



Guide Series

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE HISTORY SOURCES

Researchers interested in federal matters frequently must determine the legislative intent of Congress in enacting a particular law. To determine this intent, one must locate materials from which a legislative history of the law can be developed. A legislative history is a collection of documents containing information considered by Congress before enacting a law. These documents include various forms of a bill, debates on the floor of the Senate or House, hearings held by congressional committees considering a bill, reports issued by these committees, and presidential messages.

I. COMPILED LEGISLATIVE HISTORIES

Researchers often save time by using legislative histories compiled by others. The government frequently issues legislative histories for major pieces of legislation which reprint all hearings, reports, and other relevant materials. Commercial publishers reprint legislative histories issued by the government or publish their own. The following bibliography can be used to determine if a compiled legislative history has been issued for the act being examined. The online catalog must then be checked to see if the LRC owns it.

Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories (Ref. KF 42.2 .S724): The references to legislative histories included here are arranged by Congress and within each Congress by public law number. Each entry is in standard bibliographic form to facilitate quick location of the compilation in the online catalog. All compilations vary in the quality and the quantity of congressional documents.

II. CONGRESSIONAL MATERIALS

A. GLOSSARY

1. **Bills:** Proposed laws which must pass both houses of Congress before being sent to the President for approval or veto. Bills are sequentially numbered in separate series for both House and Senate, and retain that number through both annual sessions of Congress. Each bill is assigned to a committee, which holds hearings on the proposed legislation, and issues reports.
2. **Debates:** Congressional debates take place on the floor of the House or Senate and are printed in the *Congressional Record* (KF 35 .R43). These are not the same as hearings which take place before a committee.
3. **Hearings:** Congressional committees hold hearings on particular bills as well as on topics that fall within the scope of their responsibility. Hearings transcripts are generally published and express the views of non-legislators of what the bill under consideration should accomplish.

4. **Reports:** Reports are issued by committees of either branch, or by conference committees when reporting and making recommendations on a bill to the House or Senate as a whole. Each report is identified as House or Senate, has the number of the Congress, and a number indicating the order in which it was issued. **For example:** H.R. Rept. No. 94-130 (House of Representatives, 94th Congress, 130th report).
5. **Committee Prints:** Items printed by a House or Senate committee and intended for internal use by the committee. The same items may be published as hearings, reports or documents if intended for public information. Among the items issued as prints are studies, investigative reports, section by section analyses of certain bills, and hearings or hearings excerpts.
6. **Documents:** Various items are published as House or Senate Documents, including executive communications to Congress, special reports to Congress, and special studies. Each document is identified with the house issuing the item, the number of the Congress, and a number indicating the order in which it was issued. **For example:** S.Doc.No. 93-180. (Senate, 93rd Congress, 180th document.)

B. GUIDES TO CONGRESSIONAL MATERIAL

Researchers seeking federal legislative history materials must often contend with massive amounts of information. To avoid confusion, it is best to develop a chronology of events (introduction of bill, dates of hearings, dates reports issued, dates of passage, etc.) and to note all publications before tracking down any of the items. Several works provide lists of materials available for laws passed, and for bills considered but not passed.

1. ***Congressional Index*** (KF 49 .C6): Available in the LRC for Congresses dating back to 1951, this looseleaf service provides a chronology for every bill, from its date of introduction through signature by the President. Two volumes are issued and updated during each Congress (one volume for House bills and one for Senate bills). Included are indexes by subject and bill number, voting records, and brief biographical information for members of Congress.
2. ***United States Code Congressional and Administrative News (U.S.C.C.A.N.)*** [KF 48 .W45]: U.S.C.C.A.N. reprints public laws along with significant portions of committee reports needed to develop an interpretation of legislative intent. The editors, believing that one need not always examine every item relating to a particular law, selectively include reports. Hearings, committee prints, and documents are not included. Dates of consideration (since 1941) are listed for each act (for use in the *Congressional Record*).
3. ***CIS Indexes*** (Congressional Information Service) [Ref Index KF 49 .C62]: CIS reproduces on microfiche all hearings, reports, documents, and committee prints issued from 1970 to date, with companion indexes and abstracts in bound volumes. Researchers must use the index and abstract volumes to locate particular items in the microfiche set. Researchers can locate items by subject, name, bill number, or report and document number in the index volumes. Since 1984, CIS has also published a Legislative History volume for each year which is arranged by public law number. The LRC has on microfiche all items referred to in the index, abstract and legislative history volumes.

C. LOCATING BILLS, HEARINGS, REPORTS, DOCUMENTS, AND PRINTS

1. ***Finding Aid _____ Congress Bills 19__*** (also called *Congressional Bills Index*) [Ref. Index KF 16 .U54]: The LRC has received congressional bills and resolutions from the federal government covering 1981 - 2001 in microfiche. Each fiche card is given a unique number. To find the text of a bill, choose the *Finding Aid* for the appropriate year and session. The bills are divided between House and Senate, and are listed in the left-hand column in the *Aid*. Next to the bill number is a reference to the fiche card number. The fiche are located in the microform cabinets at KF 16 .U54.

Bills from 1933 - 1981 are also available on microfiche in the Lower Level at KF 16 .U53. They are organized by Congress.

Bills from 1989 - present are available electronically at thomas.loc.gov.

2. ***United States Code Congressional and Administrative News*** (U.S.C.C.A.N.): See B.2 (above).
3. ***CIS Indexes***: See B.3 (above).
4. ***U.S. Congressional Serial Set*** (KF 12.U5): All reports and documents issued by the Congress are eventually bound in the *Serial Set*. The *Serial Set* does not contain hearings or committee prints. The LRC has the *CIS U.S. Serial Set Index* (Ref Index KF 12. U5), covering documents issued from 1789 - 1969. Most materials published in the *Serial Set* from 1970 onward are reproduced in the CIS microfiche set (B.3, above). The LRC has many years of the *Serial Set* in both paperbound volumes and microform: 1789 - 1969 is in microfiche, with paperbound volumes for many years from 1880 to 1994.
5. ***CIS U.S. Congressional Committee Prints*** (Ref Index KF 49 .C59): Prints are issued by committees for internal use, and are reproduced on microfiche in this set. There is a five volume index for locating prints issued through 1969 by subject, title, bill number, Congress, and committee. The LRC has the paperbound index and the full text of selected prints from the years 1911 - 1969 on microfiche. Prints issued from 1970 to date are found in the CIS microfiche set (B.3, above).
6. ***Monthly Catalog of U.S. Government Publications*** (Ref. Z 1223 .A18): Researchers may find that congressional publications cannot be located in any of the traditional sources listed above. Hearings, for example, are not found in the *Serial Set*, and may prove difficult to locate for the years prior to 1970. (That is when CIS began reproducing hearings on microfiche.) The *Monthly Catalog* can be used to track down these items. The LRC has the *Monthly Catalog* from 1951 to the present. Check the public catalog once a citation is found, in order to see if the LRC has the item.
7. ***CIS U.S. Congressional Hearing Index*** (Ref Index KF 24.8 C6): This CIS publication lists all hearings issued and available for publication from 1833 to 1969. The LRC has the printed index and hearings covering 1945 - 1969 on microfiche. Hearings for earlier years are available at the General Library of the University of California, San Diego. Hearings issued after 1969 are available at the LRC in the CIS microfiche set (B.3, above).

D. LOCATING DEBATES

The ***Congressional Record*** (KF 35 .R43) prints all debates from the floor of the House or Senate. While the *Record* is generally assumed to be a verbatim transcript, senators and representatives have the right to change the text of their remarks (as printed in the daily edition) before a final version is published. An index is issued each year; locate items by subject, bill number, or sponsor. At the LRC, the daily edition is available in microfiche from 1981 to the present. The final edition is available in microfiche from 1789 to present. The current two years of the daily edition are also available in paper in the Reading Room stacks. Older copies of the final edition in paper are located on the LRC's Lower Level.

III. PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Presidents frequently send messages to Congress regarding pending legislation. Major messages are occasionally printed in the *Congressional Record* (having been offered for inclusion by a member of Congress) or as committee prints and documents. Messages also can be found in the following sets:

- A. ***Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*** (J 80 .A284): Published every Monday, this compilation includes addresses, remarks, and messages to Congress as well as appointments, nominations, and other presidential materials released by the White House. It has an Index of Contents at the front of each issue for documents in that issue and a quarterly cumulative index in the back. The LRC has the *Weekly Compilation* from August 26, 1965 to the present.

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- B. *Public Papers of the President* (J 82):** With the exception of the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, this set has been published annually since the beginning of Herbert Hoover's term in office in 1929. It is a compilation of presidential messages to Congress, public speeches, news conferences, and public letters, and is meant to provide a complete historical record of each president's term in office. The final volume of each year contains a cumulative index for that year. The LRC has the set both in paper and on microfiche.
- C. *CIS Index to Presidential Executive Orders and Proclamations (1789 - 1983)* [Ref Index KF 70 .A55 1986]:** This retrospective set indexes presidential executive orders and proclamations from 1789 - 1983. The index is divided into the following parts: a reference bibliography (access by title and date), subject and organization, chronological listing, and personal names. The LRC has the printed index and the accompanying microfiche set containing the full text of executive orders and proclamations from the years 1789 to 1983.

IV. ONLINE RESOURCES:

Both LEXIS and WESTLAW include databases with bills, public laws, the *Congressional Record*, and presidential documents. Consult a current database guide for each system for more items.

- A. Bills:**
Summary & Status - (93rd Congress - Present)
Full text - (101st Congress - Present)
thomas.loc.gov
- B. Public laws:**
93rd Congress - Present
thomas.loc.gov
- C. Committee Reports:**
104th Congress - Present
thomas.loc.gov
- D. Congressional Record:**
101st Congress - Present
thomas.loc.gov
- E. Presidential materials:**
<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/index.html>

Note: The use of LEXIS and WESTLAW is limited by USD's educational contract to currently enrolled USD law students, law faculty, and staff.

CONTACT A REFERENCE LIBRARIAN FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE