A Guide to Legislative History, Presidential and Executive Agency Documents, and Advocacy Research
Locating Information for the Public Policy Paper/Presentation

Overview
This pathfinder will help you investigate the legislative history of a bill. It also serves as a guide to accessing Presidential and Executive Agency Documents, and information from and about advocacy groups.

Included in this pathfinder are:
I. Legislative History – Congressional Bills and Debates and Committee Reports. Hearings, and Prints
II. Executive Agency Documents – Executive Agency Reports and Presidential Signing or Veto Messages, etc.
III. Advocacy Research and Additional Aids - Advocacy Group information, additional web sites of interest, and Politics research reference materials

I. Legislative History
Identifying the legislature’s purpose in passing statutes and the legislature’s intended meaning for specific provisions of statutes requires students to investigate the legislative history of the statute. This process typically involves looking at the various versions of bills, committee prints, committee reports, and legislative debates.

1. Congressional Bills
Prior to its enactment as a law, a proposed piece of legislation is introduced as a bill or a joint resolution into either the House of Representatives (assigned an H.R. or H.J. Res. Number) or the Senate (assigned either an S. or S.J. Res. Number). When a bill is amended, or modified, it is usually reprinted with the amending language. The comparison of the language of the bill as introduced and its subsequent amendments may reveal legislative intent since the insertion or deletion of language may indicate a legislative choice.

Documents to identify and obtain, if they exist, include:
- The bill as originally introduced in the House or Senate
- The bill with any amendments
- The bill as it passed in the originating body and as introduced into the other house
- The bill as amended by the second house
- The bill as it passed by the second house
- The bill as amended by a conference committee of the House and Senate
- The public law

2. Committee Hearings
Hearings, which may be held by the committees of the House and Senate, are generally of two types. A hearing may be held to investigate matters of general concern. The second, more prevalent concerns proposed legislation. These hearings are held after a bill is assigned to a congressional committee.

The primary function of this type of hearing is to provide committee members with information that may be useful in their consideration of the bill. In most instances, transcripts of the hearings are published. When published, hearings contain the transcript of testimony, the questions of committee members and the answers of the witnesses, statements and exhibits submitted by interested parties, and occasionally the text of the bill that is the subject of the hearing.

However, it is important to remember that hearings are not held on all legislation and not all hearings are published. Also, hearings may have been held during a session of Congress prior to the one in which the law was enacted. Hearings also might have been held on proposed legislation containing similar provisions to the law being researched.

*It may be beneficial to extend the search for hearings beyond a particular session, or for legislation other than the law being researched.
Documents to identify and obtain, if they exist, include:
- The hearings held by the committees to which the bill was assigned
- The hearings from previous Congressional sessions concerning the subject matter of the bill being researched
- The hearings on related bills or bills containing similar provisions that may have been held in prior Congresses

3. **Committee Prints**
Committee prints are special studies in specific subject areas prepared for the use and reference of congressional committees and their staff. These publications could include bibliographies, analyses of similar bills on a subject, excerpts from hearings, etc.

Documents to identify and obtain, if they exist include:
- Documents that may have some relation to the legislation under consideration for the research being done.

4. **Committee Reports**
After a bill is introduced into either the House or Senate, it is assigned to one or more committees that have jurisdiction over the subject matter of the bill. If the bill does not “die in committee,” and the committee recommends its passage; it does so in a written committee report. The committee report usually includes the revised text of the bill, if any; the changes made in committee; an analysis of the intent and the content of the proposed legislation; and the rationale behind the committee’s recommendation. Most committee reports will also contain a minority report arguing against passage in the present form. The debate between supporters of the proposed legislation and its opponents in the committee report can be an excellent summary of the points of controversy surrounding the proposed legislation.

Committee reports are usually considered the most important documents in determining the legislative intent of Congress because they reflect the understanding of those members of Congress closely involved in studying the subject matter of and then drafting the proposed legislation.

Documents to identify and obtain, if they exist, include:
- The reports of the committees of both houses to which the bill was assigned
- The report of the conference committee of the House and Senate (This report is usually issued as a House report)

5. **Congressional Debates**
Debate on bill on the floor of the House or Senate can take place at almost any time during the legislative process, but most frequently the debate occurs after a bill has been reported out of the committee to which it was assigned. However, most public laws are passed without ever being debated on the floor of Congress. Usually, only bills of great public interest receive such debate.

Documents to identify and obtain, if they exist, include:
- The debates, if any, on the floor of both houses of Congress for the research being done

**Accessing Legislative History:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congressional Bills</th>
<th>• LexisNexis: Congressional Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Bills – Search bill tracking reports by keyword, sponsor or bill number, search the full text of bills, and retrieve bills by number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee Reports</th>
<th>• LexisNexis: Congressional Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Report – Search the full-text of committee reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ CIS Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Document Number – Search by report number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congressional Debates</th>
<th>• LexisNexis: Congressional Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Congressional Record – Search by keyword or by speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Presidential and Executive Agency Documents

Occasionally, other documents not developed by Congress are relevant to developing a legislative history. These may consist of presidential messages or reports and documents of federal agencies. The President or an executive agency’s members acting through the President often send proposed legislation to Congress for consideration. Presidential messages or executive agency memoranda may accompany the proposal to Congress. These documents explain the purpose and describe the President’s or agency’s intent of the legislation.

Also, after a bill passes Congress, it is sent to the President. If the President signs or vetoes the legislation, the President may add a signing statement or veto message, which incorporates the President’s rationale for the action taken on the legislation.

Documents to identify and obtain, if they exist, include:
- Presidential or executive agency reports accompanying proposed legislation sent to Congress by the President
- Presidential signing statements or veto messages

**Accessing Presidential or Executive Agency Documents:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presidential Documents</th>
<th>Executive Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The White House <a href="http://www.whitehouse.gov/">http://www.whitehouse.gov/</a></td>
<td>• Department of Energy (DOE) <a href="http://www.energy.gov/">http://www.energy.gov</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III. Advocacy Research and Additional Aids

1. Advocacy Research

Advocacy research includes the investigation of groups that participate in the act or process of advocating a cause. Environmental issues suffer no shortage of such groups. It is important to remember when accessing such information to keep in mind the bias of the author or promoter of the information. Caution! Be aware of bias!

Accessing Advocacy Group Web Sites

- Political Information.com – Environment

- Political Advocacy Groups: Environment
  http://www.csuchico.edu/~kcfount/environ.html

2. Additional Legislative History Web-related Web Sites

These web sites are from the University of Michigan’s Documents Center. These sites are excellent resources for additional information and access points to legislative and executive history.

- Public Policy Matrix
  http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/polproc.html

- Legislative Histories United States Congress
  http://www.lib.umich.edu/libhome/Documents.center/legishis.html

5. Law Reviews

Law reviews are journal articles published in legal periodicals. These articles are an excellent resource for researching case law and legislative history because they typically contain secondary source material providing historical context for what the law has been, what it is now, and what it might become. Also, law review articles reflect conflicting expert opinions about what the law should become.

Accessing Law Reviews

| | Legal Research
6. Books
Many books are published on the topic of legislative histories. Though books may not contain the most recent developments with regard to legislative action, they do typically provide in-depth coverage of specific action surrounding a bill or group of bills on a particular topic or issue.

Accessing Books

| Cole Online | • Cole Online is the catalog for Cole Library. It represents the Library’s physical holdings, including books. You can access it from the Library’s homepage at http://www.cornellcollege.edu/library/ |
| WorldCat (Available via FirstSearch) | • From the Cole Library homepage, select FirstSearch, select “WorldCat.”  
• Search for books by keyword, title, author, etc… (Reminder: WorldCat does not index journal articles, only books.)  
• You may request books Cole Library does not own via Interlibrary Loan from the Library’s homepage (under Services) at http://www.cornellcollege.edu/library/services/circ_otherlib.shtml. |

7. Additional Aids

Legal Research Reference Materials

| The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation, 17th Ed. | REF 340 B625 2000 |
| Black’s Law Dictionary | REF 340.03 B564b 1990 |
| Researching Constitutional Law, 2nd Ed. | REF 342.73 M492r 2000 |

For additional questions, or to schedule a research consultation, please contact:
Mandy Swygart-Hobaugh
Consulting Librarian for the Social Sciences
aswygart@cornellcollege.edu
Cole Library, #308
x4256