Federal Bills and Proposed Legislation

Scope

The legislative branch of the federal government is responsible for making the laws that govern the United States and is one of the major foundations in our representative system. The goal of this pathfinder is to identify the different types of legislation that may be proposed by Congress, list sources that contain the full text of these documents, and to identify sources to consult when tracking a bill or resolution’s progress through Congress.

Types of Proposed Legislation

**Bills** are proposed pieces of legislation introduced by either the House of Representatives or the Senate. The only exception to this is that bills introduced for raising revenue must originate in the House of Representatives. However, the Senate may propose or concur with the amendments.

The letters H.R. designate bills introduced in the House of Representatives, while bills introduced in the Senate are designated with the letter S.

**Joint Resolutions**, like bills, can originate in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, but not jointly in both chambers as the name suggests. Joint Resolutions are nearly identical to bills and are often used interchangeably.

House of Representatives joint resolutions are designated as H.J. Res., while Senate joint resolutions are designated as S.J. Res.

Both **bills** and **joint resolutions** are enacted into law when one of the following occurs:

- The President approves the legislation and signs it into law;
- The House and Senate override a presidential veto by a two-thirds vote in each Chamber; or
- The President fails to sign or veto the bill within 10 working days while Congress is in session. If Congress adjourns during the 10 days, the bill is automatically rejected. This is known as a pocket veto.

**Concurrent Resolutions** are initiated to remedy matters affecting the day to day operations of both Chambers. They are used to express fact, principles, and policies. A concurrent resolution is not sent to the President to be enacted into law. When approved
by both Chambers, the Clerk of the House and the Secretary of the Senate sign them. Concurrent Resolutions appear in a special section of the *Statutes at Large*.

Concurrent resolutions introduced in the House of Representatives are designated by H. Con. Res., while those introduced in the Senate are designated as S. Con. Res.

**Simple Resolutions** are introduced when matters concerning the rules and operation of just one house need to be remedied. Simple resolutions are only considered by the Chamber in which they are introduced. Upon approval by that Chamber, they are attested to by either the Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate. Simple resolutions are published in the *Congressional Record*.

Simple resolutions introduced in the House of Representatives are designated as H. Res., while those introduced in the Senate are designated as S. Res.

**Proposed Legislation Numbering**

Each type of proposed legislation (Senate bill, House bill, Senate joint resolution, House joint resolution, etc.) receives its own numbering and is numbered consecutively in the order they are introduced. At the start of each Congress (which is two years in length), the numbering begins again at one. Proposed legislation not passed by the time Congress ends must be reintroduced in the new Congress to be considered. It will receive a new number. Therefore, it is very useful to know either the year or the Congress in which the proposed legislation was introduced.

The table below indicates where bills and resolutions are located in the Government Document Classification Scheme.

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<th>Type of Legislation</th>
<th>Y 1.4/1</th>
<th>Y 1.4/2</th>
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**Bill Tracking**

Bill tracking is the process used to follow the path that proposed legislation has followed once introduced in Congress. It can be used to track current legislation to see if it is near passage or rejection or it can also be used retrospectively on older proposed legislation.
Locating Text of Proposed Legislation and Bill Tracking Sources

LexisNexis Congressional Universe (On-campus use. Remote access-ASU students & staff)

- **Bills and Bill Tracking** (101st Congress (1989)-present) The database is updated daily. The full-text of bills and resolutions are available on Congressional Universe. **Keyword searching** can be used to locate proposed legislation. It is necessary to click the Bills (Full Text) radio button to activate the Limit option, which includes specifying a Congress, identifying the sponsor of the bill, or designating which version of the bill to retrieve. A search can also be done by **bill or resolution number**.

To track a bill’s progress through Congress, click on the Bill Tracking radio button. Researchers can track bills on Congressional Universe via keyword, bill or resolution number, and by sponsor.

**Thomas** [http://thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)

- **Bill Text** (101st Congress (1989)-present) This database is updated daily when Congress is in session. **Keyword searching** can be used to locate proposed legislation. Limiting options include specifying which Chamber the bill was introduced, limiting to bills that have received floor action or have been enrolled to the President, and the timeframe in which the bill was introduced. A search can also be done by **bill or resolution number**.

- **Bill Summary and Status** (93rd Congress (1973)-present) This database is updated every 24-48 hours. This database contains the summary of bills and tracks their progress through the legislative process. Users can search by keyword or by bill number.


- **Congressional Bills** (103rd Congress (1993)-present) This database is updated daily. The text of bills and resolutions is available in PDF format. GPO Access allows users to **search multiple Congresses** via keyword searching. Researchers are also able to **browse** introduced legislation for each Congress.

- Bill Cast Archives (1985-2002) – **BC-OLD**

**Lexis (Available to Law Faculty and Law Students only)**

- Congressional Bills and Bill Tracking – Current Congress **LEGIS:BILLS**
- Bill Tracking Report – Current Congress **LEGIS:BLTRCK**
- Congressional Bill Legislative Forecasts – Current Congress **LEGIS:BLCAST**
Print Sources Containing Bills and Resolutions

If searching for legislation introduced prior to 1989, researchers will likely need to consult print resources. Below are list of sources that can be used to located older legislation.

**House and Senate Bills and Resolutions**

**Location:** Law Gov. Doc Microfiche Y 1.4/

The law library has in its microfiche collection bills and resolutions from the 96th Congress (1979) to the 106th Congress (2000). They are arranged by Congress and Session and then by type of proposal.

The bills and resolutions received in microfiche are not filmed in numerical order. It is necessary to consult the **Final cumulative finding aid, House and Senate bills (GP 3.28:)** to identify the fiche a particular where a bill or resolution is located. This finding aid is located on the South Wall of the Microform Room.

**Congressional Record** (1873-Present)

When a bill is introduced, its introduction is recorded in the Congressional Record. The Congressional Record may also contain the text of proposed legislation. The bill may have been inserted as part of the record at some point in the deliberations. However, it is important to note that **not all bills and resolutions are published in the Congressional Record.**

**Congressional Record** Access Points to Locating Proposed Legislation

- Name of the Representative or Senator sponsoring the bill
- Subject
- “History of Bills and Resolutions” section
  The history section indexes all floor action in the House and Senate for a proposed piece of legislation and provides citations to committee reports.
Location:
- Law Historical 3rd Floor  KF35 .C6 1873-1969
- Law Government Documents Stacks and Microform  X 1.1: 1970-Present
- Congressional Universe  (On-campus use. Remote access-ASU students & staff) 1985-present
- Westlaw (available to law students and law faculty only) CR  1985-present
- Lexis (available to law students and law faculty only) GENFED; RECORD  1985-present

Committee Reports
Another potential resource for locating the text of proposed legislation before 1979 is the committee report written about the proposed legislation. This may or may not contain the text of the bill or resolution. For more information about locating committee reports, please consult the Federal Legislative History pathfinder.

Congressional Index  (1965/66, 1969/70-Present)
Location:  Law Gov Docs Reference KF49 .C6
This loose-leaf service is published by Commerce Clearing House (CCH). It provides information on the status of proposed legislation and is updated weekly. This source is used to locate information about a bill or resolution. It does not include the full-text of proposed legislation.

Access Points to Locating Proposed Legislation
- Name of bill or resolution sponsor
- Subject
- Bill and resolution number