Congress.gov: Access to U.S. Federal Legislative Information

August 10, 2016
KNOWLEDGE WILL FOREVER GOVERN IGNORANCE: AND A PEOPLE WHO MEAN TO BE THEIR OWN GOVERNOURS, MUST ARM THEMSELVES WITH THE POWER WHICH KNOWLEDGE GIVES.

James Madison
In support of Congress and in collaboration with the Clerk of the House, the Secretary of the Senate, the Government Publishing Office (GPO), and others, the Library of Congress coordinates a legislative branch-wide network to provide Members of Congress, their staff and constituents legislative information that is:

accessible,
accurate,
authoritative,
authorized,
available,
efficiently produced,
comprehensive,
findable,
integrated,
machine readable,
timely, and
well-organized.
The Constitutional Context

...Each House may determine the Rules of its proceedings...

...Each House shall keep a Journal of its Proceedings, and from time to time publish the same, excepting such Parts as may in their Judgement require Secrecy; and the Yeas and the Nays of the Members of either House on any question shall at the Desire of one fifth of those Present be entered on the Journal.

Article 1, Section 5
Historical Roots: 1800 – 1950’s

In establishing the Library of Congress in 1800, Congress laid a strong statutory foundation that was then iteratively enhanced over time to enable the Library to provide increasing essential and operationally integrated services in support of Congress’s Constitutional responsibilities.

In 1914, Congress established a separate bureau within the Library, the Legislative Research Service, which was later renamed the Congressional Research Service (CRS).
Historical Roots: 1800 – 1950’s
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In 1935, Congress directed and funded LRS to prepare Bill Digests (a.k.a., Bill Summaries) and for them to be made publicly available.

Decades of publishing periodic and final hardbound volumes for congressional use and dissemination to depository libraries began in January 1936.
In 1975, Congress was provided terminal based access to legislative data through the Library of Congress SCORPIO mainframe computer system.

By the early 1990’s, the House, Senate, and GPO all had initiated or were envisaging legislative information related efforts in support of their respective missions and operational needs…

From left to right: George R. Perreault, head of the Data Processing Office, standing at the computer storage unit; Ernest Acosta Jr., digital computer programmer, working at the card reader unit; and Joseph B. Murphy, digital computer programmer, inserting a new tape in one of the tape units. Jan. 20, 1964
Historical Roots: 1993 - 1997

1995 – First Release of the publicly available THOMAS website
The Committee on House Administration and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration have indicated that there are several instances where Congressional information systems may be generating or tracking duplicate information.

H. Rept. 103-517 accompanied P.L.103-283, Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 1995

...The Library of Congress should consult with and enlist the support of House Information Systems, Senate information collection and processing entities, GPO, GAO, and other appropriate legislative agencies...

H Rept. 104-141
Historical Roots: 1993 - 1997

U.S. Code: Title 2 , Chapter 5 – Library of Congress
§ 180. Legislative information retrieval system
(a) Purpose
...reduce the cost of information support for the Congress by eliminating duplication among systems which provide electronic access by Congress to legislative information.

(b) “Legislative information” defined
..."legislative information" means information, prepared within the legislative branch, consisting of the text of publicly available bills, amendments, committee hearings, and committee reports, the text of the Congressional Record, data relating to bill status, data relating to legislative activity, and other similar public information that is directly related to the legislative process.

(c) Development of single system to serve entire Congress
...the Library of Congress or the entity designated by that plan shall develop and maintain, in coordination with other appropriate entities of the legislative branch, a single legislative information retrieval system to serve the entire Congress.

(d) Development and approval of plan
.....to identify and eliminate redundancies in congressional information systems...must be approved by the Committee on Rules and Administration of the Senate, the Committee on House Oversight of the House of Representatives, and the Committees on Appropriations of the Senate and the House of Representatives. ...provide ...regular status reports on the development of the plan.

(e) Availability of information to public
.....shall examine issues regarding efficient ways to make this information available to the public.

The Congressional Research Service “…in consultation with the Secretary of the Senate and the heads of the appropriate offices and agencies of the legislative branch, shall coordinate the development…", and the "… Library of Congress shall…provide technical staff and resources as may be necessary." H. Rept. 104-733 accompanied P.L. 104-53, Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, 1997
Historical Roots: 1993 - 1997

1997 - First Release of LIS, a Congress-only Legislative Information System
Historical Roots: 2000-2007

2006 - Last major release of LIS
Time for Modernization, to:
Historical Roots: 2008-2010, Time for Modernization
Historical Roots: 2008-2010, Time for Modernization
Congress.gov, Start of the Modernization

“Three Sturdy Legs to Stand On”
A Legislative Branch-wide Partnership

GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
Congressional Research Service
Law Library
Office of the Chief Information Officer
Library Services
National and International Outreach

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE

HOUSE
Members Officers Committees

SENATE
Members Officers Committees
Congress.gov Related Services

- Legislative Analysis and Summarizing of Bills (~16,000/Congress)
- Enhancement and Q/A of House and Senate data
- Help desk support – Congress and for the Public
- Training: “train the trainers,” video’s, webcasts
- Educational Outreach
- Systems Life Cycle Coordination, Development and Operational Support
Modernization: 2011 to 2018 (and beyond)

Starting 9/26/2014

BETA.CONGRESS.GOV

“Beta” becomes the new “Congress.gov”

You can still find LIS at LIS.GOV

July 5, 2016

What is the status of the defense authorization bill? • How does a bill become a law? • Who are the representatives from Maryland? • How many cosponsors does that bill have? • Can I get notified when Congress acts on a bill? • Who are the representatives from Ohio? • Can I watch a committee hearing online? • What bills were people curious about last week? • Who are the representatives from Iowa? • Is the House of Representatives in session? • How many representatives from New York? • Is this really Congress.gov? • What is a “bill of attainder”? • What really constitutes a “sense” resolution? • What is an “enabling” or “priority” resolution? • What is a “spending resolution”? • What is the status of the defense authorization bill? • How many cosponsors does that bill have? • Can I get notified when Congress acts on a bill? • Who are the representatives from Nevada? • Can I still find th…
Congress.gov Program Goals

- Every Year:
  - 24x7 system availability
  - A model for attentive, trusted, and high value service
- For 2018:
  - Retirement of all Legacy systems
  - Next set of priorities are established
Congress.gov Collections

- Legislation
- Legislation Text
- Congressional Record
- Committee Reports
- Nominations
- Treaty Documents
- Communications
The Legislative Process

Congress.gov, the Legislative Process

Overview of the Legislative Process

Introduction & Referral of Bills

Committee Consideration

Calendars & Scheduling

House Floor

Senate Floor

Executive Business in the Senate

Bicameral Resolution

Presidential Actions

PUBLIC LAW
Congress.gov, “Quick Search” Pages
PN1180 — Carla D. Hayden — Library of Congress
114th Congress (2015–2016)

Confirmed on 07/13/2016.

Description
Carla D. Hayden, of Maryland, to be Librarian of Congress for a term of ten years, vice James H. Billington.

Organization
Library of Congress

Date Received from President
02/24/2016

Committees
Senate Rules and Administration

Actions: PN1180 — 114th Congress (2015-2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Senate Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07/13/2016</td>
<td>Confirmed by the Senate by Yeas-Nays Vote. 74 - 18. Record Vote Number: 128.</td>
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<tr>
<td>07/13/2016</td>
<td>Considered by Senate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>07/13/2016</td>
<td>By unanimous consent agreement, debate and vote 7/13/16.</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/09/2016</td>
<td>Placed on Senate Executive Calendar. Calendar No. 592.</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/09/2016</td>
<td>Reported by Senator Blunt, Committee on Rules and Administration, without printed report.</td>
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Future Directions and Challenges

Complete the Initial Modernization

- Web Interface
- Legislative Tools
- Legislative Information Exchange
Future Directions and Challenges

US and International Data Initiatives

▪ U.S. Code in USLM (United States Legislative Markup) XML
  ▪ The Office of Law Revision Counsel released downloadable XML files, the schema, and a user guide in 2013

▪ Markup of U.S. Legislation in Akoma Ntosa
  ▪ Library of Congress sponsored data challenges to draft and transform Congressional bill texts into Akoma Ntosa in 2015

▪ Bill Status Data in XML
  ▪ House, Senate, GPO and LOC made bill status data available in bulk XML in 2015
  ▪ [https://www.congress.gov/about/data](https://www.congress.gov/about/data)
Future Directions and Challenges

Work with Congress and others on prioritizing:

- Personalization
- Geospatial?
- Bill Comparison?
- Historical Collections?
- ….
Congress.gov: Access to U.S. Federal Legislative Information

Cliff Cohen
Associate Director
Office of Congressional Information and Publishing
Congressional Research Service
Email: ccohen@crs.loc.gov
URL: congress.gov
Sustainability

PEOPLE

DATA

SUBSTAINABILITY

PROCESSES

TECHNOLOGY
Users and Usage, Service to Congress

- **Primary User Groups:**
  - Members of Congress
  - Secretary of the Senate and House Clerk Staff
  - Congressional staff (Committee’s and Member Offices)
  - CRS staff (Policy and Legislative Analysts; Information Specialists)
  - Beginners, new Congress.gov users

- **Usage Statistics:**
  - Congress.gov vs. Legacy LIS
  - Daily and Repeat Usage
  - Most Popular Pages
  - How they visit us
Users and Usage: Service to the Public

- Policy analysts and political scientists
- Law librarians
- Lawyers
- Civil society groups and transparency advocates
- Journalists and media
- Data analysts, data scientists
- Legal scholars, historians, researchers
- Undergraduate, graduate students (including law students)
- K-12 teachers
- Concerned citizens (communities and individuals)
- Lobbyists
- Curious citizens

Key Metrics Report | General Public (non-LoC, non-House/Senate) | Sat. 1 Aug. 2015 - Sun. 31 Jul. 2016 | Graph generated by Adobe Analytics at 8:04 AM EDT, 8 Aug 2016