. To use THOMAS, your office must have an Internet connection and Web browser software.

“About THOMAS” (scroll to the bottom of the page) provides clear, detailed information about the various sections. The THOMAS home page also includes searching tips and answers to frequently asked questions. The “Legislative Process” area includes hypertext versions of two primers on the legislative process: *How Our Laws Are Made* (from the House of Representatives) and *Enactment of a Law* (from the Senate). “Historical Documents” includes the full text of the Constitution, Declaration of Independence and many other important documents from our Nation's earliest years. The ability to search and browse varies somewhat from title to title in these sections. THOMAS provides the following information:

Current activity in Congress. Tabs at the top of the page provide information about current House and Senate legislative activity. These are labeled “House Floor This Week,” “House Floor Now,” and “Senate Schedule.” A column on the left includes links to “Bills in the News,” historical documents, and additional legislative, executive and judicial websites.

Legislation. Bill Summary & Status (107th – 93rd Congresses): Information *about* bills and amendments (see below for bill *text*). This section provides information about each bill's sponsors, titles, summary, legislative history, and floor/executive actions, and much more. The bill records are searchable by word/phrase, subject (index) term, bill/amendment number, stage in the legislative process, dates of introduction, sponsor/cosponsor, and committee. There are browsable lists in several categories to assist in scanning and locating legislation, e.g. all legislation, public laws, vetoed bills, etc.

Bill Text. (107th – 101st Congresses): Full *text* of all Government Printing Office-supplied versions of bills. Searchable by word/phrase or bill number. Searches may be limited to only those bills receiving floor action, enrolled bills, or to House or Senate bills.

Major Legislation. (107th – 104th Congresses): *Selected* bills and amendments judged significant by legislative analysts in the Congressional Research Service. This area is browsable by topic, title, bill/amendment number, bills enacted into law.

Public Laws by Law Number. (107th – 93rd Congresses): Bill summary and status records for each bill that became public law, listed by law number order and in bill number sequence (including House Joint Resolutions, House Bills, Senate Joint Resolutions, Senate Bills).

House Roll Call Votes. (107th – 101st Congress, 2nd Session): Roll call (recorded) votes from the House of Representatives listed in reverse chronological order (by roll call vote number). The vote summary page lists roll call vote number, vote date, the “issue” (bill/amendment number, quorum call or Journal approval), the “question” (description of the vote), the result (Passed, Failed, or Agreed to), and the title/description of the legislation. Vote detail pages show individual member votes and vote totals by party.

Senate Roll Call Votes. (107th – 101st Congress, 1st Session): Roll call (yea - nay) votes from the Senate listed in reverse chronological order (by roll call vote number). The vote summary page lists roll call vote number, vote date, bill number, vote result, and title/description of vote. Vote detail pages show individual member votes ordered alphabetically by member, by vote category, and votes summaries. Senate votes on nominations and treaties are also shown.

Congressional Record.

Most recent issue. (107th Congress): A reverse chronological list of all issues received and processed in the current Congress. Browsable by date and part or section of the *Record* (House, Senate, Extension of Remarks, Daily Digest).

Congressional Record text. (107th – 101st Congresses): Full text of the daily edition of the *Congressional Record* searchable by word/phrase, by Member of Congress, and/or date or date range. Search the entire *Record* or limit searches by section of the *Record*, date, etc. Each daily section is preceded by a clickable Table of Contents.

Congressional Record Index. (107th – 103rd Congress, 2nd Session): Cumulative index for each session of Congress, published every two weeks. Index to the daily edition of the *Record* prepared by staff under the leadership of the Joint Committee on Printing. Searchable and browsable by index terms. Page references are linked to the full text file. For the 107th Congress, there is a link to the [GPO version](#) of the *Congressional Record Index* that is updated daily when Congress is in session.

Resumes of Congressional Activity. (107th, 1st Session – 91st Congresses): Here are “workload” statistics published after each session of Congress. Among the

categories of legislative data are numbers of days and hours in session, bills enacted into law, measures introduced, vetoes, etc. This section also includes the Disposition of Executive Nominations – a table of the numbers of civilian, Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps nominations submitted to the Senate by the President and their disposition. This section is in tabular format that is browsable but not searchable.

Days-in-Session Calendars. (Senate: 107th Congress, 1st Session – 95th Congress, 2nd Session; House: 107th Congress, 1st Session – 94th Congress, 1st Session): Monthly calendar format shows the days the House and Senate met during each session of Congress. Calendars are browsable but not searchable.

Committee Information.

Committee Reports. (107th – 104th Congresses): This section provides access to the full text of House and Senate committee reports, conference reports, and joint committee reports printed by the GPO. Most, but not all committee reports are printed. This section is searchable by word/phrase, report number, bill number, committee. Searches can be limited by type of report. This section is also browsable.

Committee Home Pages. This browsable section provides links to House and Senate Committees' own home pages residing on House and Senate servers. Content varies, but these pages typically include information about committee jurisdiction, membership rosters, schedules, and publications.

Legislative Information System

[<http://www.congress.gov>]

The Legislative Information System (LIS) is designed to provide Members of Congress and their staff with access to the most current and comprehensive legislative information available. It is available *only* to the House and Senate and the legislative support agencies. The Library of Congress' THOMAS system and the Government Printing Office's GPO ACCESS system continue to provide legislative information to the public. A helpful chart comparing the features of LIS and THOMAS is available by clicking on "Help" at the top of the LIS homepage. To use the LIS, your office must have an internet connection with Web browser software.

The information available through this system comes from a variety of sources, such as government agencies, the Congress, commercial sources, and the Library of Congress. Some databases, such as the text of bills, the text of the Congressional Record, etc. are processed by the Library of Congress so that users can search different files in similar ways. In other cases the system provides links to information resources that reside elsewhere and that provide their own means of indexing and displaying data.

LIS is organized into nine groups of links to legislative information. Titles of the groups do not always reveal the full range of information included at that point. Some resources can be reached from more than one location on the LIS or may be

available from more than one supplier (CRS, GPO, etc.). Appearance, features, and currency vary. Browse around the categories and the “Help” feature to become familiar. Brief descriptions of the primary areas follow.

Floor Activities and Schedules. Schedule information for the Senate and House floor, committees, and leadership. Legislative and executive calendars. Links to commercial news and information sources, publications, events calendars, etc. Be sure to click on “These Links and More with Descriptions” for a menu of all the resources in this section accompanied by a two to three line description.

Committees. This section provides users with the ability to search the full text of committee reports, browse the full text of selected prints, hearings, and committee transcripts, view committee schedules and link to committee home pages.

Senate and House Links. Senate and House public home pages as well as their intranets (some features may have restricted access). Senate treaties, nominations, and executive communications files are available here. Senate and House member lists and links to their home pages. Click on “Legislative Reference Sources” for many additional links with brief explanations, such as floor activity and schedules, committee rosters, and jurisdictions, rules and procedures. In this subgroup are also links to the official Congressional Directory, Pictorial Directory, and a continually updated version of the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.

Other Government Links. Executive and judicial branch links are clustered here along with access to state and local government internet sites.

Executive Branch. Provides links to the White House and Executive Office of the President as well as executive agencies, independent agencies, boards, commissions, and committees. At the bottom of this page is a link to the “The Federal Judiciary,” a site maintained by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts as a clearinghouse for information from and about the judicial branch.

Code of Federal Regulations. A group of resources provided by the Government Printing Office. These include the CFR (1996 and forward), Federal Register (1995 and forward), United States Government Manual (1995 and forward), Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (1993 and forward), Public Papers of the Presidents (1995 and forward), and others.

Law Resources. Includes statutes in browsable and searchable forms from several sources, regulations, and judicial opinions from the Supreme Court, circuit courts of appeal and others.

The Constitution of the United States: Analysis and Interpretation. Presents the entire document with historical notes, amendments, and decisions.

State and Local Government. A compilation from many sources, this group offers links to state and local government information, statutes, organizations, as well as state government websites.

Legislation/Congressional Record. This section provides easy access to basic and advanced searching for Bill Summary & Status, Congressional Record, and Text of Legislation Files from the 93rd Congress to the present. Searches can be conducted in a single Congress or in multi-Congress groups. There are links to vote information, CRS appropriations and budget information products, Public Laws, and the U.S. Code. Earlier Congresses may not have all of the searching capabilities found in the more recent years.

News and Commercial Sources. This section contains links to news wires and other commercial sources although access may be restricted to House only or Senate only. In addition, the section includes the CRS Public Policy Literature Abstracts database. There is also a direct link to the historical documents segment of THOMAS for direct access to documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, and the Constitution of the United States. This link to the Constitution does not include the notes, analysis, and interpretation found under “Other Government Links; CRS Constitutional Law Analysis.”

Support Agencies. Five agencies’ home pages, documents, and services can be reached from this segment: Congressional Research Service, Congressional Budget Office, General Accounting Office, Government Printing Office, and Library of Congress.

User Assistance and Guides. This section provides links to House and Senate user support groups, the CRS Guide to the Legislative and Budget Process, and the full text of the House document *How Our Laws Are Made* and the Senate document *Enactment of a Law*. Two other useful documents here are House Rules and Manual (Jefferson’s Manual) and Standing Rules of the Senate. Don’t overlook the *Help* button embedded in the flag banner at the top of the page.

Previous Congresses. The final section contains links to information from previous Congresses like that found in the section above, “Legislation/Congressional Record”: Bill Summary and Status, Bill Text, Committee Reports, Public Laws, the Congressional Record, etc. Material in some categories is as early as the 93rd Congress.

CRS on the World Wide Web

[<http://www.crs.gov>]

The CRS World Wide Web site provides Members of Congress and their staff with information, documents, and links to resources that have been selected for their relevance to the work of the congressional office.

The CRS presence on the World Wide Web will undergo a major change and will appear in greatly enhanced form early in the 107th Congress. This primer will be updated accordingly to reflect the changes and the new features, emphasizing how researchers in congressional offices can best take advantage of the new CRS web site.