How to Trace a Bill Through Congress

Laws typically go through 48 separate stages, and major legislation may take several congressional sessions with several regenerations before finally passing. To understand and interpret the final law that is passed, alternate versions of the bill, hearings, and debates over wording can be helpful. The stages and resources outlined below will help you track a bill through Congress and locate various versions and supplementary material produced by Congress prior to its passage. See http://congress.gov/legislative-process for an overview of the legislative process.

Resources
- **Monthly Catalog** - Lists hearings and reports
  - 1895-1996: Ref Z 1223.A18
  - July 1976-present (replaced the Monthly Catalog)
    Search or see the “New Titles” tab for monthly additions 2005+
- **Calendars of the U.S. House of Representatives and History of Legislation and the Senate Calendar of Business**
  Indexes all legislation reported by committees and acted upon by either or both chambers.
  - 1979, 1983-present: Y 1.2/2
  - 104th Congress-present (1995+)
- **Checklist of Hearings Before Congressional Committees Through the Sixty-Seventh Congress (1921/23)**
  - Ref Z 1223.Z7 T5 (pts. 1-9)
    We don’t have volumes 1-3, which covers the House Committees on Agriculture through the Committee on Coinage, Weights & Measures
- **CIS Annual** – Ref KF 49.C62 (for 1995+ and full text of referenced documents, see the Law Library)
  Published in three volumes:
  - Index to Congressional Publications and Legislative Histories
  - Abstracts of Congressional Publications
  - Legislative Histories of U.S. Public Laws
- **Congressional Record (and preceding titles)**
  Provides detailed House and Senate proceedings, including entire speeches. Each Congressional Session includes a subject and bill number index. The subject index includes the names of Congressional members and refers to page numbers (pagination by Congressional Session).
  Print -
  - 1789-2009: 2nd floor journals
- 1873-present – *Congressional Record* J11.R5

Other Formats -
- 1990: Gov. Docs X (CD-ROM)

Online -
- 1789-1873: [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwcr.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwcr.html)

- **Cumulative Index to Congressional Committee Hearings**
    Lists hearings by subject, committee, and bill number. Search for the hearing title in WorldCat ([http://library.und.edu/db/worldcat](http://library.und.edu/db/worldcat)) or have a librarian search for it in the circulation system to try to find the relevant SuDoc number. Most are in Y4 J.

- **Congressional Quarterly Almanac**, 1948-present: Ref JK 1.C66

- **CQ Weekly** – Chronicles major legislation and includes votes
  - Vol. 33, 1975-present: 2nd floor journals, JK 1.C15
  - 1983-present: [http://library.und.edu/db/cq-weekly-report](http://library.und.edu/db/cq-weekly-report)

- **Digest of Public and General Bills and Resolutions (DPGBR)**
  Discontinued after the 101st Congress (1990)
  - 1986-1990: Gov Docs LC 14.6

- **House Journal** - Covers daily proceedings of the House
  - 1789-1873: [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwhjlink.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwhjlink.html)
  - 1817-1913: J 66.A2x (Microprint)
  - 1873-1953: Part of the *U.S. Serial Set*
  - 1953-present: Gov. Docs. XJH

- **Senate Journal** – Covers daily proceedings of the Senate
  - 1789-1873: [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsjlink.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsjlink.html)
  - 1817-1913: J 66.A2x (Microprint)
  - 1873-1953: Part of the *U.S. Serial Set*
  - 1953-present: Gov. Docs. XJS

  Note: Access to current years of the *Senate Journal* is presently unavailable electronically.

  Subject and Keyword indexing for the Serial Set (Y 1.1/2) of House and Senate reports and other documents by specific Congress

- **U.S. Serial Set**
  - 1817-1913: J66.A2x (microprint)
  - 1876-present: Gov. Doc. Y 1.1/2 (1876-1904 are in the back)
Slip Laws – Ref AE 2.110 (located in a box near the U.S. Code Ref KF 62.A1 U5)
Slip Laws are retained until the corresponding Statutes at Large volume is received

Statutes at Large
- 1789-1936: E 169.1.L5 (ultrafiche)
- 1789-1875: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsllink.html
- 1895-present (2010): Ref KF 50.U5x

United States Code (published every six years)
- 1982-last edition: Gov Doc Y 1.2/5
- 1925-present: LAW Libr. Y 1.2/5

Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents
- 1953-present: J80.A284 (Periodicals)

Introduced Print
Use the Congressional Record, the House Journal and the Senate Journal to locate introduced bills.

For the full text of a bill:
- Before 1981: Consult hearings held by the committee(s) that considered the bill. Use the Monthly Catalog or CIS Annual (Index Vol.) to find printed hearings. Both list publications by subject, bill title, and committee; the later also by public law number, bill number, and popular bill name.
- 1981-2000
  - House Bills – Microfiche Y 1.4/6:
    Include [Congress-bill #] after the colon to find the desired bill. Series includes bills at all parliamentary stages (introduced, marked-up, amended, etc.). Use a print finding aid to locate bill numbers.
  - Senate Bills – Microfiche Y 1.4/1:
    Include [Congress-bill #] after the colon to find the desired bill. Series includes bills at all parliamentary stages (introduced, marked-up, amended, etc.). Use a print finding aid to locate bill numbers.
- 1993+ (103rd Congress)
    Indexed and searchable bill text.
    Provides searchable bill text.
Committee Amendments Rejected
Minute books include committee roll-call votes and the text of amendments they voted on. Look for the printed transcript of a mark-up session; the supplemental, additional, or minority views contained in the committee report; floor amendments proposed by committee members; and the descriptions of committee action in *Congressional Quarterly’s Weekly Report* and other print and electronic media.

Resources:
- *CQ Weekly*
- *Congress.gov*
- *FDsys*

Committee Amendments Adopted
Look for printed mark-ups and committee reports. Use the same sources as above. If a committee reports a clean bill with a new number, in lieu of the introduced version on which hearings were held, this will be mentioned near the beginning of the report. In the Senate, if more than one report accompanies a bill, each includes a different report number. The house uses one number for all reports on a bill, but designates each report as a different part. Chambers use identical calendar numbers for all reports on the same bill. The report may also identify similar or identical measures introduced in prior Congresses by bill number. All reports are included in the *Serial Set* (Y 1.1/2) but appear in the *Congressional Record* only when they are read on the floor or printed therein by unanimous consent.

Resources
- *Serial Set*
- *Congressional Record (and preceding titles)*

Floor Amendments Adopted and Rejected
The *Congressional Record* index for each congressional session identifies all proposed amendments under the sponsor’s name, including amendments not formally offered or withdrawn before being acted upon. The History of Bills and Resolutions section of the index also cites all amendments offered on the floor of each house. You can also use the *Legislative Histories Annual* (part of the *Serial Set*) to identify relevant pages in the Proceedings section of the index.

Resources
- *Congressional Record (and preceding titles)*
- *FDsys*
  See their “History of a bill” link for legislative histories of bills from 1983+
- *Serial Set – Legislative Histories Annual* (annual volume part of the set)
**Act Print (Engrossed Bill)**

“Engrossed” refers to committee hearings held in the 2nd chamber to consider a bill, after the originating chamber has passed the bill. Use the same resources for identifying an Introduced Print (above), as they are “introduced” into the new chamber for consideration.

**Resources**
- Monthly Catalog
- Congress.gov
- FDsys
- House Bills
- Senate Bills

**Committee Amendments Rejected & Adopted (Act Print)**

When a committee amends and reports a bill passed by the other house, its report contains an explanation of its amendment(s) and is most likely to include the text if it reports a substitute. When action by the 2nd chamber results in passage with amendments, the changes are transcribed on separate paper. The engrossed bill and (new) engrossed amendment(s) are then delivered to the body of origin. Engrossed bills may not be altered by the other house. An accompanying message requests that the first chamber concur in the amendments.

**Resources**
- Congressional Record (and preceding titles)
- FDsys – See the “History of bills” link for bills from 1983+
- Congress.gov – Use for 1993+

**Conference Report**

When one house passes a substitute, this report contains the entire text of the bill. The text appears in the Congressional Record and in the Journal of each house. The Journals provide minutes of floor action, including matters considered by the House, votes, and other actions taken, but not the actual debates. Prior to 1953, Journals were included as Serial Set volumes.

**Resources**
- Congressional Record (and preceding titles)
- House Journal
- Senate Journal

**Vetoed Bill**

The Congressional Record, Monthly Catalog, CIS/Annual (Index), and the WeeklyCompilation of Presidential Documents lists measured returned by the president with a veto message. The Weekly Compilation includes the text of all messages submitted to Congress concerning legislation and public statements regarding the same. The text of all veto messages, including the bill, appears in the Congressional Record and the Journal of the house of origin. The Serial Set prints the text of the bill along with the message, as either a House or Senate Document, depending on the body of origin. The text of a pocket vetoed bill is compiled from its latest print, plus
amendments adopted that appear in the *Congressional Record*, including any conference report.

**Resources**
- *CIS Annual*
- *Congressional Record (and preceding titles)*
- *Monthly Catalog*
- *House Journal*
- *Senate Journal*
- *Serial Set*
- *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*

**Laws**
These are published in the *Statutes at Large* a few years after each Congressional session, after first appearing as “Slip Laws.” Eventually laws will be included in the appropriate section of the *U.S. Code*.

**Resources**
- *Slip Laws*
- *Statutes at Large*
- *United States Code*

**Companion Bills**
“Companion bills” are identical measures introduced in each house. If introduction in one chamber offers no clues as to history and objectives, such information may be available about its companion. Their number is given in the index to the bound *Congressional Record, House Calendar, Digest of Public General Bills and Resolutions (DPGBR), Daily Digest*, and *Statutes at Large*.

**Resources**
- *Congressional Record (and preceding titles)*
- *Calendars of the United States House of Representatives and history of legislation*

Adapted From: