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Recommended Citation

Roger Williams University School of Law Library, "Law Library Briefs" (2005). *Law Library Newsletters/Blog*. 20.

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Law Library Briefs

Roger Williams University School of Law Library



No. 20, March, 2005

Researching Federal Legislation

For those who are researching federal legislation, there are various electronic resources to use in addition to LexisNexis and Westlaw databases. These include the subscription service, *LexisNexis Congressional*, and the free, public services of FirstGov, GPO Access, and the Library of Congress' THOMAS World Wide Web System. These websites enable you to research a bill from its introduction in Congress until its final disposition. Materials may include the full text or summary of the bill, amendments to the bill, its status in a committee, a committee hearing or report, legislative floor debate, a Presidential statement accompanying its enactment into law or veto, and the text of the bill as enacted into law. For information on "How Congress Makes Laws," check out <http://thomas.loc.gov>. For a fun review of the legislative process, check out "I'm Just a Bill" at <http://www.school-house-rock.com/Bill.html>.

A service subscribed to by the Law Library is *LexisNexis Congressional*, accessible by clicking the "Online Resources" link from the Law Library's home page. At

LexisNexis Congressional, you can search publications such as full-text bills, committee reports, and the *Congressional Record*. Congressional testimony available on *LexisNexis Congressional* includes transcripts of prepared questions and answers and prepared statements. You can also track the status of your bill and the full text of the bill as enacted into law. Generally, searching for information is by keyword or by bill number with an option to restrict your search by congressional session. Information about committees and individual members of Congress is also available via *LexisNexis Congressional*.

A *FirstGov* (<http://www.firstgov.gov>) is "The U.S. Government's Official Web Portal" providing information for citizens, businesses, and nonprofits on all branches of the federal government.

You can access a listing of links to websites for the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives by clicking the "Federal Legislative" link under the heading "By Organization." These websites include those of committees and leadership offices. There are also

links to websites of individual senators and representatives. Contacting the appropriate committee or sponsor(s) could yield up-to-date information about the status of your bill not yet found in any print or electronic resource.

A *GPO Access* (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov>) is a service of the U.S. Government Printing Office. Materials available at GPO Access are organized by the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. Clicking "Congressional Bills" enables one to conduct a keyword search of bills for the current congressional session. There is an option to browse bills by chamber and by type of bill (bills or resolutions). Clicking "View All" instead of "Congressional Bills" will retrieve a listing with links to congressional materials such as the *Congressional Record*, congressional hearings, and congressional reports.

A service of the U.S. Library of Congress, the *THOMAS World Wide Web System* at <http://thomas.loc.gov> (named after U.S. President Thomas Jefferson) provides access to various congressional materials. Available mate-

rials are categorized: Legislation, *Congressional Record*, and Committee Reports. From the home page, you can search bills for the current congressional session by keyword(s) or by bill number. Under "Legislation," you can browse the previous day's legislative action, search bills and resolutions, or search public laws. There are options to view the *Congressional Record's* "Daily Digest," browse the *Congressional Record* by date or by the keyword index, or conduct a search of the *Congressional Record*. You can also obtain the roll call votes for bills. At the THOMAS website, you can obtain full-text congressional committee reports. There are options to search committee reports by report number, by bill number, by committee, or by word/phrase. In addition to the committee reports, there are links to House and Senate committees' websites.

For further guidance in researching federal legislation, consult "Pathfinder on Researching Current Federal Legislation" (TimeSaver, No. 9) and "Researching Federal Legislative History" (TimeSaver, No. 19). These TimeSavers are available from the Law Library's website at <http://law.rwu.edu/Law+Library/Research+Guides.htm>.



New Photocopiers!

The old photocopiers in the Law Library have recently been re-

placed with new ones! You can still use your copycard with the new photocopiers.



Microforms : Federal Legislative Materials

For those who are researching federal legislative history, you might not find the needed materials available in print or electronic format. Do not despair! The Law Library's collection contains a variety of federal legislative materials in microfiche. These materials include the *Congressional Record* and its predecessors and the Congressional Information Service (CIS) Microfiche Library.

The *Congressional Record* is published everyday that Congress is in session and is the only source which publishes floor debate in the House and Senate. The *Congressional Record* and its predecessors provide coverage of the activities of each session of Congress since 1798.

The CIS Microfiche Library provides full-text microfiche copies of all publications abstracted in CIS Index volumes beginning in 1970 to present. These publications include Congressional committee reports and hearings. The microfiche in this set are filed chronologically by year and then numerically by committee, type of publication, and order of publication. It is important to record the year and the "CIS accession number" (99

S543-15) when performing research in the CIS indexes. The CIS Microfiche Library is also searchable using the Law Library's WebCatalog through the link "Search U.S. Congressional Documents, 1970 - 2001." You can search by author, title, subject, and words in the title. Separate microfiche collections published by CIS provide the text of additional historical documents; for example, the Law Library holds the complete *Serial Set* through 1969 on microfiche. This a collection covers all numbered Congressional reports and documents issued from 1789. As this collection is not searchable electronically, you will need to use the appropriate print index.



Computer Lab Monitor: Marcus Jones

Working as a Computer Lab Monitor this semester is first-year student Marcus Jones. Marcus is from Macon, Georgia and has a B.A. in Sociology and Political Science from Mercer University. He is a member of Phi Alpha Delta (P.A.D.) and a contributor to *The Docket*. After graduation from law school, his ideal job would be to work for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as he is interested in administrative law, discrimination issues, property law, and real estate law.

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