

Climbing Capitol Hill: The Basics of Congressional Research

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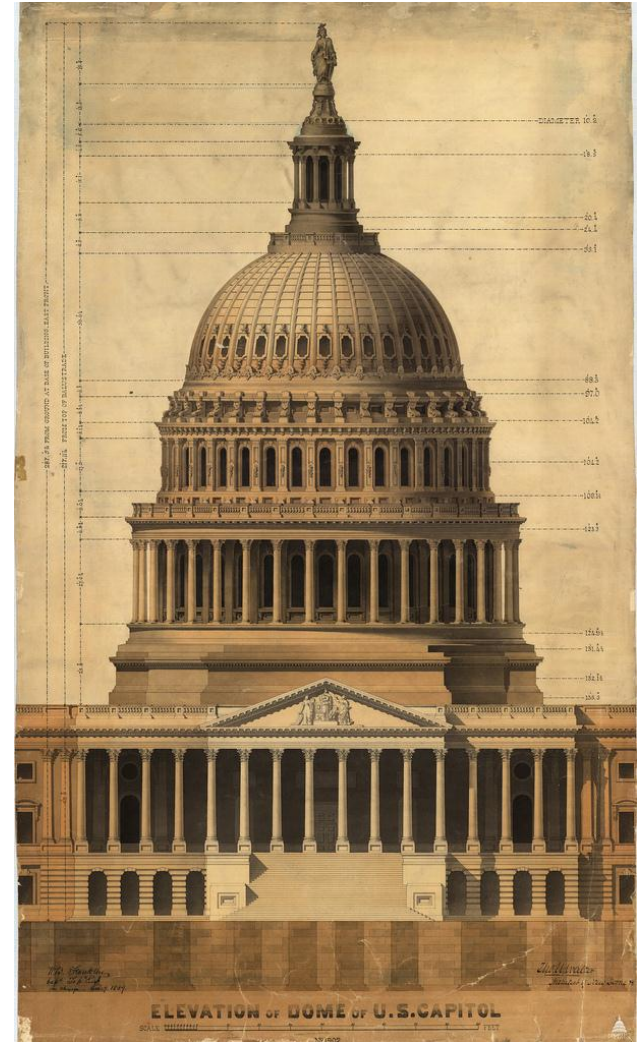


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- **A caveat (or three)**
- **Brief civics lesson**
- **Tips & tricks**
- **What Congress Produces**
- **How researchers may use that content**
- **How to find that content (for free and for fee)**
- **Auxilliary services for congress**
- **Questions and Answers**



- **Established in Article 1 of the US Constitution**
 - "all legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives."
 - **House**
 - 435 members
 - Elected every 2 years
 - Initiates revenue-raising bills
 - Initiates impeachment processes
 - **Senate**
 - 100 members
 - Elected every 6 years
 - Ratifies treaties and approves presidential appointments
 - Decides impeachment cases
 - **Meets for two-year 'Congresses' each with two 'Sessions' that are numbered – currently in the 113th Congress, 1st Session.**
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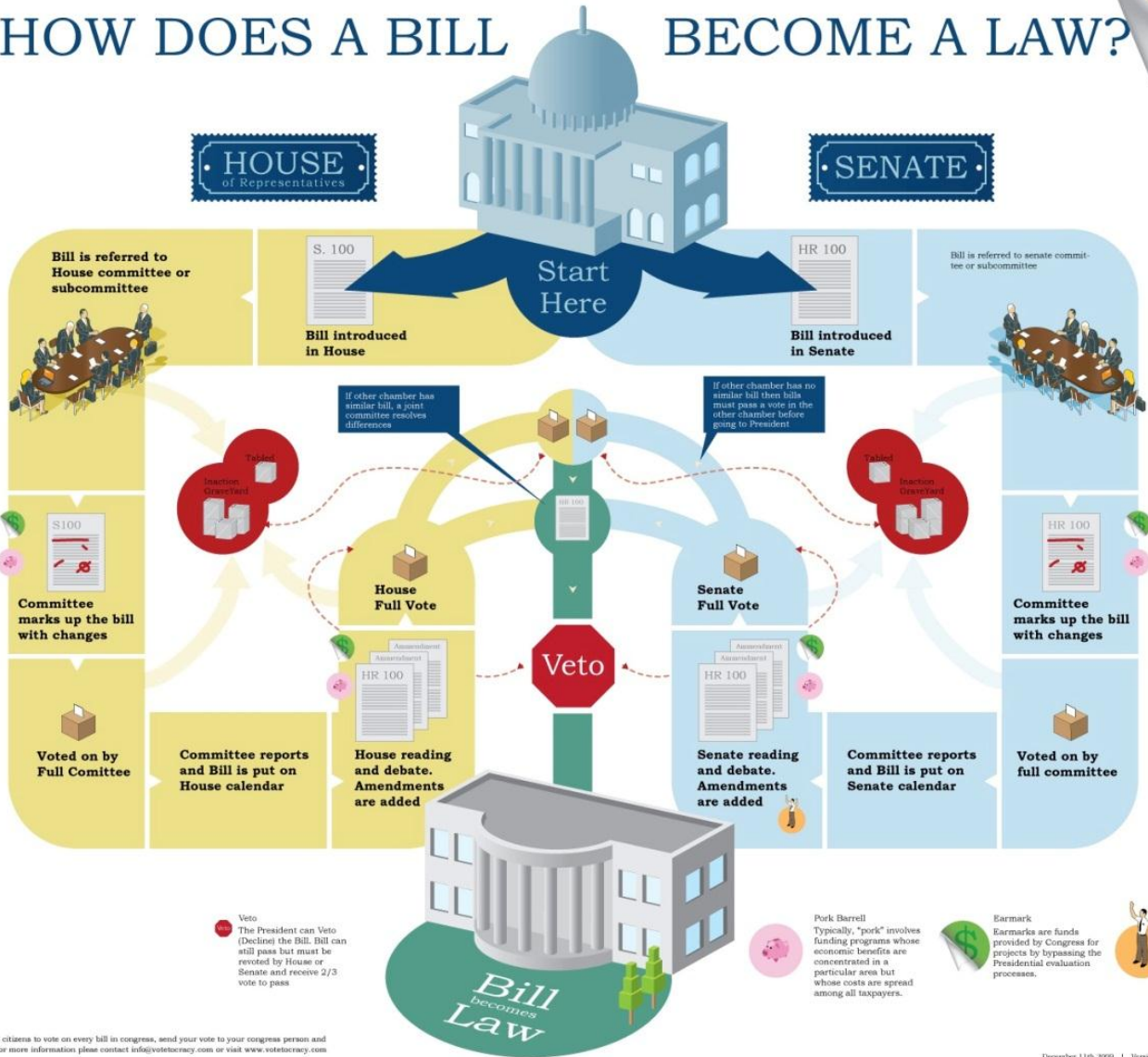


Congress: A Civics Lesson Cont.

HOW DOES A BILL BECOME A LAW?

435
Representatives

Each state receives representation in the House in proportion to its population but is entitled to at least one Representative. Each representative serves for a two-year term. The House was granted its own exclusive powers: the power to initiate revenue bills, impeach officials, and elect the president in electoral college deadlocks.



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Senators

Each U.S. state is represented by two senators, regardless of population. This ensures equal representation of each state in the Senate. Senators serve staggered six-year terms.

<http://visual.ly/how-does-bill-become-law>

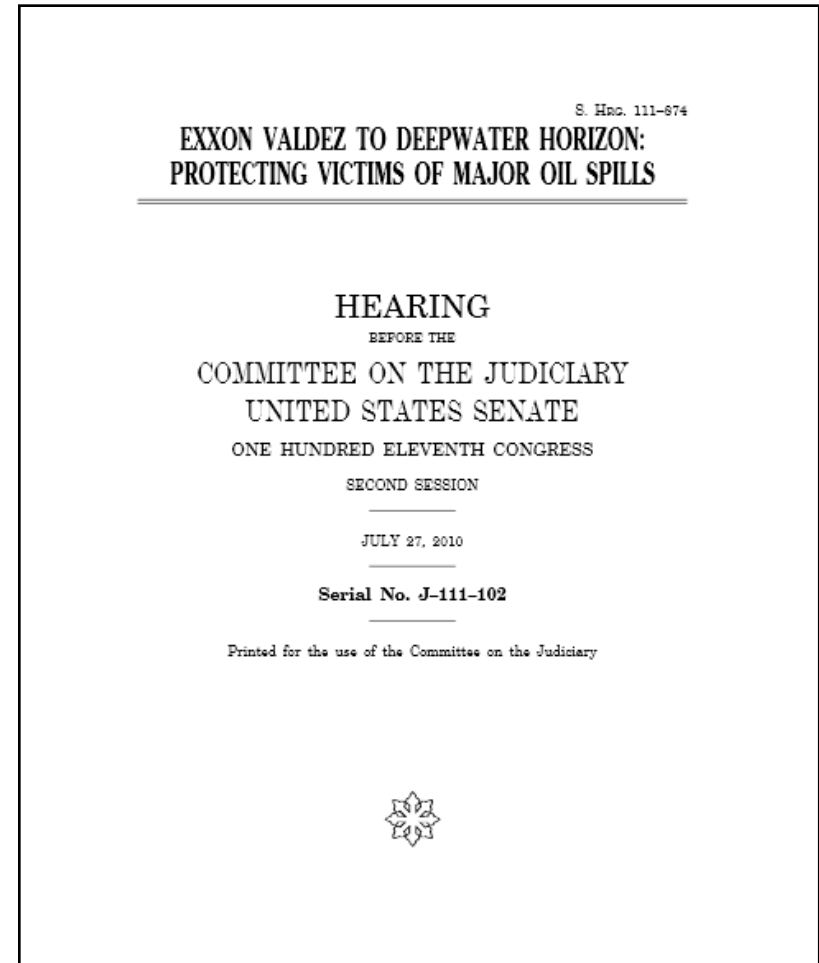


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- **Names matter (and they change)**
 - Bills and Acts are numbered (differently in House and Senate and Joint) and sometimes named, too (i.e. 'Obamacare' vs. 'Affordable Care Act')
 - Publications (Annals of Congress > Congressional Record)
 - Agencies ('Health Education and Welfare' became separate departments of Health and Human Services and Education)
 - Committees
 - **Names/Numbers/Dates will make your life easier if you have them**
 - Name of congressperson, witness, committee, bill, etc.
 - What congress AND what session
 - Day/Date of votes, floor discussion, hearings, etc.
 - Bill number (was it in the House or Senate)
 - Serial Set Numbers
-



- **Congressional Hearings**
- **Serial Set**
- **Congressional Record**
- **CBO Reports**
- **CRS Reports**
- **Legislative Histories**





Congressional Hearings: What are they?

- Meeting or session of a Senate, House, joint, or special committee of Congress
 - Used to obtain information and opinions on proposed legislation, conduct an investigation, or evaluate/oversee the activities of a government department or the implementation of a Federal law.
 - May also be purely exploratory in nature, providing testimony and data about topics of current interest.
 - Contain data and testimonies from a wide variety of sources
 - Most congressional hearings are published two months to two years after they are held. Some are never published.
-



Congressional Hearings: What are they used for?

- Researching a particular issue or policy – often considered primary sources for students
 - Researching the inner workings of Congress – committee structure, power plays among members, etc.
 - Researching special interests via witnesses called to testify
 - Tracking issues over time (Nuclear nonproliferation during the Cold War vs. after The Cold War)
 - Evaluating the relationship between Congress and the Administration (confirmation hearings).
 - Wonderful source of data
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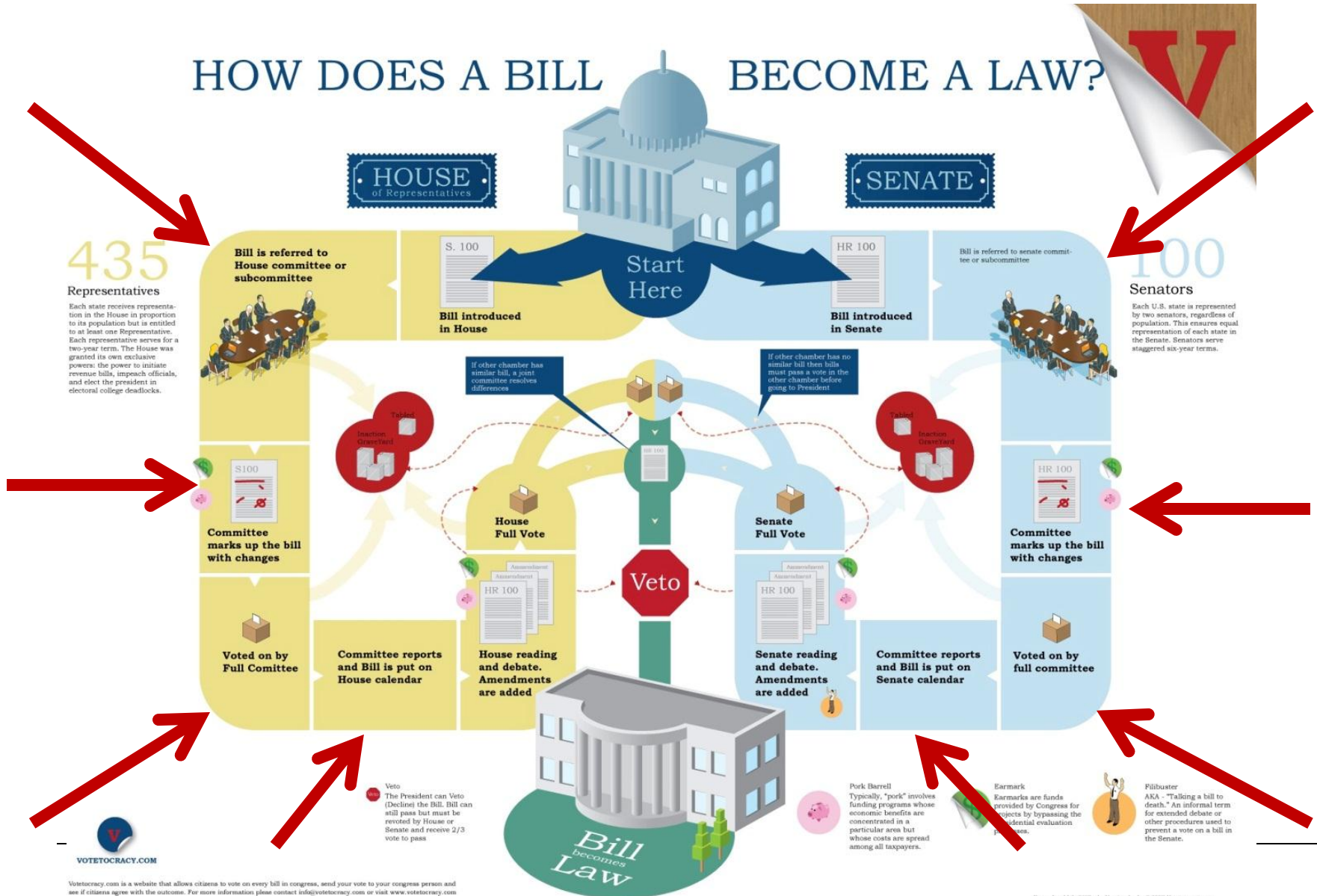


Congressional Hearings: How do you find them?

- **In Print or Microfiche**
 - **Online for Free**
 - [FDsys](#) (99th – 113th Congress 1985 - Current)
 - [C-SPAN Video Library](#) (selected hearings)
 - **Online for \$\$**
 - ProQuest Congressional
 - WestLaw
-



HOW DOES A BILL BECOME A LAW?

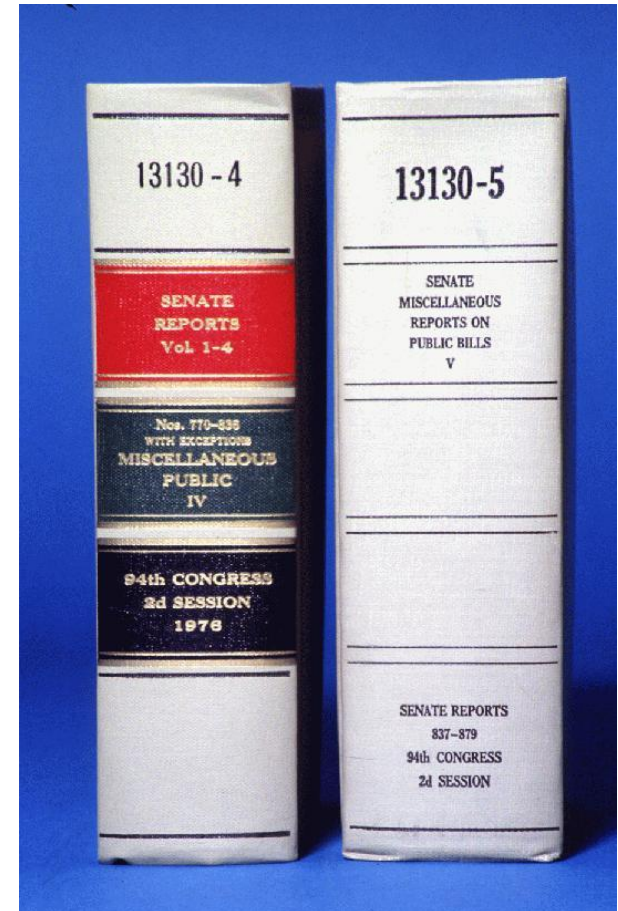


<http://visual.ly/how-does-bill-become-law>

- **Began with the 15th Congress, 1st Session (1817)**
 - **Documents before 1817 may be found in the [American State Papers](#).**
 - **Documents cover a wide variety of topics and may include**
 - Reports of executive departments and independent organizations,
 - Reports of special investigations made for Congress
 - Publications about the history of the government, institutions and architecture of Washington
 - Annual reports of non-governmental organizations.
 - During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, executive-branch materials were also published in the *Serial Set*.
 - **Useful in researching almost anything to do with government, policy, legislation, etc.**
 - **[Additional info](#) from GPO:**
-

- **Contains:**
 - House Documents
 - Senate Documents
 - House Reports
 - Senate Reports
 - Senate Treaty Documents
 - **Documents** are primarily the information coming **IN** to the committee. This includes texts of various executive communications to Congress, executive agencies' annual or special reports to Congress, accounts of committee activities and committee-sponsored special studies, and a miscellany of publications such as ceremonial tributes to individuals or reports of patriotic organizations.
 - **Reports** are primarily the information coming **OUT** of a committee to the larger body (House or Senate). This is how congressional committees formally report and make recommendations to the Senate or House as a whole concerning their findings and deliberations regarding specific pieces of legislation, or their investigative or oversight activities.
 - Can sometimes be the most informative documents related to the creation of specific legislation. They can provide the data the committee used in their decision-making, and can provide insight into the thinking behind a particular piece of proposed legislation.
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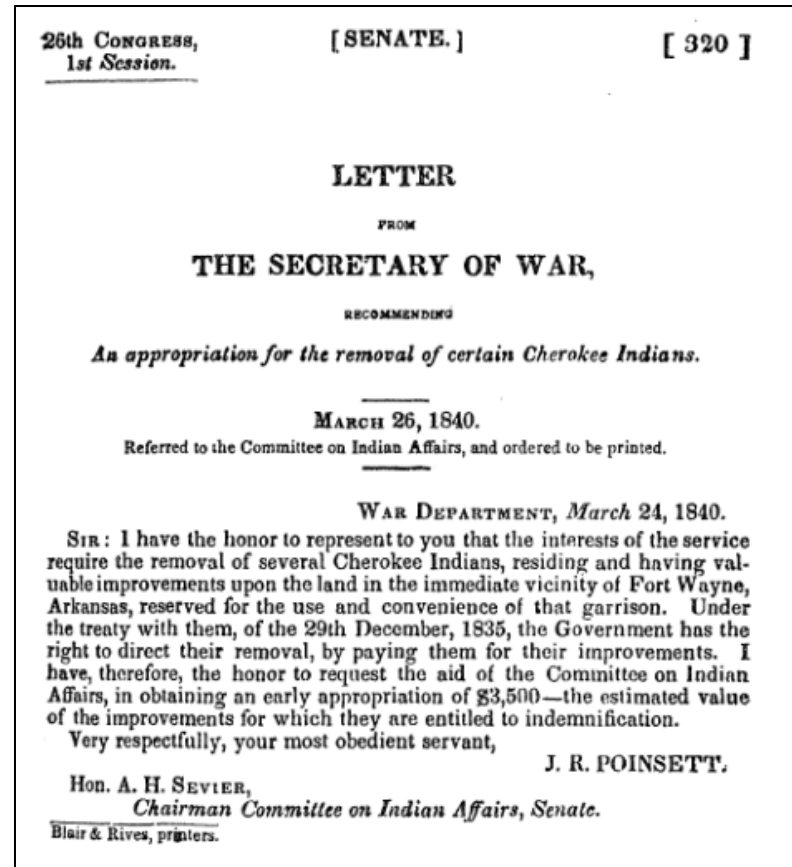
- **In Print (bound volumes or microfiche)**
- **Online for Free**
 - [Congressional Reports](#)
(104th – 113th Congress 1995 – Current)
 - [Congressional Documents](#)
(94th – 113th Congress 1975 – Current)
 - [Library of Congress](#)
(23rd – 64th Congress 1833-1917)
- **Online for \$\$**
 - ProQuest Congressional
 - Hein Online
 - Readex





Serial Set: What is it Used For?

- Researching a particular policy
- Researching a particular Congress
- Researching topics across time
- Researching organizations or institutions
- Tribute volumes are often of particular interest
- Early Serial Set volumes include things like
 - Annual Reports of government agencies
 - Reports on the relocation of the Cherokee
 - Discussion on financing the Lewis and Clark expedition, etc.





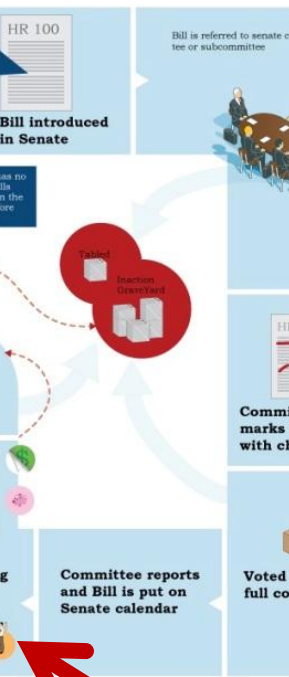
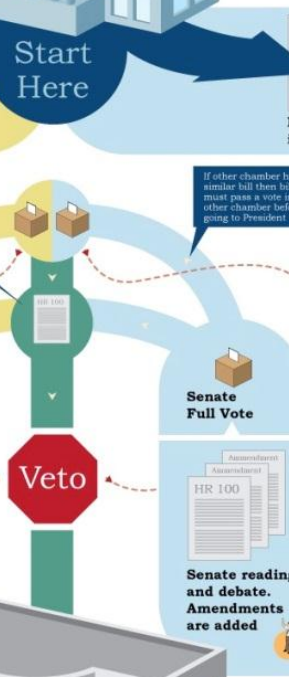
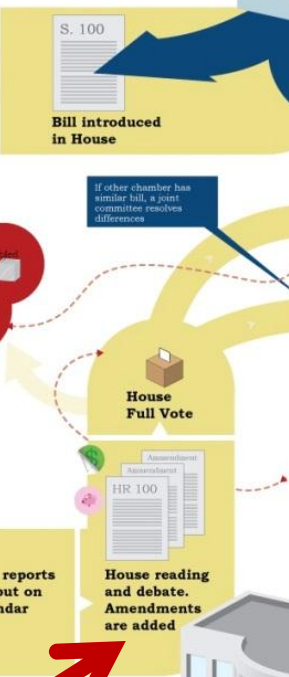
- **It is the official record of the proceedings and debates of the United States Congress.**
 - **Title Changes**
 - Annals of the Congress of the United States: 1st – 18th Congresses (1789-1824)
 - Register of Debates in Congress: 18th Congress 1st session – 25th Congress 1st session (1824–1837)
 - Congressional Globe: 23rd through 42nd Congresses (1833–1873)
 - Congressional Record: 43rd Congress (1874) – Present
 - **Covers what happens on the floor of Congress (NOT what happens in committees)**
 - **Important to know:** Members of Congress can revise or extend their remarks and for most of the years of congress these are not indicated in the CR. Now, they are in a different typeface or indicated with a bullet.
 - Additional info available here: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/abt.cong.rec.html>
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Veto

Veto
The President can Veto (Decline) the Bill. Bill can still pass but must be re-voted by House or Senate and receive 2/3 vote to pass

Pork Barrel
Typically, "pork" involves funding programs whose economic benefits are concentrated in a particular area but whose costs are spread among all taxpayers.

Earmark
Earmarks are funds designated by Congress for projects bypassing the President's vetting process.



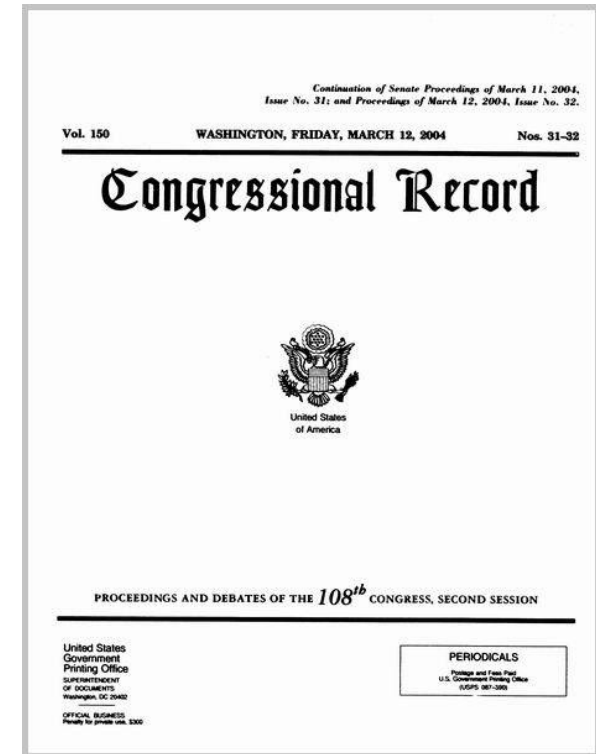
Filibuster
AKA - "Talking a bill to death." An informal term for extended debate or other procedures used to prevent a vote on a bill in the Senate.

<http://visual.ly/how-does-bill-become-law>



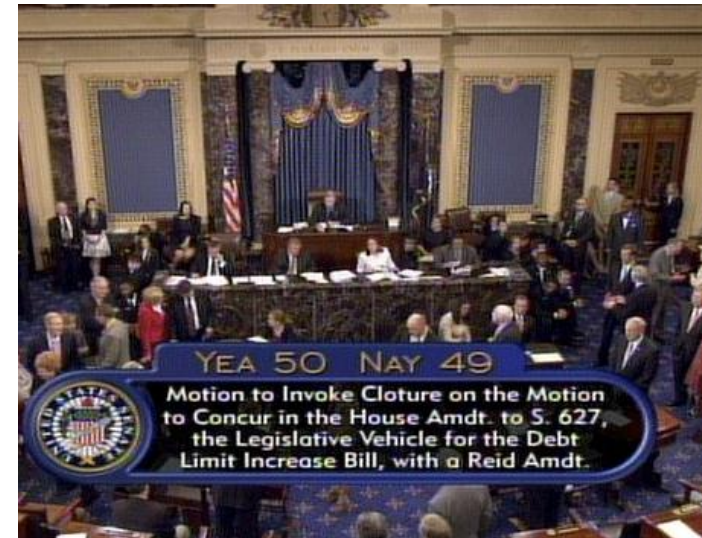
Consists of

- House section and Senate section each covering floor debate and business.
- Extensions of Remarks (speeches, tributes and other clarifications that were not actually uttered during open proceedings – formerly called Appendix)
- Daily Digest (Summary of what happens)
- Index for each session of congress by name & subject
- Also contains communications from the President and the Executive Branch, memorials, petitions, and various information (including amendments and cosponsors)

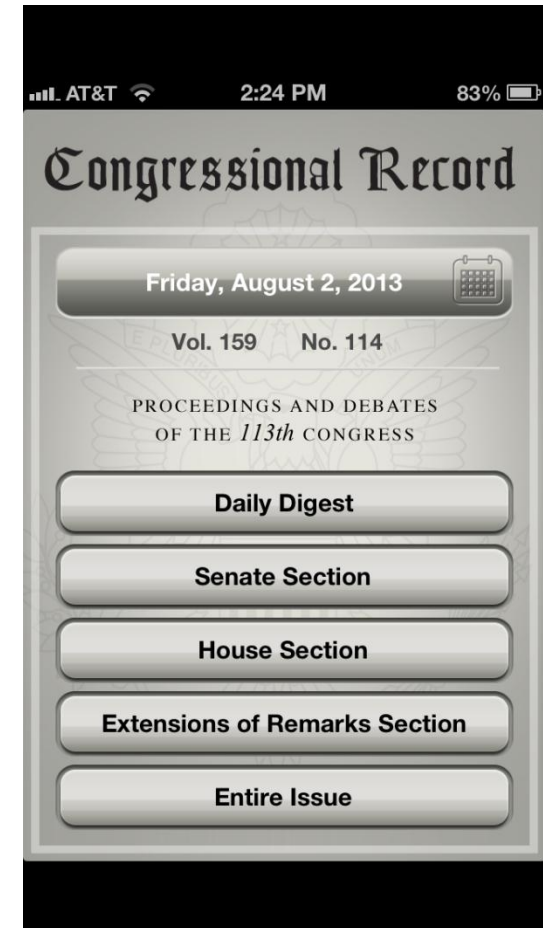




- **To track debates on topics across time (compare Prohibition and Repeal debates)**
- **Congressional Rhetoric**
- **To look at members 'Record' on particular issues**
- **Tracks votes**
- **Demonstrates changes in procedure over time**



- **In Print or Microfiche**
- **Online for Free**
 - [FDSys](#) (1994 – present)
 - [THOMAS](#) from LOC (1989 – Present)
 - [American Memory from LOC](#) (1773 – 1874)
 - [iOS App](#) (back to 1995)
 - [C-SPAN Video Library](#) (selected debates)
- **Online for \$\$**
 - ProQuest Congressional
 - Hein Online
 - WestLaw



- **Congressional Research Service**

- Nonpartisan
 - Congress' 'think tank'
 - Policy group staffed by experienced researchers, economists, policy analysts and statisticians
 - Existed informally earlier but was codified in 1946 and called The Legislative Research Service. Renamed CRS in 1970.
 - Does not provide reports to the public except through your congressperson (or FOIA request).
 - Available Online in ProQuest Congressional but not widely for free
 - Major Studies and Issue Briefs of the CRS was also put out in MF
 - Some can be found online – for example: <https://opencrs.com/>
 - Goldmine of information for researchers on any topic.
 - Example: “Youth and the Labor Force: Background and Trends” from July 2013
-

- **Congressional Budget Office**

- Created in 1974
 - Nonpartisan
 - Provides economic data to congress
 - Publishes reports in print (SuDoc Y10.2) and online (<http://www.cbo.gov/topics/>) back to 94th Congress (1975-76)
 - Reports analyze economic impact of proposed legislation as well as enacted legislation
 - Really useful for students writing policy analysis or policy proposal papers
 - Example: [The Economic Impact of S. 744, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act](#)
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What are they?

- Allows you to track a law from it's first appearance as a bill in the house or Senate all the way through the hearings, revisions, discussions and votes.
- Usually used to teach legislative process or to determine intent behind a law

Legislative History < Back to res

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Title Info

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Legislative History of: | PL111-148 |
| Title: | Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act |
| Date: | March 23, 2010 |
| Length: | 906 p. |
| Enacted Bill: | 111 H.R. 3590 ; Retrieve Bill Tracking Report |
| Congress Session: | 111-2 |
| CIS-Number: | 2010-PL111-148 |
| PL Number: | P.L. 111-148 |
| Statute at Large: | 124 Stat. 119 |
| Bills: | 107 S. 2933; 108 H.R. 2490; 108 S. 333; 108 S. 2940; 109 H.R. 4993; 109 S. 2010; 110 H.R. 20; 110 H.R. 1783; 110 H.R. 2833; 110 H.R. 3163; 110 H.R. 6444; 110 S. 334; 110 S. 1070; 110 S. 2236; 111 H.R. 3590; 111 S. 1796; 111 H.R. 20; 111 H.R. 1740; 111 H.R. 3200; 111 H.R. 3962; 111 S. 324; 111 S. 1679; 111 S. 1790; 111 H.Res. 903; 111 H.Res. 1203; |

How do they work?

- **Before you begin your research, it helps to know at least one of the following two pieces of information:**
 - The public law citation or the Statutes at Large citation (e.g. P.L. 107-56; 115 Stat. 272)
 - The bill number and Congress of the Act or Resolution (e.g. H.R. 3162 from the 107th Congress)

How do you find them:

- Proquest Congressional
 - ProQuest Legislative Insight
 - Hein Online, Westlaw, LexisNexis
 - On the open web in places like:
 - http://www.justice.gov/jmd/ls/legislative_histories/legislative-histories.html
 - <http://www.llsdc.org/Leg-Hist/>
-

- **Congress/Session Numbers with corresponding Congressional Record/Debates volumes**
 - **GovDoc-L Listserv - <http://govdoc-l.org/>**
 - **Schoolhouse Rock ‘I’m Just a Bill’**
 - **Research Guides**
 - http://hcl.harvard.edu/research/guides/us_congressional/
 - <http://libguides.nps.edu/content.php?pid=437875&sid=3584211>
 - <http://guides.library.tamu.edu/content.php?pid=302472>
-



Questions?

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<http://www.slideshare.net/roztedford/basics-of-congressionalresearch>

OR

<http://slidesha.re/15Ol9jf>



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 - **September 25: Gov Info Tour with Alex Simons**
 - **October 16-18: NCLA Biennial Conference**

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