I. **A Brief Overview of the Legislative Process**

Before you begin researching with Legislative Insight, a brief background on the legislative process is helpful. The legislative process generally begins when an issue arises and it is determined that introducing a bill is the best way to address that issue.¹ Members of Congress are the only persons who can introduce a bill into Congress, but bills may be suggested and drafted by anyone, including Congressional aides, lobbyists, constituents, or the President.² Bills must be introduced during a House or Senate daily session, at which time the House or Senate Bill Clerk provides the bill number and it is determined whether the bill should be referred to a committee, held at the desk, or placed on the calendar.³ If a bill is held at the desk or placed on the calendar, it means that the bill can be considered by a full Chamber of Congress at any time. Most bills are referred to a committee or a subcommittee for consideration or suppression.⁴ If a hearing is held on a bill at a committee or subcommittee level, testimony is taken from witnesses and other discussion occurs about the fate of a bill.⁵

If a committee votes to report a bill, a committee report is drafted and filed with the House or Senate clerk.⁶ A reported version of the bill is drafted with any changes to the text from

---


the original version of the bill. Committee reports usually contain the text of the bill as amended and reported, as well as the text of the bill as it would appear if it passes into law. The full House or Senate can consider a bill that has been referred to a committee once the committee report is filed. Next, both Chambers of Congress, where debate on the bill occurs, can consider the bill or offer amendments to the bill.

When either Chamber of Congress passes a bill, the bill is referred to the other Chamber and becomes an Act. The other Chamber must then decide whether to completely accept the original Chamber’s bill and send it to the President, or make changes to the original Chamber’s bill and send it back to that Chamber. If the original Chamber receives a bill back from the other Chamber, it may either accept the changes made by the other Chamber and send the bill to the President, make more changes to the bill and send the revised bill back to the other Chamber, or demand that the original bill language be kept intact and request a conference. If a conference occurs and both Chambers agree to compromise on the language of an Act, a conference report

---

is issued.\textsuperscript{14} If both the House and Senate vote to accept the conference report, the bill goes to the President.\textsuperscript{15}

An Act approved by both Chambers of Congress goes to the President, who has ten days to sign the bill into law, veto the bill, or take no action on the bill.\textsuperscript{16} If the President signs the bill into law, it becomes law and the President may include a signing statement.\textsuperscript{17} If the President decides to veto the bill, it is returned to Congress and Congress can either accept the veto or override it with a 2/3\textsuperscript{rd} vote of House and Senate members (each Chamber) present and voting.\textsuperscript{18} If either Chamber does not override the veto, the bill goes no further.\textsuperscript{19} Finally, if the President takes no action on the bill and Congress is still in session, the bill becomes law.\textsuperscript{20} If the President takes no action on a bill and Congress has adjourned for the session, the bill is vetoed.\textsuperscript{21} Once a law is passed, the law is assigned a Public Law number, printed as a slip law, compiled chronologically in the \textit{Statutes at Large}, and codified by topic in the United States Code.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{14} This conference report is available as a House report and is published in the \textit{Congressional Record}.
\textsuperscript{17} ProQuest, LLC. (2012). Legislative histories. Retrieved from http://www.conquest-leg-insight.com/legislativeinsight/LegislativeInsightHelp.jsp#legislativeProcess
\textsuperscript{22} ProQuest, LLC. (2012). Legislative histories. Retrieved from http://www.conquest-leg-insight.com/legislativeinsight/LegislativeInsightHelp.jsp#legislativeProcess
II. What Publications Are Usually Included in a Legislative History?

Legislative histories help researchers to better understand why a bill was introduced and interpret statutory language. Several different types of Congressional publications may be part of a legislative history, but not every type of Congressional publications is part of the legislative history for every law. The more important Congressional publications that may be part of a legislative history are as follows:

- **House and Senate Reports**

  These are reports and recommendations from House or Senate committees to the entire House or Senate. Conference committee reports are particularly useful for legislative history analysis because these are created when differing versions of a bill need to be reconciled into a compromised bill between the House and Senate. Reports are designated by “H. Rpt.” or “S. Rpt.”

- **Committee hearings**

  Committee hearings include transcripts of testimony from experts and witnesses, reports, exhibits, correspondence and other information designed to help Congressional committees gather information on an issue are included in the committee hearings through Congressional.

- **The Congressional Record**

---


Debates on bills, as well as other remarks and statements from Members of Congress that occur on the House or Senate floor, can also provide researchers with an understanding of arguments made in favor of or against a piece of legislation. Transcripts of this activity can be found in the *Congressional Record*. The *Congressional Record* is the official documentation of proceedings and debates on the Congressional floor. Each day’s proceedings are published in the Daily Edition of the *Congressional Record*, and at the end of the Congressional session, these are compiled into the Permanent, Bound edition of the *Congressional Record*. There is usually a substantial delay (i.e., several years) between the end of a Congressional session and the publication of the Permanent edition for that session, so researchers may only be able to find information on recent Congressional floor activity in the Daily Edition.

- **Text of Bills**

  The text of the legislation itself provides important insight for federal legislative history researchers, particularly in determining legislative intent.

---


Legislative Insight provides the text of enacted bills, plus related bills for federal legislative research.30

- **House and Senate Documents**

  House and Senate Documents include documents provided to the full House and Senate chambers or Congressional committees, Presidential veto messages or messages proposing legislation and other information.31 They are designated by “H. Doc.” or “S. Doc.”32

- **Presidential Signing Statements**

  Presidential signing statements are issued by the President when signing a bill into law.33 Presidential signing statements are considered controversial by some, particularly when used for substantive purposes, but they can provide researchers with important background and context for the law being researched.34

---


