

CRS Report for Congress

Tracking Current Federal Legislation and Regulations: A Guide to Resources

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Tracking Current Federal Legislation and Regulations: A Guide to Resources

Summary

This guide has been designed to introduce congressional staff to selected official government and commercial sources that are useful in tracking and obtaining background information and specific facts on the status of federal legislative or regulatory initiatives. By using a variety of these sources, congressional staff can track federal legislation and regulations.

Those who prefer weekly overviews would be interested in such commercial publications such as *CQ Weekly*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. For daily coverage, helpful resources are the *Congressional Record*, *CQ Today*, (formerly *CQ Daily Monitor*), the *Federal Register*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. Databases such as GPO Access, LexisNexis, Westlaw, and the websites of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate are also useful.

The *Code of Federal Regulations*, the *Index to the Code of Federal Regulations*, and the *CIS/Index to Publications of the United States Congress* provide subject access to regulatory and legislative publications. Government sources such as the Legislative Resource Center, the White House's Office of the Executive Clerk, and the Office of the Federal Register can give brief information on legislative and regulatory developments too new to have been captured by standard online or printed sources. Capsule descriptions of directories and other media sources are provided. Annotations for each source contain publisher contact information. This report will be updated as needed.

Additional information on tracking legislation for congressional offices is provided in CRS Report RL30796, *Legislative Research in Congressional Offices: A Primer*, and CRS Report RS20991, *Legislative Planning: Considerations for Congressional Staff*.

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Tracking Current Federal Legislation and Regulations: A Guide to Resources

Introduction¹

Tracking the status of current federal legislation and regulations is often viewed as a difficult task, requiring a vast library of costly resources, in-depth knowledge of the issues, and strong familiarity with the federal government's inner workings. This is not necessarily so. Although access to sophisticated databases and comprehensive knowledge of the federal government may help, it is possible for most congressional staff to follow an issue by using a variety of resources readily available. The scope of the issue will determine how complicated and time-consuming the process will be.

This guide has been designed to introduce researchers to selected authoritative government and commercial sources that are useful in tracking and obtaining background information or specific facts on the status of federal legislative or regulatory initiatives. The sources are arranged alphabetically in two broad sections: tracking current federal legislation and tracking current federal regulations. The sections are organized into subcategories composed of official government and commercial sources. Additional commercial resources, primarily newspapers, have also been included. Annotations describing each source's contents and organization are included so that researchers can select those that most closely fit their needs. Internet addresses usually provide information about the items, rather than access to them.

Most of the publications cited in this guide are available in local public or research libraries. Federal publications can often be found in libraries designated as federal depository libraries. To get their addresses, contact a local library; telephone the office of Depository Services of the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) at (202) 512-1119; or go to the Locate a Federal Depository Library page on the GPO Access website at [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/libraries.html>].

For all other materials, publisher contact information has been provided. Since pricing structures vary by subscriber type and prices change frequently, publishers must be contacted to obtain the latest order information. GPO publications can be ordered, prepaid, by mail, telephone (toll-free 866-512-1800), or fax (202-512-2250) on any Discover, MasterCard, VISA, or American Express credit card from Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954.

¹ This report was originally authored by CRS Information Specialist Carol D. Davis.

Tracking Current Federal Legislation

Action on legislation passed or pending in the current Congress, and its status in the legislative process, is reported in the *Congressional Record*. This is the primary source for the text of floor debates and the official source for recorded votes.

An accurate and widely used database, the Legislative Information Service (LIS) [www.congress.gov] website is a portal to a variety of commercial, academic, and government legislative sources, including LIS specialized databases. LIS databases, identified by the LIS logo on the search pages, include Bill Summary and Status, Bill Text, the *Congressional Record*, and Committee Reports. (The *Congressional Record* can be accessed from LIS.) Basic information about bills, including the sponsor and cosponsors, committees of referral, official or long title, and status appears in the Bill Summary & Status file the day after introduction of the measure.

Since some current legislation amends previously enacted law, it may be necessary at times to consult the earlier laws in the *United States Statutes at Large* or the *United States Code* at [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>] and [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/uscode/index.html>].

Official Government Sources

Congressional Record

[<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord/index.html>]

Superintendent of Documents
P.O. Box 371954
Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954

Tel: (866) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2250

Frequency: Published each day that one or both chambers are in session, except infrequent instances when two or more consecutive issues are printed together.

The *Congressional Record* contains the edited transcript of activities on the floor of the House and the Senate. The “Daily Digest” section summarizes action in each chamber, committee hearings, new public laws, and committee meetings scheduled for the next legislative day. Indexes are issued twice a month. The subject index section can be used to identify bills by topic, and the “History of Bills and Resolutions” section tracks action on specific bills. The indexes, which are available online at [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cri/index.html>], are eventually cumulated into bound volumes.

Daily Calendar Information. Both political parties in the Senate and the House provide recorded messages about the proceedings on the floor of each chamber every day they are in session. Call the following numbers for these cloakroom recordings:

Senate: (202) 224-8601 (Republican)	House: (202) 225-7430 (Republican)
(202) 224-8541 (Democratic)	(202) 225-7400 (Democratic)

GPO Access[<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html>]

GPO Access User Support Team	Tel: (202) 512-1800
Superintendent of Documents	(866) 512-1800
U.S. Government Printing Office	Fax: (202) 512-2104
732 North Capitol Street, NW	
Mail Stop: IDCC	
Washington, DC 20401	
E-mail: ContactCenter@gpo.gov	

The Government Printing Office (GPO) provides free Internet access to a wide variety of legislative, regulatory, and executive material, such as congressional bills, the *Congressional Record* and the *Congressional Record Index* (including the “History of Bills and Resolutions” section), congressional calendars, public laws, selected congressional reports and documents, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, the *Federal Register*, and the *Code of Federal Regulations*. Time spans covered vary by category.

Legislative Information Service (LIS) at [<http://www.congress.gov>]. Legislative Information System provides Members of Congress and their staffs access to legislative information that is accurate, timely, and complete. This website, accessible only to Members and their staff, is a portal to a variety of commercial, academic, and government legislative sources, including LIS specialized databases. LIS databases, identified by the LIS logo on the search pages, include Bill Summary and Status, Bill Text, the *Congressional Record*, and Committee Reports. Basic information about bills, including the sponsor and cosponsors, committees of referral, official or long title, and status appears in the Bill Summary & Status file the day after introduction of the measure.

Legislative Resource Center (LRC). The Legislative Resource Center assists with the retrieval of legislative information and records of the House for congressional offices and the public. The Legislative Resource Center provides centralized access to all published documents originated and produced by the House and its committees, to the historical records of the House, and to public disclosure documents. The center combines the responsibilities of several previously separate offices — the House Library, House Historical Services, the House Document Room, the Office of Legislative Information, and the Office of Records and Registration. For assistance regarding the status of current legislation, call (202) 225-1772.

Public Laws Update Service. Information on new public law numbers assigned to recently enacted public laws can be obtained from a recorded message maintained by the National Archives and Records Administration’s Office of the Federal Register at (202) 741-6043 or by subscribing to its Public Laws Electronic Notification Service (PENS) at [<http://listserv.gsa.gov/cgi-bin/wa.exe?SUBED1=publaws-l&A=1>].

U.S. Capitol Switchboard. The office of any Member of Congress, congressional committee, or congressional subcommittee can be reached by calling (202) 224-3121.

U.S. House of Representatives Home Page at [<http://www.house.gov>]. This Web source provides legislative details such as:

- recent major House floor and committee actions;
- legislative schedules;
- background information on, and links to material concerning the legislative process;
- directories of Representatives by state and by name;
- the chamber's leadership;
- House roll-call votes starting with the 101st Congress, second session (1990); and
- brief descriptions of floor proceedings when the House is in session.

U.S. Senate Home Page at [<http://www.senate.gov>]. Materials of legislative interest offered at this Internet source include the following:

- Senate calendars;
- background information on, and links to materials on the legislative process;
- Senate roll-call votes starting with the 101st Congress (1989);
- the chamber's leadership;
- descriptions of the Senate committee system and of individual committees;
- historical information about the Senate;
- directories of Senators by name, state, class (term expiration date), and party; and
- glossary of common legislative terms.

Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents

[<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/wcomp/index.html>]

Superintendent of Documents
P.O. Box 371954
Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954

Tel: (866) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2250

Frequency: Weekly, with quarterly, semiannual, and annual indexes.

This weekly periodical provides information such as the dates on which the President signed or vetoed legislation. Also, it contains transcripts of presidential messages to Congress, executive orders, and speeches and other material released by the White House.

White House Records. Via a recorded message, the Office of the Executive Clerk at the White House provides dates for the following information: presidential signings or vetoes of recent legislation; presidential messages; executive orders; and other official presidential action. If the desired information is not in the taped message, callers can stay on the line to speak with a staffer. The recorded message is available at (202) 456-2226.

Commercial Sources

Congressional Information Service(CIS)/Index to Publications of the United States Congress

[<http://www.lexisnexis.com/academic>]

LexisNexis Academic & Library Solutions
7500 Old Georgetown Road
Bethesda, MD 20814-6126
E-mail: academicinfo@lexisnexis.com

Tel: (301) 654 - 1550
(800) 638 - 8380
Fax: (301) 657- 3203

Frequency: Monthly index and abstracts issues, with quarterly indexes and annual cumulations.

This source provides detailed abstracts of congressional publications, such as printed hearings, reports, committee prints, and documents. Titles, subjects, publication numbers, bill numbers, and witness names can be searched. Also, the legislative histories of public laws are provided. Coverage dates are 1970 to the present.

CQ Today

[<http://www.cq.com>]

Congressional Quarterly, Inc.
1255 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Tel: (202) 419-8279
(800) 432-2250, ext. 279

Frequency: Monday through Friday when Congress is in session, with updates throughout the day on the Web.

This subscription newsletter provides daily news on Congress, such as planned floor action for the Senate and the House, bill and amendment descriptions, and notices of bill markup sessions and conference negotiations. Also, daily and selected future committee schedules are given. Significant sections are the “Pulse of Congress,” with behind-the-scenes information on Members and committees; “People on the Move,” which highlights congressional staff changes; and the “Appropriations” section, which appears during the appropriations cycle. Subscribers also receive an afternoon e-mail newsletter, *CQ Today Extra*, with the day’s latest news about Congress and updated information on the next day’s congressional schedule.

CQ Weekly

[<http://www.cq.com>]

Congressional Quarterly, Inc.
1255 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Tel: (202) 419-8279
(800) 432-2250, ext. 279

Frequency: Weekly, with special supplements and annual *Almanac*.

This weekly summary of congressional action and developments contains status tables for appropriations bills and other major legislation, roll-call vote charts for both chambers, and topical treatments of committee and floor actions. Most issues have articles that provide current and background information on legislative topics. Occasionally, special reports are printed. Quarterly indexes are issued. The annual

Congressional Quarterly Almanac is a comprehensive review of the year's legislative session.

CQ.com

[<http://www.cq.com>]

Congressional Quarterly, Inc
1255 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
E-mail: hotline@cq.com

Tel: (202) 419-8511
(800) 678- 8511

Bill texts, summaries, tracking, and analysis are provided in this database. Among its other features are forecasts of major pending bills; versions of bills; links to related bills; roll-call votes; legislative histories; floor and committee schedules; detailed committee coverage; texts of committee reports; transcripts of witnesses' testimony; and publications such as the *CQ Weekly*, *CQ Today* (formerly *CQ Daily Monitor*), the *Congressional Record*, and the *Federal Register*. Among CQ.com's access points are bill number, keyword, phrase, Member name, and date. Time spans covered vary by the category of information sought. Only CQ.com subscribers can access this system on the Internet.

Westlaw

[<http://www.westlaw.com>]

West Group
610 Opperman Drive
Eagan, MN 55123

Tel: (651) 687-7000

Although Westlaw was designed primarily as a legal reference database, many of its files contain material useful to anyone tracking legislation or regulations. For example, the *Congressional Record* is available in full text on this subscription service, as are the *Federal Register* and the current *Code of Federal Regulations*. Also available in full text are congressional bills, selected presidential documents, and federal laws. Only Westlaw subscribers can access the system.

Tracking Current Federal Regulations

Regulations are issued by federal departments and agencies under the authority delegated to them by federal law or presidential executive order and have the force of law. Final regulations are printed in the *Federal Register (FR)* and later codified by subject in the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)*. By using these two sources with their many indexes and tables, it is possible to identify existing regulations in a subject area or pertaining to a specific section of the *United States Code*, identify regulations issued pursuant to a specific public law, or find proposed regulations that are not yet final.

The *Federal Regulatory Directory* describes the regulatory responsibilities of more than 100 federal agencies, and the *Index to the Code of Federal Regulations* provides indexing to the *CFR*.

Official Government Sources

Code of Federal Regulations

[<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>]

Superintendent of Documents
P.O. Box 371954
Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954

Tel: (866) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2250

Frequency: Revised annually (about one quarter of the titles at a time) in January, April, July, and October.

The *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* codifies final regulations having general applicability and legal effect that first appeared in the *Federal Register*. Its 50 titles are arranged by subject. Since the annual revision incorporates new regulations and drops superseded ones, the *CFR* reflects regulations in effect at the time of printing. Several indexes and tables accompany the set.

Federal Register

[<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>]

Superintendent of Documents
P.O. Box 371954
Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954

Tel: (866) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2250
Customer Service: (202)
741-6000

Frequency: Daily, Monday through Friday; not published on Saturdays, Sundays, or federal holidays.

The *Federal Register (FR)* is the official announcement of regulations and legal notices issued by federal departments and agencies. These include proposed and final federal regulations having general applicability and legal effect; executive orders and presidential proclamations; documents required to be published by act of Congress; and other federal documents of public interest. It also updates the *CFR*. Daily and monthly indexes, and an accompanying publication, *List of CFR Sections Affected*, aid in its use.

The *Register* also publishes the “Unified Agenda of Federal Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions” twice a year (usually in April and October) at [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/ua/index.html>]. This document provides advance notice of proposed rulemaking by listing all rules and proposed rules that more than 60 federal departments, agencies, and commissions expect to issue during the next six months. Regulations that concern the military or foreign affairs, or that deal only with agency personnel, organization, or management matters, are excluded. The agenda is available online from 1994 through the present at [<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/us/index/html>], and can be searched by subject, agency, and *Code of Federal Regulations* part number.

Congressional staffers who need copies of pages of the *Federal Register* can photocopy as many pages as they need in person at the Office of the Federal Register. The address is the National Archives and Records Administration, 800 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001. For information on per-page copying costs and hours of operation, contact the *Federal Register* at number above.

GPO Access

[<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html>]

GPO Access User Support Team
Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
732 North Capitol Street, NW
Mail Stop: IDCC
Washington, DC 20401
E-mail: ContactCenter@gpo.gov

Tel: (202) 512-1800
(866) 512-1800
Fax: (202) 512-2104

The Government Printing Office provides free Internet access to the *Code of Federal Regulations*, the codification of the general and permanent rules published in the *Federal Register* by the executive departments and agencies of the federal government. It is divided into 50 titles that represent broad areas subject to federal regulation. Each volume of the CFR is updated once each calendar year and is issued on a quarterly basis.

Office of Management and Budget's "Regulatory Matters" Web Page

[<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/regpol.html>]

Reviewing proposed and final federal regulations is the job of the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), which focuses on cost-benefit analysis. Information on regulations that OIRA is reviewing or has reviewed during the past 30 days can be found on the "Regulatory Matters" page of the OMB website at the Web address given above. Also available is data on rules reviewed by the agency since 1981.

RegInfo.gov

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

This website is produced by OMB and General Services Administration (GSA). Here you will find a list of all rules undergoing OIRA EO 12866 regulatory review. Updated daily, a list of all rules on which review has been concluded in the past 30 days; lists and statistics on regulatory reviews dating back to 1981; and letters to agencies regarding regulatory actions.

Regulations.gov

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

This website was launched by the federal government in 2003 to enhance public participation in federal regulatory activities. Here, people can search and view proposed regulations from about 160 federal departments and agencies. Also, every entry links to a comment form that readers can complete and submit to the appropriate department or agency. Regulations.gov is updated each business day with proposed new regulations. Among the database's search options are

- keyword or subject;
- department or agency name;

- regulations published today;
- comments due today;
- open regulations or comments by publication dates; and
- *Code of Federal Regulations* citation.

White House Records (202) 456-2226

The Office of the Executive Clerk at the White House provides a recorded message with information on the dates that executive orders and presidential proclamations appeared in the *Federal Register*. If the desired information is not included in the taped message, callers can also be connected with a staffer.

Commercial Sources

Citation Publishing, Inc.

[<http://www.citation.com>]

Citation Publishing, Inc.
92 Argonaut Street, Suite 255
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656
E-mail: sales@citation.com
Frequency: Daily

Tel: (949) 770-2000
(800) 808-3372

Full-text access to the daily *Federal Register* and to the current *Code of Federal Regulations* is available through this company's CyberREGS Online database. Although the company focuses on environmental issues, this database is not limited solely to that area. Only CyberREGS Online subscribers have web access this system on the Web.

Federal Regulatory Directory

[<http://www.cqpress.com>]

CQ Press
1255 22nd Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20037
E-mail: customerservice@cqpress.com
Frequency: Every two years

Tel: (866) 427-7737
(202) 729-1800
Fax: (800) 380-3810

Profiles of the mandates and operations of more than 100 federal regulatory agencies are provided in this directory. Each profile gives a brief history and description of the agency and its regulatory oversight responsibilities, and lists key staff, information sources, legislation, and regional offices. An overview of the federal regulatory process is provided. Other aids are the full texts of key regulatory acts and executive orders, a guide to using the *Federal Register* and the *Code of Federal Regulations*, and subject and name indexes.

Index to the Code of Federal Regulations

[<http://www.lexisnexis.com/academic>]

LexisNexis Academic & Library Solutions
7500 Old Georgetown Road
Bethesda, MD 20814-6126
E-mail: academicinfo@lexisnexis.com

Tel: (301) 654-1550
(800) 638-8380
Fax: (301) 657-3203

Frequency: Annual, with quarterly updates

This *Index to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* is arranged by subject; geography (by political entities or federally regulated properties), proper name of physical entities administered by the government (national parks, monuments, etc.); official headings for each section of the *CFR*; and new and revised *CFR* sections numbers.

LexisNexis Congressional

[<http://www.lexisnexis.com/academic>]

LexisNexis Academic & Library Solutions
7500 Old Georgetown Road
Bethesda, MD 20814-6126
E-mail: academicinfo@lexisnexis.com

Tel: (301) 654-1550
(800) 638-8380
Fax: (301)657-3203

This fee database contains detailed abstracts of congressional publications such as hearings, reports, documents, and committee prints. It is the enhanced Web-based counterpart of the *CIS/Index to Publications of the United States Congress* (see the “Printed Sources” section). Also provided are links to the full texts of many congressional and federal documents, such as the *Congressional Record*, congressional hearing transcripts, the *Federal Register*, and the *Code of Federal Regulations*. Length of coverage varies depending on the category of information sought. These and other sources are accessible only to subscribers.

Westlaw

[<http://www.westlaw.com>]

West Group
610 Opperman Drive
Eagan, MN 55123

Tel: (651) 687-7000

Although Westlaw was designed primarily as a legal reference database, many of its files contain material useful to anyone tracking legislation or regulations. For example, the *Congressional Record* is available in full text on this subscription service, as are the *Federal Register* and the current *Code of Federal Regulations*. Also available in full text are congressional bills, selected presidential documents, and federal laws. Only Westlaw subscribers can access the system.

Additional Commercial Sources

Information on what is happening in Washington can be gathered by exposure to an assortment of editorial perspectives, “inside” reporting, and political analysis.

Examples of major daily newspapers offering these types of coverage are *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*. Weekly magazines such as *National Journal*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report* also provide regular coverage of the Washington scene and are on the Web.

Similarly, Web-based media sources also provide such political coverage. Examples of these include the following:

The American Spectator

[<http://www.spectator.org/>]

The American Spectator is a conservative-leaning American monthly magazine covering news and politics.

C-SPAN.org

[<http://www.c-span.org>]

C-SPAN is a private, non-profit company, created in 1979 by the cable television industry as a public service. Its mission is to provide public access to the political process. C-SPAN receives no government funding; operations are funded by fees paid by cable and satellite affiliates who carry C-SPAN programming.

The Hill

[<http://www.hillnews.com>]

The Hill is a non-partisan weekly newspaper covering Congress and its members.

CNN.com: Inside Politics

[<http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS>]

CNN.com delivers breaking news and information on top stories, weather, business, entertainment, politics, and more.

The Nation

[<http://www.TheNation.com>]

The Nation is self-described as “America’s oldest weekly journal of progressive political and cultural news, opinion and analysis.”

National Review Online

[<http://www.nationalreview.com>]

The National Review Online provides conservative commentary on politics, news, and culture.

Roll Call

[<http://www.rollcall.com>]

Roll Call daily newspaper has been covering Capitol Hill news since 1955. (Rollcall.com is only available on subscription basis - free for print subscribers.)

Slate

[<http://slate.msn.com>]

Slate online magazine of liberal news and commentary on culture and politics